

**THE APOCALYPTIC ANXIETY OF AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM AS SEEN
THROUGH LEFT BEHIND AND TIM LAHAYE'S PROGRAMME FOR THE
PRESERVATION OF EVANGELICAL IDENTITY**

by

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ABSTRACT

A leader in American Evangelicalism, the Rev. Dr. Tim LaHaye gained national prominence through the *Left Behind* series of novels (written with Jerry Jenkins) that have sold 70 million copies in America. The thesis examines why this modern-day version of apocalypticism has been so popular in America and how the answer to this question has a bearing on the traditional theory of apocalypticism that understands the genre to thrive in cultures experiencing crisis. The thesis through an inductive quantitative survey of *Left Behind* readers reports six key explanations for *Left Behind's* success, including the identification of a pre-existing evangelical sub-culture that positively responds to the *Left Behind* future narrative as describing present conditions. The survey reveals that the source of apocalyptic anxiety for the readers of *Left Behind* is *not* anxiety about the end, but anxiety towards the current short-term threat that evangelicals face to their way of life in America, their freedom as evangelical Christians, and their stability while living in what is a noticeably declining "Christian nation." In reaction to this state of affairs, American evangelicals try coping with their apocalyptic anxiety through a dangerous political activism that has world-wide ramifications and through the use of an extreme theology of Christian sanctification.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Traci Dawn Espinosa, for her fantastic support and encouragement along the way and her confidence in me that the work could be completed during a demanding pastorate. “When I look at all the women in the world, I find none of whom I could boast as I boast with joyful conscience of my own.” – Luther

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DEFINITIONS

Antichrist:	An eschatological figure that opposes God mentioned in 1 st John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 nd John 7 and most likely “the man of lawlessness” of 2 nd Thessalonians 2:3, 9 variously interpreted in traditional circles. In pretribulationism he is a satanic world-leader in both the political and religious spheres. He will persecute those who resist him during the seven-year tribulation that occurs after the rapture.
Blessed Hope:	Mentioned in Titus 2:13 in reference to the Second Coming of Christ, but in pretribulationism the first phase of the second coming of Christ called the “rapture” which is the snatching of all true believers from earth to Christ and is secret to those left behind who will suffer the tribulation.
Cosmic Distress:	Apocalyptic descriptions of God’s judgment that present extreme conditions as affecting elements of the heavens and earth. Dispensationalism treats such an approach as compromising Scripture.
Evangelicalism:	Trans-denominational Christian movement that considers the Bible authoritative, emphasizes acceptance of Christ, and encourages personal evangelism. Many accept dispensational eschatology.
Fundamentalism:	In broad terms an uncompromising conservative believer sometimes viewed as a religious extremist, but in American Christianity fundamentalism is an older and stricter form of evangelicalism. Major tenets include verbal inerrancy of the Scriptures, the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth, the substitution theory of the atonement, and the physical resurrection and bodily return of Christ.
Dispensationalism:	The view that biblical history is divided into seven (7) epochs of time or “dispensations.” God relates uniquely to His people in a given epoch. We are in the 6 th epoch of grace; the millennium is the 7 th . The seven-year “tribulation” occurs between the 6 th and 7 th dispensations.
Glorious Appearing:	Though the exact terminology does not occur in the Bible, pretribulationists base the terminology on Matthew 24:30 and Revelation 19:11-21. It is the second phase of the second coming of Christ which occurs at the end of the seven-year tribulation. When this occurs, Christ conducts a great judgment, binds Satan and prepares for the literal millennium on earth.
Gog and Magog:	Terms appearing in Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 20 which traditional exegesis treats as apocalyptic forces of evil opposed to God. Dispensationalism understands these to be the evil Russian and Islamic armies that will attack Israel in the near future.
Great Parenthesis:	Dispensationalist term based on Daniel 9:24-27 in reference to “seventy sevens.” Dispensationalists theorize that the Old Testament accounts for 69 of the 70 sevens, but that the 70 th seven will be fulfilled during the 7-year tribulation yet to come. The “great parenthesis” occurs between the close of the 69 th seven and the beginning of 70 th seven which is the 7-year tribulation.

Israel:	In dispensationalism, the re-gathered Old Testament nation of Israel that has been re-established through the 1917 Balfour Agreement, 1948 War of Independence and 1967 Six-Days War. This Israel is the “super-sign” of the end-times.
Kingdom of God:	Dispensationalism considers this to be the time of the millennial kingdom of God on earth. In fact, LaHaye specifies that every time a Christian prays in the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy Kingdom Come,” that they are praying for the millennium.
Literal:	LaHaye’s hermeneutic which considers “apocalyptic” as a false biblical genre. His version of “literal” avoids spiritual interpretations of Scripture and treats prophecy in a wooden and literalistic fashion.
Preterism:	From the Latin <i>praeteritus</i> meaning “gone by.” It is expressing time fulfilled and represents the view that the book of Revelation is either mostly or completely fulfilled in terms of prophetic prediction. It is a common traditional perspective for example that views the great judgments in Revelation as describing the accomplished victory of Christ and the binding of Satan in apocalyptic terms. This view rejects LaHaye’s futurist approach that awaits “literal” fulfilment of these judgments.
Pretribulationism:	Dispensationalists may be “pre-trib,” “mid-trib,” or “post-trib,” but LaHaye (like Lindsey) represents the most popular view that describes the rapture of the Church as occurring before (“pre”) the seven-year tribulation. Both premillennialism and dispensationalism are assumed.
Prophecy:	For LaHaye, it is “history written in advance,” and an extreme form of foretelling (as opposed to forth-telling). This version of “prophecy” is especially known for replacing apocalyptic supra-history with literalistic future predictions bound to time and space on earth.
Rapture:	The snatching up from earth all true Christians into heaven. From the stand-point of those “left behind,” Christians will suddenly vanish leaving behind all personal effects like braces, hearing-aides, clothing and jewellery. All babies will be raptured, including those in the womb.
Russia:	In pretribulationism, the end-time nation which specifically represents “Magog” that will lead the Russian-Islamic attack against Israel. This attack will be the final major sign of the end before the rapture occurs.
Secular Humanism:	LaHaye’s term for what he considers a secularized religion designed specifically for perpetuating atheism, Darwinian evolution and other satanic ideas. LaHaye views the United States as being overcome by it. Christians must therefore be mobilized against this satanic tide.
Tribulation:	In dispensationalism, the specific seven-year transition between the rapture of the Church and the beginning of the Millennium. During this period all who come to believe in Christ during the tribulation will be severely persecuted by the Antichrist.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANT	Ante-Nicene Fathers
CTCR	Commission on Theology and Church Relations (of the LCMS)
LCMS	Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

INTRODUCTION

THE APOCALYPTIC ANXIETY OF AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM AS SEEN THROUGH *LEFT BEHIND* AND TIM LAHAYE'S PROGRAMME FOR THE PRESERVATION OF EVANGELICAL IDENTITY

Personal Interest in the Research

The ubiquitous presence in the U.S. of the works representing pretribulational dispensational premillennialism is impressive. When I was a child, whenever I looked up at my big brother's bookshelf, I saw the book *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey, one of the most important leaders in the movement. Since those childhood days, I have heard countless classmates, friends, family members and – for the last 18 years as a parish pastor – parishioners remark about this unique religious outlook, especially its eschatology which is both disturbing and potentially frightening. Major periodicals like *TIME* and *Newsweek* have also given considerable attention to what appears to be a sensationalistic approach to what the Bible is thought to say about the end-times. I have during this time become concerned about the spiritual ramifications of such a teaching on people I care about.

At first glance the theology seems both superficial and insubstantial since it presents biblical apocalypticism in wooden and literalistic fashion. Moreover, I have been surprised that despite the fact that Scripture is so clear about no one knowing the time of the end (Mt 24:36 & Acts 1:7), people continue to flock towards these teachings which specialize in end-time prediction. Then, even after the success of Lindsey's book that was America's best-selling "non-fiction" book during the 1970's and reached 28 million in print by 1990 (Marsden, 2006: 248), I was amazed to find that Lindsey's success was actually eclipsed by Tim LaHaye's and Jerry Jenkin's *Left Behind* series which has sold 70 million novels (Bates,

2007: 319). If one includes the graphic novels and children's series of shorter books, one must add an additional 10 million copies to this number (Biblical Discernment Ministries, 2005: online). *Left Behind* is the most recent populist wave of pretribulationism in America. My interest was aroused: What accounts for this level of popularity in pretribulationism in the United States?

The Deeper Question in Historical Studies

The question becomes even more important in light of the fact that *Left Behind* is a modern-day version of apocalyptic literature. Furthermore, LaHaye, the originator and teacher behind the *Left Behind* series, has made it clear on many occasions that while the novels are fiction, he regards the teaching of pretribulationism to be faithful to Biblical eschatology. That is, the *Left Behind* descriptions of the 21 judgments based on what is presented in the book of Revelation, are supposed to be predictive of what will actually happen in the future. This is why the *Left Behind* fictional descriptions are practically word-for-word reproductions of LaHaye's "non-fiction," biblical commentary on the book of Revelation, entitled *Revelation Unveiled*. Appendix 1 shows the parallels between the *Left Behind* novels and LaHaye's non-fiction commentary. Appendix 1 also provides an example of a terrifying scene from the novels that is intended to inspire readers to check their spiritual readiness for the end. *Left Behind* perpetuates an actual movement in modern-day apocalypticism.

This state of affairs expanded my original inquiry. There are millions of Americans not only perpetuating the popularity of *Left Behind* in general, but they are popularising apocalypticism in particular. Such works as Paul Boyer's *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* is an early academic study of this American

trend. The situation as it stands seems to challenge the traditional understanding of why and under what circumstances apocalypticism thrives. As I will be pointing out through the observations of several commentators on apocalyptic literature, apocalyptic is fundamentally written to, and received by, people in crisis. Any tribulation is seen as a part of a larger providential development in which the people of God will be vindicated by God and hence essentially it is a message of hope in desperate times. Such circumstances characterised by apocalyptic anxiety typically involve a mortal threat against the people of God. The seeming problem, however, is the blatant lack of a life and death struggle in the United States of America. There is no overt crisis and yet through *Left Behind* apocalypticism has flourished. Stephen D. O’Leary in his important contribution to this field *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* expresses the difficulty as follows:

If the largely middle-class group of fundamentalist Christians in the United States who today form the core of Hal Lindsey’s readership believes itself to be similarly persecuted, this is surely a rhetorically induced perception; for there is an obvious difference between being torn apart by lions in front of cheering crowds and being forced to endure media onslaughts of sex, violence, and secular humanism (1994: 11).

O’Leary certainly touches on an important element of the overall analysis (his suggestion that the persecution is only “rhetorically induced,” however, appears oversimplified). While there are genuine rhetorical contributions to evangelical apocalyptic anxiety, such as the abuse of biblical, apocalyptic texts and a hermeneutic that applies the misconstrued exegesis to “fulfilled prophecy” in connection to modern-day Israel, we show that the apocalyptic anxiety goes beyond the literature. As consistent with fundamentalist and conservative evangelical tradition in America there is a long-standing sub-culture that perceives a real threat coming from the trends of secularization in America. At first glance, this fact would seem to diminish the motivation in reading *Left Behind*, but we have found

that *Left Behind* does not merely reinforce apocalyptic anxiety, but more importantly offers a way of coping with it.

This improved perspective on the cause of apocalyptic anxiety has been brought out by Glenn W. Shuck in *Marks of the Beast: The Left Behind Novels and the Struggle for Evangelical Identity*. Here, Shuck sees a correlation between the threats of a “network culture” that represents the rapid changes in the world as a source of significant anxiety among evangelicals. His work, however, is largely deductive. Similar to the work of Shuck is the contribution of Amy Johnson Frykholm in *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America*. Frykholm also sees *Left Behind* as a kind of identity coping mechanism that allows evangelicals a form of communal belonging. Her findings, however, are based upon qualitative interviews. We were able to test core elements of both Shuck’s and Frykholm’s theories through an inductive, quantitative survey.

Furthermore, there are few works that explain the serious ramifications of pretribulationism (though Timothy P. Weber’s *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend* is an exception). As I conducted my research, I soon realized that the spreading of pretribulationism constitutes a real danger to the people of the United States and the world. This thesis reports on, and responds to, these dangers.

Research Focus and Questions

1. Why is *Left Behind* so popular in America?
2. If *Left Behind* is more or less consistent with the traditional apocalyptic theory, what accounts for modern-day apocalyptic anxiety (the perception of crisis) in America?
3. What are the political and spiritual effects (dangers) of such a state of affairs?

Tim LaHaye as a Case Study for Pretribulational Dispensational Premillennialism

LaHaye provides the teaching that permeates *Left Behind* and that is supposedly to be found in Scripture. Not only was *Left Behind* his idea, but he provided writer Jerry Jenkins with the eschatological outlines for teaching pretribulationalism throughout the 16 novels. Though *Left Behind* represents LaHaye's major work, he had already made an impact long before *Left Behind*. Millions of his many books in the areas of temperament theory, end-time teaching and Christian political activism published since the mid-1960's have established him as a vital leader in evangelicalism in America (his name is connected to over 100 published titles of which he is author, co-author or editor). Appendix 2 lists his publications. In addition, his political career is surprisingly impressive; he has managed to be very influential through his contribution to the Christian Right that formed an alliance with the Republican Party. "The *Evangelical Studies Bulletin* named LaHaye as the most influential Christian leader for the past quarter century (Sine, 2001: online)." This is noteworthy in light of the fact that he was chosen even over Billy Graham and because LaHaye's work is predicted to be a continuing influence on evangelicalism in America for the next few decades.

Given LaHaye's role in evangelicalism in America and the leader in the single most successful venture of apocalyptic literature in the history of the country, it made sense to study him thoroughly and to try to understand the popularity of *Left Behind*, its relationship to traditional apocalyptic literature, and its effects upon evangelical Christianity in America (as well as how those effects may spread to other people). I have therefore studied LaHaye as comprehensively as possible. There are many books that analyze his work, but these have done so only in a partial fashion. For example, Hank Hanegraaff has written *The Apocalypse Code: Find Out What the Bible Really Says About the End Times and Why It Matters Today*.

Hanegraaff does an admirable job in analyzing LaHaye, but does so primarily with respect to how he interprets the book of Revelation.

Not only did I realize that LaHaye's temperament theory is a logical platform in preparing a spirituality that is complementary to the apocalyptic mindset in relation to the world, but it is now also evident that his works on Christian activism in politics seamlessly fit the apocalyptic agenda that prepares for the end. His works that seek to prove his historical, exegetical and hermeneutical positions also strive to legitimize the content of *Left Behind*.

Chapters in this Thesis

Chapter One: History of Millennialism seeks to identify common historical connections between the work of LaHaye and other millenarian movements. It was hoped that by understanding the cause of anxiety and the perpetuation of apocalypticism in these other movements that we would be aided in understanding the modern-day movement. In the process, we took the opportunity to consider carefully the origin of the "rapture". This aspect reveals important weaknesses in LaHaye's position.

Chapter Two: LaHaye's Exegesis is examined for the use and abuse of the biblical, apocalyptic texts that are used to try to legitimise the pretribulational position. Traditional exegesis is compared and contrasted to LaHaye's exegesis. By conducting such an analysis, it becomes evident how apocalyptic anxiety can be generated through LaHaye's approach to the texts and how, consequently, LaHaye's treatment misses out on the consolation derived from more traditional exegesis.

Chapter Three: LaHaye's Hermeneutic demonstrates that the supposed exegetical findings of pretribulationalism are read into the text since they are guided by dispensational

hermeneutical pre-suppositions. In this chapter the hermeneutical pre-suppositions are analysed that appear to have led to the alarmist theology in America. In seeking to defend his hermeneutic LaHaye attacks St. Augustine who is the primary exponent of the leading competing view. I demonstrate that his attack against St. Augustine is based on inaccurate historical grounds.

Chapter Four: Survey and Interview explains the methodology for the most important aspect of this thesis, namely the survey which provided an inductive quantitative analysis of the readership of *Left Behind*. Through the survey, I have been able to identify a source for apocalyptic anxiety among American evangelicals. Furthermore, this chapter also provides insights from the interview I conducted with LaHaye. Through such a combination of approaches we see the appeal LaHaye offers his readership.

Chapter Five: LaHaye and Politics shows perhaps the single most important impact of a growing pretribulationism in America. The danger is expressed through a misguided political activism that has already gained significant success in America. An important part of this political activism is the insistence on preparing for a prophetically predicted war that pretribulationism says must take place in the relatively near future.

Chapter Six: LaHaye and Christian Life analyses the potential danger to spiritual-life due to this theology which encourages a divergent version of Christian sanctification. The approach of using stages of sanctification serves an agenda of increasing confidence in preparing for the end. It is a mindset that leads to one of two extremes: proud delusion (in believing that one has arrived at the pinnacle of holiness) or defeatist despair (in coming to the conclusion that such sanctification is impossible for one to attain).

Chapter Seven: Findings and Suggestions are offered in the conclusion of the thesis. In it, I present a cumulative answer to why *Left Behind* has proved so successful. There are six distinct, but complementary reasons. I also discuss the primary cause for apocalyptic anxiety in the evangelical community as first brought out in the survey chapter. I summarize all the major parts of the thesis, especially as they relate to the apocalyptic anxiety of American evangelicalism. I conclude this chapter with a basic response to the situation with suggestions on how the state of affairs might be improved on.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORY OF MILLENNIALISM

Paul Boyer, in his important work *When Time Shall Be No More*, asserts that “from the dawn of Christianity, biblical apocalyptic has shaped Western thought...[and] this background can enhance our understanding of prophetic belief in present-day America (1992: 46).” Furthermore, “modern prophecy scenarios are in fact updated versions of very ancient ones (1992: 55).” For example, dispensational writers like LaHaye predict the great tribulation of Antichrist’s reign to be a literal three and a half years. Similarly the church father Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130-c.200) explained Daniel’s prophecy “for a time, times, and half a time” (Daniel 7:25). He interpreted this reference by writing, “that is, for three years and six months, during which time, when he comes, he shall reign over the earth (1995: 554).”

There is little doubt that the first Christians lived with an air of expectancy when it came to anticipating the return of the Lord. For example, St. Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians provides clear teaching on how to live in anticipation of the “day of the Lord” (chapter 4). However, it would go too far (as LaHaye does) to attribute LaHaye’s unique theory of a pretribulational rapture and his dispensational theology to the Bible or even an early church origin. Indeed, the single most distinctive aspect of his eschatology, the rapture, is noticeably absent from early church testimony.

Justin Martyr (c.100-c.165) is a good example of early church premillennialism that is in no way equivalent to pretribulationism. He wrote, “But I and others...are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare (1995: 239).” This comment, however, comes after Trypho’s question to Justin about whether Justin

believed that even the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets would be “made joyful with Christ” during the 1000 years. This Justin Martyr affirms and therefore connects the concepts of Christian resurrection followed by an earthly millennium. Justin goes further, however, and adds “thereafter the general...resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place (1995: 240).” What is missing in Justin Martyr’s system when compared to Tim LaHaye’s system is the pretribulational rapture.

Not only does Justin not teach a pretribulational rapture, but he also does not share LaHaye’s aversion to other millennial systems. Justin explains to Trypho: “on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise (1995: 239).” Justin Martyr did not seem to treat his eschatological preference in a dogmatic manner. LaHaye on the other hand, treats his eschatology as being beyond dispute.

There have been others, however, in the early church who even if they did not teach a pretribulational rapture, did stress an imminent end of the world. LaHaye’s outlook in this respect is therefore by no means original, but springs from a long tradition. During the early Roman persecutions of Christians in the second century, Montanus from Phrygia in Asia Minor led “the first of many doomsday movements to emerge from within Christianity (Albanes, 1998: 163).” Interestingly, the Montanists claimed greater spiritual maturity with their end-time views. Similarly, LaHaye criticizes the mainline churches that do not emphasize what he considers necessary eschatology for having “lost touch” with “mainline doctrine (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 77).”

In sharing the Montanist distinction that spiritual maturity will manifest acceptance of an imminent eschatological view, LaHaye tries to cultivate an apocalyptic anxiety. LaHaye

suggests that mature Christians will take “prophecy” so seriously that such Christians will inevitably know that the end is at hand. By achieving this goal, LaHaye is then in the position to pursue other aspects of his agenda (such as his politics) with his readership.

While some church fathers like Tertullian (ca.160-ca.220) looked favourably on the Montanists and even joined them, others like Origen not only attacked the Montanists, but refuted their method of interpreting Biblical apocalyptic literature (Boyer, 1992: 47). Eusebius warned against Montanus in his *Ecclesiastical History*, recording that Montanus pretended to be the Paraclete (2000: 169). In claiming to be a reincarnation of the Holy Spirit, Montanus also maintained that he had special knowledge that included knowledge of Christ’s imminent return. Evidently an awareness of the imminence of Christ’s return represented mainstream Christianity (Pelikan, 1971: 98). Pelikan understands that inherent in the attitude of Montanus is the correlation that to lose apocalyptic vision of an imminent end is to allow the church to settle and lose its charismatic heritage (1971: 99).

This correlation between an apocalyptic imminent end and the Christian life is a key theme in the writings of Tim LaHaye. He understands that the prophecy in his system “emphasizes the ‘imminent’ return of Christ....This has proven to be one of the most spiritually motivating forces in church history (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 6).” According to LaHaye, such an eschatological emphasis promotes holy living in an unholy age, greater evangelism, and the ecclesiastical motivation to fulfil the Great Commission (1999: 6-7).

The concern lies in that LaHaye claims that prophetic belief (according to his eschatological outlook in particular) is responsible for proper sanctification. At least, this seems to be the implication. As a result, there is a natural slant towards the Montanist concept

of imminent return and the enjoyment of the early church *charismata* in that we can be holier, more fervent and missionary-minded if only we will treat the end of the world as imminent.

LaHaye, though, would certainly not claim to rely on the spurious teaching of Montanus. On the contrary, he insists that his eschatology was held from the days of the apostles into the fourth century (1999: 238). All other views, especially what is typically categorized as the allegorizing of St. Augustine, LaHaye labels as the compromising and “spiritualising” of Scripture. This spiritual sense, however, was present even in the time of the early church. For example, Origen (ca. 185-254) wrote in *De Principiis*: “Many, not understanding the Scriptures in a spiritual sense, but incorrectly, have fallen into heresies (1995: 355).”

LaHaye, however, in making his case about early origins of his system engages in the practice of generalizing plausibility with half-truths. He implies that because a significant part of the early church advocated some form of premillennialism that this somehow supports the whole of LaHaye’s theological story. LaHaye sets up an impressive looking chart in his Revelation commentary that depicts overwhelming preference in early church testimony for premillennialism over amillennialism, a system evidently (according to LaHaye’s chart) hardly known – if at all – in the early church (LaHaye, 1999: 332). But the real issue here is that LaHaye implies that his peculiar form of premillennialism is identifiable with the traditional brand of premillennialism (for example, in what we saw above in Justin Martyr). History, however, simply does not confirm the legitimacy of such a move and it is the consideration of this history that is now considered.

The Origins of the Rapture

LaHaye is sensitive to the accusation that the pretribulational rapture in dispensationalism is historically recent. He commences his apologetic by explaining, “One popular argument against the pre-Tribulation theory of the “blessed hope” [rapture] phase of Christ’s return is that it was invented by John Darby in the nineteenth century (1828) and was never seen or mentioned by the early Christian fathers or for almost 19 centuries of church history. That argument is simply not true (LaHaye, 2002b: 41-42)!”

There is little question that John Nelson Darby is frequently given credit for having significantly developed the premillennial dispensational system. Boyer says simply, “By far the most influential millennial system in contemporary America is pre-millennial dispensationalism, first worked out by the British religious leader John Darby (1800-82), a founder of the Plymouth Brethren sect....(2002: 313).” Damian Thompson describes Darby’s work as “a new model of historical development” and a system that “proposed a detailed and ingenious timetable (1996: 101).” Thompson goes on to highlight that it was Darby who labelled the event described in 1st Thessalonians 4:17 as “the rapture.” After that, the term was established. Darby is credited with a great deal in this respect: “[his] timetable is difficult to improve upon: no other system allows millennial expectation to simmer gently for so long, thus maintaining evangelical fervour without allowing it to boil over into full-scale millenarianism (1996: 102).” This also explains why Darby’s name is frequently linked with the origins of dispensationalism.

Moreover, Darby has been described as a “tireless worker” who took his teachings into America, Canada, France and Switzerland (Patterson and Walker, 2001: 99). Taking into consideration the milieu of spiritual enthusiasm represented in the first (1730-60) and second

(1800-30) Great Awakenings in America and other factors, Eugen Weber explains that this was a time that “eschatological terminology came on all sides (1999: 176).” He describes New England and upper New York as full of visionaries, clerics, and common folk estimating the millennium’s coming. Ernest Sandeen describes that during this time America “was drunk on millenarianism (Sandeen, 1970: 42).”

That is to say when Darby was in America the conditions for the reception of his novel eschatology was very favourable. “What Darby discovered in Bible history was that God deals with mankind in a series of dispensations.... [and] The divine authority of Scripture required literal fulfillment of the prophecies (Weber, 1999: 182).” Conservative evangelicalism in America latched onto this and has never let it go. As a result, even LaHaye proponents admit that “modern pretribulationism sprang from Darby’s teaching (Hitchcock and Ice, 2004: 206).”

What concerns LaHaye, however, is that anyone would assume that just because Darby is so prominent in terms of the origin of a fully-developed dispensationalism, that the key doctrine of the pretribulational rapture should also be attributed to him. If this were the case, then an early-19th century origin for the rapture would certainly show the teaching to be relatively recent and essentially unbiblical.

LaHaye holds that the pretribulational rapture teaching in America can be traced back to Reverend Morgan Edwards, a Baptist pastor in Philadelphia who described the doctrine in his book *Millennium, Last Days Novelties* written in 1788 (LaHaye, 2002b: 42). Hitchcock and Ice report that Edwards, the founder of Brown University, first wrote about his rapture beliefs in 1744 and he “clearly separates the Rapture from the Second Coming...(2004: 199-

200).” Edwards also “admitted in his essay that his ideas were uncommon among his peers (Thigpen, 2001: 143).”

The rapture concept, however, seems to have even earlier origins within American history. Increase Mather (1639-1723), the Puritan minister in Boston seems undoubtedly to have taught the idea of rapture. Boyer describes the background: “Increase wrote of the earth’s coming destruction of fire, and cited scriptures proving that the saints would ‘be caught up into the Air’ beforehand, thereby escaping the final conflagration – an early formulation of the Rapture doctrine more fully elaborated in the nineteenth century (1992: 75).” Hitchcock and Ice claim that there is even an example of early rapture teaching from the Medieval Church (14th century) as well as several others from the 17th century onward (2004: 194-199).

The main support for the rapture, however, seems largely confined to the post-Medieval period. There is little doubt that a more substantial case for origins would be made if the rapture teaching could be located in the early church tradition. Such a discovery would be consistent with LaHaye’s claim that the early church represents his eschatological system.

The Claim that the Rapture was taught in the Early Church

Pretribulationists tried to establish such an early church foundation for the rapture in *The Shepherd of Hermas* (A.D. 160). The document is cited as describing an escape from the great tribulation, and these words are ostensibly treated as proof for the rapture (2004: 193). Hitchcock and Ice, therefore, suggest that LaHaye’s teaching aligns with the ancient document. This is their actual citation from the *The Shepherd of Hermas*:

You have escaped from great tribulation on account of your faith, and because you did not doubt in the presence of such a beast. Go, therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of the great tribulation that is coming. If then ye prepare yourselves, and repent with all your heart, and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to escape it, if your heart be pure and spotless, and ye spend the rest of the days of your life in serving the Lord blamelessly (2004: 193).

Hitchcock and Ice imply that the words “escaped” and “escape” in application to the elect are synonyms of “rapture.” The above quotation, however, is taken out of context. In the actual ancient document Hermas is given a vision of “a representation of the tribulation that is to come (1995: 17).” In his vision, he sees the church. In allegorical fashion, the church speaks to Hermas and she explains to him his vision of the beast that in his vision he has “escaped from.” She verifies that the reason for Hermas’ deliverance is his faith in Christ. After saying these things, she goes on to give the account quoted by Hitchcock and Ice. But *after* this account describing the saints’ ability to “escape” the beast representing the great tribulation, she goes on to teach that this does not mean that the saints are removed, but rather they are purified. That is, they are delivered in the sense as she says previously, that the beasts of the tribulation “cannot tear you (1995: 18).” The account continues this way:

“[The Church says] Cast your cares upon the Lord, ye who doubt, for He is all-powerful, and can turn His anger away from you, and send scourges on the doubters. Woe to those who hear these words, and despise them: better were it for them not to have been born.” I [Hermas] asked her about the four colours which the beast had on his head. And she answered, and said to me, “Again you are inquisitive in regard to such matters.” “Yea, Lady,” said I, “make known to me what they are.” “Listen,” said she: “the black is the world in which we dwell: but the fiery and bloody points out that the world must perish through blood and fire: but the golden part are you who have escaped from this world. For as gold is tested by fire, and thus becomes useful, so are you tested who dwell in it. Those, therefore, who continue stedfast [sic], and are put through the fire, will be purified by means of it...But the white part is the age that is to come, in which the elect of God will dwell...This then is the type of the great tribulation that is to come. If ye wish it, it will be nothing (1995: 18).”

The “escape” is not removal in the sense of vanishing from the world, but “escape” in the sense of being in the all-powerful care of God. It is being “tested” and then made “useful.” The “escape” is deliverance “through the fire...purified by means of it.” And for those with true faith who look forward to the age to come – not before, but after the tribulation – will know the tribulation as “nothing,” that which was ineffective in causing the elect to lose their eternal lives. Thus, for Hitchcock and Ice to label the teaching of Hermas as a “pretribulational concept of escaping the Tribulation” is a misrepresentation. There is no pretribulational escape at all, but an assurance of protection *through* the tribulation; an “escape” that will refine the saints of God and preserve them for the age that is to come.

LaHaye, however, continues to claim early church support for his teaching. In his book, *The Rapture*, LaHaye lavishes praise on another dispensational “prophecy scholar,” by the name of Grant Jeffrey (LaHaye, 2002b: 43). Jeffrey is a boon for LaHaye’s cause as he has written several books defending the various tenets of dispensationalism.

In Jeffrey’s book, *Apocalypse*, he seeks to make a case for the early church’s advocacy of the rapture. Jeffrey believes the order of end time events as presented in *The Didache* (c. 120) “suggests the Rapture will precede the appearance of the world-deceiver, the Antichrist (1994: 103).” Jeffrey presents a portion from *The Didache* in the following manner in order to make the case for early church dispensationalism:

Be ye watchful for your life! Let not your lamps be extinguished nor your loins ungirded, but be ye ready! For ye know not the hour in which your Lord cometh. 2. Assemble yourselves frequently, seeking what is fitting for your souls. For the whole time of your faith will not be profitable to you, if you are not made perfect in the last time...then the world-deceiver shall appear as a son of god and shall work signs and wonders...6. And then shall the signs of the truth appear, first the sign of a rift in heaven, then the sign of the sound of a trumpet, and thirdly, a resurrection of the dead. 7. but not of all, but as it was said, ‘The Lord will come and all His saints with Him.’ 8. Then shall the world see the Lord coming on the clouds of heaven (1994: 102).”

Jeffrey goes on to offer this analysis: “In this short passage we see a strong belief in the imminent return of Christ: ‘Be ye ready! For ye know not the hour in which your Lord cometh.’ There is also a suggestion...that the First Resurrection of the believers will be separated from the Second Resurrection of the wicked dead by the millennial period when he talks about “the resurrection of the dead, but not of all (1994: 102-103).” This interpretation, however, can only be established by the limited portion of *The Didache* he quotes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Jeffrey leaves out of his presentation a critical portion in the middle of the quotation above:

[After the words “signs and wonders”] and the earth shall be delivered into his hands, and he shall do iniquitous things which have never yet come to pass since the beginning. Then shall the creation of men come into the fire of trial, and many shall be made to stumble and shall perish; but they that endure in their faith shall be saved from under the curse itself (*The Didache*, 1995: 382).

When Jeffrey surmises that this “order of events suggests the Rapture will precede the appearance of the world-deceiver, the Antichrist,” he by-passes the clear words indicating believers endure “from under the curse itself,” that is, *The Didache* does not teach a snatching away of believers, but of believers enduring the tribulation that will end with events including the coming of the Lord upon the clouds of heaven (1995: 382). Since the believers endure *through* the tribulation, the words about the resurrection do not refer to two resurrections (one before and one after the tribulation), but rather the resurrection of faith experienced only by believers. Others will be counted among those who did not believe, but “the world” -- as *The Didache* says -- will “see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.” Consequently, both believers and unbelievers experience the tribulation.

While Jeffrey is like any other writer or teacher, i.e. capable of human error, the quality of his case of an early church testimony is undermined by this fascinating detail: in his

presentation of various early church testimonies (that he claims supports dispensationalism) including *The Didache*, he also lists *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. Jeffrey gives the impression that these two titles referring to the *same document* are two distinct sources (1994: 107)! Going further, not only does he list *The Didache* again by a different name, but he also quotes the same verse twice, once under “*The Didache*” and again under “*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*.” In the meantime, the uninformed reader might easily get the impression that Jeffrey is actually mounting more and more early church evidence for his case. The only difference between the two citings is that he says *The Didache* is dated “from approximately A.D. 110” while *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* “was composed before A.D. 120.” If this is the quality of the presentation he gives, it seems even more noteworthy that LaHaye seems to trust Jeffrey to verify a historical foundation for the rapture.

But Jeffrey is an important historian of dispensationalism and he is representative of the views that combine recent pretribulationism with early church premillennialism. Upon closer inspection though, an early foundation for pretribulationism is lacking. Jeffrey, however, makes another surprising claim: He writes that Hippolytus (A.D. 170-236) wrote “about the rapture” in his *Treatise on the Christ and Antichrist* (1994: 103).

Contrary to the Jeffrey’s claim, what Hippolytus actually wrote has nothing to do with a dispensational rapture. Based on the actual testimony of Hippolytus in the *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, it is inaccurate to say that he advocated the rapture consistent with LaHaye’s definition. From this document, Hippolytus wrote:

Now, concerning the tribulation of the persecution which is to fall upon the Church from the adversary...By the “woman then clothed with the sun,” [Rv 12] he meant most manifestly the Church, endued with the Father’s word, whose brightness is above the sun...And the words, “her child was caught up unto God and to His throne,” signify that he who is always born of her is a heavenly king, and not an earthly...“And

the dragon,” he says, “saw and persecuted the woman which brought forth the man-child...”...That refers to the one thousand two hundred and threescore days (the half of the week) during which the tyrant is to reign and persecute the Church...(1995: 217)

It is clear from Hippolytus that the church is not raptured before the tribulation, but is in fact persecuted while going through it. Jeffrey’s comment therefore, that Hippolytus wrote “about the rapture,” appears misleading. In brief, the claimed backing of the early church is lacking.

LaHaye, however, does not lack confidence in Jeffrey’s research. LaHaye expresses excitement over the ramifications of what is considered Jeffrey’s most important contribution to the dispensational early-origin argument for the rapture: “Jeffrey’s most important find [sic] was his discovery of a statement in an apocalyptic sermon from the fourth century. The author is designated “Pseudo-Ephrem” because there is some question whether or not it was really written by Ephrem of Nisibis (c. 306-373), a Syrian church father [the spelling of the ancient theologian in different sources is variously presented as “Ephrem,” “Ephraem” and “Ephraim.”]. Some prefer a later date for the sermon...suggesting it may have been written sometime between 565 and 627. For our purposes the real date is immaterial, for even allowing it to have been written as late as the seventh century proves that early Christians...saw the Rapture happening *before* the Tribulation (LaHaye, 2002b: 43).”

In his book, *Armageddon: Appointment With Destiny*, Jeffrey tells of the exciting discovery he made: “During the summer of 1994, after more than a decade of searching, I discovered several fascinating manuscripts that contain clear evidence of the teaching of the pretribulational Rapture in the early church (1997: 173).” The document which was specially translated for him by Professor Cameron Rhoades, professor of Latin at Tyndale Theological

Seminary (a translation which does not appear to be publicly available), is entitled *On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World*, by Ephraem the Syrian, A.D. 373 (1997: 173). The document includes the following account:

We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers what is imminent or overhanging. Already there have been hunger and plagues, violent movements of nations and signs, which have been fulfilled, and there is not other which remains, except the advent of the wicked one in the completion of the Roman kingdom. Why therefore are we occupied with worldly business, and why is our mind held fixed on the lusts of the world or the anxieties of the ages? Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that He may draw us from the confusion, which overwhelms the world? Believe you me, dearest brothers, because the coming of the Lord is nigh, believe you me, because the end of the world is at hand, believe me, because it is the very last time. Because all saints and the Elect of the Lord are gathered together before the tribulation which is to about to come and are taken to the Lord, in order hat [sic] they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins (italics added). And so, brothers, most dear to me, it is the eleventh hour, and the end of this world comes to the harvest, and angels, armed and prepared, hold sickles in their hands, awaiting the empire of the Lord (1997: 174-175).

Jeffrey considers the references “draw us from the confusion” and “gathered together before the tribulation” to be a supernatural removal of the saints (rapture) from the earth prior to the tribulation (1997: 177). But keep in mind the dispensational treatment thus far of Hermas, *The Didache*, and Hippolytus. It seems more than possible that when Ephraem (or Pseudo-Ephraem) speaks of the drawing and gathering of the saints that he might very well be describing the conversion and/or preservation of the saints. The text does not seem conclusive either way. However, there is more to our consideration. Despite not having access to the Jeffrey discovery, we do have access to other works of Ephraim Syrus, the same church father referred to by both LaHaye and Jeffrey.

One of those works by Ephraim Syrus, a father of the Syrian Church in the 4th century, is a series of hymns entitled the *Nisibene Hymns*. Hymn XXXVI is part of a series of hymns “Concerning our Lord, and Concerning Death and Satan.” In this hymn, death is personified and the interaction between Christ and death is portrayed by Ephraim:

Death ended his speech of derision: and the voice of our Lord sounded into Hell, and He cried aloud and burst the graves one by one. Tremblings took hold on Death; Hell that never of old had been lighted up, into it there flashes splendours, from the Watchers who entered in and brought out the dead to meet Him, who was dead and gives life to all. The dead came forth, and the living were ashamed, they who thought that they had conquered the Life Giver of all...(said Death)...But this Lamb of the festival, has robbed Hell...has emptied the graves that were full...The death of Jesus to me is a torment...A medicine of life has entered into Hell, and has restored life to its dead...O Jesus King, receive my supplication, and with my supplication take to Thyself a pledge, even Adam the great pledge accept for Thyself, him in whom are buried all the dead; even as when I received him, in him were hidden all the living. The first pledge I have given Thee, the body of Adam; go Thou up therefore and reign over all; and when I shall hear Thy trumpet, I with mine own hand will lead forth the dead at Thy Coming. Our King living has gone forth and gone up, out of Hell, as Conqueror. Woe He has doubled to them that are of the left hand; to *evil* spirits and demons *He* is sorrow, to Satan and to Death *He* is pain, to Sin and Hell mourning. Joy to them that are of the right hand, has come to-day. On this great day, therefore, great glory let us give to Him, who died and *is* alive that, unto all He may, give life and resurrection (1995: 197-198)!

It appears as though Ephraim is describing the universal resurrection. While there is certainly reference to the resurrection of the unjust who rise up from hell and are ashamed, there is also a resurrection in reference to Adam “in whom are buried all the dead,” i.e. people both just and unjust. Furthermore, the resurrections of the just and unjust are put side-by-side by virtue of the separation of both the right hand and the left hand. In other words if Ephraim invests so much in describing the conquering of death leading to a universal resurrection, we have reason to believe that if the Jeffrey document is from the same Ephraim – or even his tradition of teaching – then the gathering together before the tribulation does *not* suggest a

pretribulational rapture. Much to the contrary, such a gathering would refer to preservation *during* the tribulation and as appears consistent with the hymn, a future universal resurrection on the last day coinciding with the last judgment.

The Actual Time-Frame of the Origin of the Rapture

Such analysis of the purported early church foundation of the pretribulational rapture weakens the claim of an early origin. Furthermore, signs of the rapture teaching in the Middle Ages appear to be undeveloped aberrations from mainstream Christianity. It appears, therefore, that the idea of the rapture did not fully develop until the 17th and 18th centuries. This is precisely where the origin question becomes especially interesting.

According to Paul Thigpen after Increase Mather (1639-1723) and the 1788 Morgan Edward's essay on the rapture, the "next hint of such a doctrine appears, surprisingly enough, in the writing of a Chilean Jesuit named Manuel Lacunza (2001: 143)." His teaching on the rapture appears in his book *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty* published in Spanish in 1812 (2001: 143). Lacunza does indeed present Jesus snatching up from earth the true believers before the terrible judgments upon the world, but what is of even more interest is that Lacunza's work was translated into English in 1826/1827 by Edward Irving. Irving was a minister of the Protestant Church of Scotland and later excommunicated for a deviant Christology. There seems to be little doubt, however, that around this time of his translating Lacunza, Irving was preaching the secret rapture for which LaHaye is now famous for (2001: 144).

This is a critical observation, because Ernest Sandeen (scholar on the roots of fundamentalism), records that Edward Irving was an outcast among the millenarian party (1970: 14). To be sure, LaHaye's camp wants to distance itself from Irving. Hitchcock and Ice

assert: “Other scholars who have researched in depth [Irving’s] views of Bible prophecy agree... [Irving] never held to pretribulationism (2004: 205).” This is an important position for the pretribulationists to maintain, since any historical connection between their tradition and Irving would associate the teaching of the rapture with a controversial figure.

There has been more than one theory, however, as to how Irving is connected to Darby. Dispensationalists recoil -- and understandably so -- when the names of S.P. Tregelles and Dave MacPherson are mentioned. These men apparently tarnished Darby’s reputation by showing his source lay with Irving and that Irving may have been influenced by the occult (Patterson and Walker, 2001: 102-104).

Patterson and Walker, however, recommend a different approach in considering Darby’s possible connection to Irving. By going directly to Irving’s writings connected to the Albury Prophecy Conference journal *The Morning Watch*, they found that Irving had recorded his belief in pretibulationism. One of Irving’s colleagues, John Tudor, makes explicit mention of a pretribulation rapture with the words “translation of the saints” in the December of 1829 edition of *The Morning Watch* (2001: 109). Just a few months later in March of 1830, Irving expounds on 1st Thessalonians 4:15 and teaches a clear pretribulation doctrine (2001: 110). This is the very thing LaHaye proponents want to deny. In fact, it appears that Irving and the Albury circle held to a relatively mature and detailed doctrine of the pretribulation rapture as early as 1829-30 with roots going back to Irving’s translation of Lacunza around 1826/1827. LaHaye tries to counter any association with Irving by citing Sandeen and others stating that Darby was in possession of the rapture teaching by 1826/1827 (2002c: 149-152). What is troublesome for LaHaye’s position, however, is that he writes, “This date [1827] is important because *none of the current attacks suggesting Mr. Darby derived the pre-Trib*

position from unsavory [sic] sources provide dates before 1831 (2002b: 152) [his emphasis]!”

This statement, however, is simply inaccurate.

Furthermore, history informs us that Irving was one of the best known preachers in London and pastor of one of its largest congregations. Irving stayed at the Powerscourt home when he visited Dublin on a preaching tour in 1830. Lady Powerscourt in turn may have visited one or more of the Albury Prophecy Conferences. In early fall of 1831, she sponsored her own series of prophecy conferences which intentionally copied the Albury format. Darby was a regular part of these conferences (Patterson and Walker, 2001: 112-114).

Again, all of this has important ramifications for our question on the origins of the teaching. The historical survey taken as a whole reveals the following: 1) LaHaye relies on faulty early-church research that purports to support the rapture; 2) His most impressive source (Ephraim) does not reliably support his position; and 3) Irving casts a shadow on the integrity of its 19th century development. The circumstances do not elicit confidence in LaHaye’s assertions. In fact, LaHaye’s work seems less related to theological legitimacy and more related to the historical trends of similar millenarians caught up in raising apocalyptic anxiety.

Historical Patterns Relating to Apocalyptic Anxiety

Of course, Christian interest in and anxiety about apocalyptic is not new. It was found also to exist in pre-Christian times. Norman Cohn in *The Pursuit of the Millennium* shows how already in the book of Daniel, we see the trends of the “glorious future kingdom [on earth]...embracing not simply Palestine but the whole world (2004: 21).” The apocalyptic vision nurtures a revolutionary paradigm:

The world is dominated by an evil, tyrannous power of boundless destructiveness – a power moreover which is imagined not as simply human but as demonic. The tyranny of that power will become more and more outrageous, the sufferings of its victims more and more intolerable – until suddenly the hour will strike when the Saints of God are able to rise up and overthrow it (2004: 21).

Despite the Church's official stance that avoided dating the end-time in the age of Saint Augustine, the apocalyptic worldview would continue to open the door to millennialism. This seems inevitable from Weber's perspective in that "[a] religion that regarded the natural and supernatural realms as divinely interlaced could only confirm mentalities that made no distinction between the natural and the supernatural (1999: 47)." Such mentalities are aroused whenever events perceived as signs of the apocalypse occur. In September of 589, a terrible earthquake ravaged Antioch, killing tens of thousands. In November 589 fearsome floods devastated Gaul and Italy, after which plague killed thousands, including Pope Pelagius II. His successor Gregory I (590-604), revealed his apocalyptic anxiety when he spoke of the end being a good deal closer than previous calculations had indicated (1999: 48). The cultural conditions were rife with eschatological alarmism at every turn.

Rowley's thesis seems accurate in proposing that apocalyptic was more often written while the author suspected "that he was living in an evil age, and believed it to be the final fling of evil (1964: 172)." In addition apocalyptic literature identifies two groups: "To the persecuted saints [the apocalyptic texts] brought courage and inspiration, and the exhilaration of a sense of mission. To others they declared that their miseries were the inevitable fruit of yielding themselves to the dominion of Beliar (1964: 178)." Collins observes that such apocalyptic trends come out during various kinds of distresses and perceived crisis (1998: 38). Russell describes the mindset:

The social order, such as it was, seemed to be collapsing around them. The course of justice was being perverted on every side; corruption had entered into business dealings and even into the law courts; violence was abroad in the land, and people did not know where to turn for justice and security (1994: 15).

LaHaye encourages this description be applied to the United States today. While it seems incredible that anyone could possibly believe that America is in a state of apocalyptic crisis, nevertheless LaHaye's goal is find a way to generate apocalyptic anxiety. He reveals his version of crisis in America: "[T]he moral conditions spoken of in the book of Revelation are already here. We are already living in the days like those of Noah and Lot, days our Lord predicted would return just before His return to this earth (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 347)." Not only does LaHaye assume that Christ was describing conditions in the 21st century, but he also believes that the current time is the worst of times. This is exactly what he tries to convince others to believe.

Throughout history many people, however, have felt that theirs was *the* generation like those of Noah and Lot. And they thought so under different conditions and circumstances. It is interesting to consider the various forms of perceived threats spawning apocalyptic anxiety throughout the centuries. For example, after the Christian persecutions under the Roman empire ceased with Constantine (c. 280-337), there was a whole new set of tensions inherent in Rome's decline and overall instability. This basic instability may explain why the interest in apocalyptic never entirely stopped.

The Apocalyptic Elements of Time, Perceived Threats and Israel

A good example of the continuing interest in apocalyptic comes through the Spanish monk Beatus (d. 798) who wrote a three-part *Commentary on the Apocalypse* in which he predicted the year 800 to mark not only the completion of the sixth millennium since creation,

but also the coming of Antichrist (Abanes, 1998: 168). By the mid-800's the paranoia of the end increased through the growing threat of Muslims who had already taken over the holy city of Jerusalem in 638. Apocalyptic features for producing anxiety come out in these examples: 1) the element of special time (i.e. the year 800 as completion of the sixth millennium) and 2) the element of perceived threat against the people of God (i.e. the Antichrist and Muslims). As shall be shown LaHaye is prolific at presenting both features through a very questionable handling of the Bible and his extreme characterization of the political culture in America. His approach is consistent with the tradition of millenarianism.

Again, one aspect of this tradition for raising apocalyptic anxiety is the element of time. For example, while there was tremendous apocalyptic fear associated with A.D. 1000, it seems that the crisis was over by A.D. 1003. New found calm was evidenced through the widespread building of new churches (Thompson, 1996: 46). Apocalyptic anxiety, however, would reappear in A.D. 1033 because of the commonly-held A.D. 33 date of Christ's crucifixion (1996: 46). It appears LaHaye has seized upon such correlations of time. It is more than relevant that his *Left Behind* series was first offered to the American public at the close of a millennium and the commencement of a new one. Furthermore, the single most successful edition of the series, *Desecration*, coincided with the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks on American soil. There is little question that the apocalyptic abusers will continue to make the most of historical time correlations (e.g. A.D. 2033).

This historical trademark of date watchers and setters, the likes of Mackay's "fanatic preachers" who deal in apocalyptic prophecy, has not changed: they keep up "the flame of terror" in the hearts of the anxious and they are experts at promoting fear (1980: 257-258). Likewise for LaHaye, one must believe that he is living in the end times. LaHaye insists that false teachers, wars, pestilences and earthquakes are at all time highs (LaHaye and Jenkins,

1999: 39-40). It is not hard to see that if people believe these things to be true (and experience anxiety), then it should not be surprising that they would also be open to the possibility that theirs was the last generation before the coming millennium.

It is what accompanies the idea of the apocalyptic time, however, that is worrying. For LaHaye the apocalyptic signs anticipate war. It seems that violence often goes hand-in-hand with the end times. In 1066, the Normans conquered England an event marked by William the Conqueror ordering the survey known as the *Domesday Boke*, “because it evoked the Day of Judgment but, even more, the great register of the day of doom, the *Liber Vitae*, or *Book of Life* (Weber, 1999: 51).” The crusades were also viewed apocalyptically. In analysing the birth of the crusading movement, Riley-Smith identifies the motivating factors as the desire for vengeance and millenarianism. The first motive was to avenge the honour of Christ, the other was the idea that mass conversions would usher in the Last Days (2005: 24). This latter motive also involved reclaiming the Holy Land. Boyer verifies that “[a]pocalyptic belief fueled support for the Crusades between 1097 and 1270 to retake the Holy Land from its Islamic conquerors (1992: 51).” More and more Christians joined the cause in preparation for the end, especially with the Holy Land at stake.

As shall be demonstrated, LaHaye also uses the Holy Land to justify his arguments which generate apocalyptic anxiety as he presents his view of the inevitability of a great war precipitated by an attack against Israel. That is, the perceived threats are not just against God’s people in general, but against Israel -- specifically -- as a nation. Political conditions surrounding Israel therefore bring yet another common element in historical millenarianism: the Israel connection which helps establish apocalyptic time. LaHaye considers Israel “the infallible sign” as we approach the end times (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 47).

These various apocalyptic rationales for the time of the end are in fact the genius of dispensationalism. LaHaye has perpetuated this tradition of dividing history into special epochs combined with the finalism of one's own generation as if history was in place to culminate in the exceptional space of one's own lifetime. *Ours* is the time of the end and we are therefore also the people of the end time. This characteristic LaHaye shares with millenarians of the past.

Similarities to Joachim of Fiore

One of the most famous early dispensationalists that reveals patterns of what LaHaye is doing today is Joachim de Fiora (Joachim of Flore, ca. 1132?-1202). It appears as though Joachim is responsible for reintroducing millenarianism in terms of a rudimentary dispensationalism (Boyer, 1992: 52). It is one thing to show millenarian tendencies, but another to create a historical system that will perpetuate the unique eschatology. This is what Joachim did, because “[h]e took to an extreme the principle...that each event in history corresponds to an event in another dimension of time and space (Thompson, 1996: 64).” This correspondence of course has drastic effects upon the history of the world itself. Joachim's system works out as follows:

[H]istory unfolds in three stages. The first begins with Adam and ends with Christ; the second goes from Christ to the year 1260; the last will begin in that date and extend to the end of time. The first is the age of the Father; the second is that of the Son; and the third is that of the Spirit. The date 1260 is fixed through an exegetical process that serves to illustrate Joachims' theological method. If between Adam and Jesus there were forty-two generations, it is to be expected that, in order to keep the concordance between both testaments, there will be also forty-two generations between Christ and the beginning of the third age. Although in the Old Testament these generations were not all of equal length, the perfection of the New Testament requires that they all be equal. If one then calculates on the basis of thirty years for each generation, forty-two generations will be 1,260 years. As to how long the third age will last, Joachim does not venture a guess (Gonzales, 1971: 190-191).

Like Joachim before him, LaHaye also promotes stages of history (epochs/dispensations), but that is not where the similarities end. Joachim also seemed inspired to propose such a plan in light of his significant criticism towards the condition of the church. Evidently, he “lamented the present state of the church and its loss of spiritual vitality (Pelikan, 1978: 301).” Herein lies another important intersection between Joachim and LaHaye. LaHaye has also expressed concern over the present state of the church. He believes that many churches have departed from the early Christian tradition, since “[t]he early church was not given to ecclesiasticism (LaHaye, 1999: 33)!” As a matter of fact, in LaHaye’s view the churches of the Reformation have strayed from original Christianity so much, they have earned the condemnation of being “dead (1999: 73).”

With this total view of corruption and deficiency even within the church, it is small wonder that something had to be done on a grand scale to correct the problem. Joachim offered his dispensational approach to remedy the inadequacy of the church. For him, his apocalyptic thinking represented all of history, including the church, moving through catastrophes that would purify and lead to a better stage of history (Weber, 1999: 52). For Joachim, the Saracen onslaughts during the crusades corresponded to the opening of the sixth seal of Revelation (Thompson, 1996: 63). But despite such outpourings of judgment, there was for Joachim a great hope embedded within the suffering. “For although Joachim believed that he lived in an age of unique crisis, and that the Antichrist would soon appear, he saw his defeat as ushering in the new age of history in which a reformed Church would form the perfect society: The Age of The Spirit (1996: 64).” For LaHaye this time of hope is represented in the millennium itself.

As mentioned, dispensationalism establishes progressive church ages and this millenarian trait is clearly seen in LaHaye. Joachim likewise taught that the restored spiritual

church would be one in which all the Jews would finally be converted to Christ (Pelikan, 1978: 302-303). What is more, Joachim taught that this development between the history of Israel and the Church could be traced in correspondence to the seven seals of the book of Revelation (Schaff, 2002a: 376).

For Joachim the first seal aligned with the resurrection of Christ; the second seal saw correspondence to the persecutions of the ante-Nicene Church; the third seal was connected to conflicts of heresy from Constantine to Justinian; the fourth seal coordinated with the age lasting to Gregory III (d. 741); the fifth seal saw expression in the troubles under the German emperors; the sixth seal – that included the time of Joachim himself – was “the twelfth Christian century with all the miseries of that age, including the violence of the Saracens, and the rise of heretics. The opening of the seventh seal was near at hand, and was to be followed by the Sabbatic rest (2002a: 377).”

Similar to Joachim, LaHaye also divides the church into stages of history and teaches that these stages are presented in the book of Revelation. LaHaye believes that the condition of the church throughout the ages divides neatly into the corresponding descriptors of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. To LaHaye, the seven churches are “prophetical” and represent “consecutive periods in ecclesiastical history (LaHaye, 1999: 36).” Here are the periods of church history according to LaHaye (1999: 36):

- | | |
|---------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Ephesus – | Apostolic church (A.D. 30-100) |
| 2. Smyrna – | Persecuted church (A.D. 100-313) |
| 3. Pergamos – | State church (A.D. 313-590) |
| 4. Thyatira – | Papal church (A.D. 590-1517) |
| 5. Sardis – | Reformed church (A.D. 1517-1790) |

6. Philadelphia – Missionary church (A.D. 1730-1900)
7. Laodicea – Apostate church (A.D. 1900 -)

LaHaye asserts that the church steadily became corrupt with the exception of those churches that maintained the higher plane of spiritual insight that includes the narrow Biblical literalism that serves LaHaye's form of eschatology. LaHaye relates that the Church of Philadelphia aligns with the time in which "the doctrine of the premillennial return of Christ, which had been all but dead since the end of the third century, was revived (1999: 79)." Thus there is a kind of dispersion, increase or blessing that favours one stage of history over another.

The relationship with Joachim's system is remarkable. Besides Joachim making his epochs align with the three persons of the Holy Trinity, he had definite designations for the church dispensations as well. The first age was that which was under the law; the second was under grace; and the third was under more ample grace (Pelikan, 1978: 302). And while the basic theological concept of ages is not unbiblical (for example, Eph 1:10), Joachim's approach was novel and unprecedented for over a millennia of church history (Bryant and Dayton, 1983: 9-10). What is more, however, as these dispensations proceeded within their system, Joachim anticipated "the progressive spiritualization of man (1983: 10)." That is, Joachim envisioned lesser things being left behind for more powerful mysteries given to the faithful (Pelikan, 1978: 302). This was the case to the extent that he engaged in what Flinn describes as "hyper-spiritualization of theological history" where such material aspects of life as creation, work, marriage, and productivity fade away (Bryant and Dayton, 1983: 10). This consummation, however, had to be preceded by great hardship. Thompson elucidates:

It would not, however, manifest itself all at once: there would be a difficult period of transition, of battle with the Antichrist, in which a new breed of “spiritual men,” hermits and preachers, would come to the rescue of the forces of good. Then, at last, the new age would come (1996: 65).

This envisaged new age would be a sublimely happy era and while some would argue that this presents more a utopia than millennium, there are glaring similarities between the two. After all, LaHaye fully anticipates the dispensational concept of the millennium on earth, and Joachim anticipated the creation of brand new social structures (1996: 65). The earth would be better in every way than ever before.

How Some Have Responded to Millenarianism in the Past

Most importantly for our purposes of understanding intersections between LaHaye and the history of millenarianism, we must ask how Joachim’s teaching related to those around him. His teaching, like the teaching of other spiritualists of his age, “won widespread support, both among the people and the princes (Barraclough, 1979: 131).” This is so because it appealed to the spirituality of the age that valued apostolic poverty, but when combined with Joachim’s ideas, it triggered revolutionary ideas. Joachim’s system “shattered the church’s pretensions to represent the Kingdom of God on earth (1979: 131).” It encouraged the concept of the possible achievement of an earthly paradise as a third stage of human history that often entailed not simply apocalyptic change, but political reconstruction, something apparent enough for example in Hitler’s Germany and the third *Reich* (Thompson, 1996: 65).

Gonzales describes Joachim’s teaching as “an enthusiastic and idealistic spiritualism that, in view of the evil that reigns in the world, finds refuge in the hope of a new age (Gonzales, 1971: 191).” There is new hope in the new age, but there is also a way to revolt against the old age and the old constriction. This two-sided dynamic is one way of explaining

the popular response, and it is certain that Joachim was the first since St. Augustine to lead the church back to a millennium to come and his influence on subsequent millennial thought was substantial (Landes, 2000: 261).

But to sustain such a millenarian system, one must be able to generate perceived imminent threats in order to create apocalyptic anxiety. Joachim's audience had a certain spiritual predisposition; LaHaye's audience (conservative evangelicalism) has a modern version of a predisposition, notably in respect to their adherence to a view that claims an "inerrancy" of Scripture and the "prophetic" nature of the same. Such spirituality does not need extreme cultural crisis to raise apocalyptic anxiety. All it requires are apocalyptic texts that allow for modern manipulation and just enough cultural correspondence with "prophecy" to make a case.

The perpetuation and generation of continual threats seems always symptomatic of apocalyptic. Furthermore, the response to such threats is sometimes a violent reaction in defence of the faith. The Apostolic Brethren founded in 1260, the apocalyptic milestone year (recall that Joachim saw 1260 as an apocalyptic year and the beginning of the new age), were the first European group "to take the fatal step from preaching apocalyptic ideas to armed resistance to the forces of Church and state (Thompson, 1996: 67)." It seemed that millenarian movements were becoming increasingly bold to the point of physical violence.

Neither did these movements fade away when the predicted dates for the end failed. Often, the millenarian movement will not collapse upon disappointment, but the resultant mental dissonance will amount to a resilience leading to the adjustment of expectations. This is the story of the Apostolic Brethren who after the great disappointment of 1260 simply fixed their hopes to the end of the century (1996, 69-70). In the meantime, the Apostolic Brethren

serve as a model for millenarian interests bold enough to go against the traditional church and resort to violence.

How can we connect LaHaye to such extreme characteristics? An examination of LaHaye's writings shows that it is not out of the question to make such a connection. The main twelve-novel series is essentially about a war between Antichrist and the tribulation force (the Christians who resist). The Christians resort to military might. As one of the Christian protagonists is engaged in a military operation against the Antichrist forces, there is reference back to her training with different types of weapons: "Chloe knew they needed more firepower, especially not knowing what they would encounter. But learning the Luger and the Uzi – which they knew the Greek underground could supply – had been more than enough to tax her before they left Chicago (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2002: 5)." For LaHaye, war is inevitable, whether it comes in the form of the attack upon Israel before the tribulation begins, or the great battles during the tribulation itself. The critical point is that believers must arm themselves.

Cohn mentions that the Joachimite prophecies produced fringes of the Spiritual party that were extreme in nature. Included in such examples are figures such as Fra Dolcino in southern Europe who "flourished a millenarianism as revolutionary and as militant as any...(Cohn, 2004: 110-111)." These were related to the concept of a new order that would replace the Church of Rome (2004: 110). Along the way the militant-millenarian Fra Dolcino predicted that the end would come in 1300, then 1305 and fought to his death in 1307 (Thompson, 1996: 70). Such accounts lead Thompson to believe that apocalyptic offers an ideal framework for connecting political realities with religious belief (1996: 71).

As mentioned, LaHaye has been heavily involved in politics as well as writing theology. In fact, Kevin Phillips, an American political analyst sees serious correlations to current American politics in light of the fact that both LaHaye and current American politics have shared everything from criticizing the United Nations to identifying Baghdad as an evil regime. Referring to President George W. Bush's foreign policy, Phillips writes, "LaHaye had authored essentially that plot almost a decade earlier (Phillips, 2006: xiv)."

Much of the historical angst (and a good example of apocalyptic trends against the popular structures) originated in the form of apocalyptic charges that the pope was the antichrist. The charges, however, did not come from an isolated few, but characterized millenarian ideas leading up to and including the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Wycliffe (1330-1384) according to his concept of "dominion" could establish for the most part which servants acted consistently under the lordship of God. He looked for both piety in life and obedience to the will of God. When applying these standards towards the pope, his conclusions were clear. To Wycliffe the pope was not simply a reprobate, but the Antichrist himself (Gonzalez, 1971: 331).

Wycliffe's views had a substantial influence on John Huss (1372-1415). Huss agreed with Wycliffe on essential theological points and was condemned by the Council of Constance and then burned at the stake (1971: 333). His execution had the effect of making him a national hero back in Bohemia, and the "Hussites" would go on to defend some of Huss's theological positions (for example, communion in both kinds) (Weber, 1999: 57). The more extreme Hussites, however, set up a mountain stronghold not far from Prague and called it "Mount Tabor," after the biblical site of Christ's transfiguration. These extremists were called "Taborites" (1999: 57). Cohn explains that "since they believed the Church of Rome to

be the Whore of Babylon and the Pope to be Antichrist, it is clear that they felt themselves to be living on the eve of the Millennium or maybe...of the Third and Last Age (2004: 211).”

The Taborites, being in constant preparation for the coming of the Lord, began spreading their doctrine of the Kingdom of God by armed force, and predicted that the end would come in 1420 (Meissner, 1995: 206). Cohn writes, “[The Taborites were] no longer content to await the destruction of the godless by a miracle, the preachers called upon the faithful to carry out the necessary purification of the earth themselves (Cohn, 2004: 212).”

Something very interesting, however, occurred when the time of the end did not materialize according to their pre-established date; they did not disband in disappointment, but rather entered into an even more aggressive stage (Thompson, 1996: 76). To this set of circumstances, Thompson records that “[a] fresh doctrine appeared: that Christ had *secretly* returned at the time of the founding of Tabor,” a concept that would later be used by the Jehovah Witnesses, yet another millenarian group (1996: 76). The Taborites, however, experienced division even in their own ranks as some of them believed that they had achieved lives incapable of sin (1996: 77). Remarkably – as will be demonstrated in later chapters – LaHaye has not only adapted a form of the secret return of Christ, but also a form of Christian perfectionism.

In 1434 the Taborite army was defeated and in 1452 the town of Tabor was taken over, leading to the Taborites evolving into a pacifist and apolitical sect known as the “Moravian Brethren” (Cohn, 2004: 223). What the history of the Taborites depicted, however, was how extreme apocalyptic movements can be similar to visions of secular revolution and that “the vision of a perfect society becomes steadily more secular, all-embracing and terrestrial (Thompson, 1996: 77-78).”

Sometimes, however, the mixture of religion and politics did not always lead to a militaristic stance. Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498) did, however, lead Florence to the “burning of the vanities,” the reaction against the ancient paganism that had seeped into the religion through the Renaissance (Gonzalez, 1971: 333-334). He lived while the city of Florence “seemed to be on the eve of becoming a model municipality, a pattern of Christian morals, a theocracy in which Christ was acknowledged as sovereign. In the movement looking towards this change, [he was the] chief actor...prior of the Dominican convent of St. Mark’s...(Schaff, 2002: 684-685).”

He called on Florentines to mend their ways through his fiery sermons and evidently one of his most important prophecies was fulfilled: Charles VIII came to Florence to release her from political bondage (2002: 691-692). The prophetic connection was powerful in that King Charles VIII was in pursuit of his own goal of an apocalyptic world empire and evidently thought of himself as the last emperor (Thompson, 1996: 79).

Savonarola told the city of Florence that the coming invasion was a divine chastisement that would lead to the Age of Gold (1996: 79). He placated the Florentines to the extent that they opened the city gates to Charles’ army and by 1495, the French receded and left Savonarola’s great religious republic in less than the vision the prophet had promoted. He was burned to death in 1498 (Weber, 1999: 59). His death occurred not simply because his New Jerusalem was lacking, but because its establishment implied that Rome was the Antichrist, leading to his excommunication by Pope Alexander. In the end, Savonarola’s messianic republic lasted only three years (Thompson, 1996: 80).

What is more important about Savonarola’s role in history, however, was the way he illustrated revivalism mixed with the sense of the end-time. The time was also right as

eschatological anxiety was high as the year 1500 approached. So Savonarola warned the people that moral reform was essential to avoid tribulation (1996: 79-80). And if their preparation was sufficient then millennial blessings would flow into their society:

This is the first time we see a whole society promised wealth, international influence and moral superiority if it is prepared to assume its apocalyptic function of bringing about the golden age (1996: 81).

LaHaye powerfully stresses his version of morality and the Christian life. It is in achieving this kind of life that one avoids being left behind. This preparation is also for a new age in the form of an earthly millennium *and* for the current age in which conservative evangelicalism still has the opportunity to flourish in American culture.

Having shown some of the historical roots of this specific form of apocalypticism, we now turn to a more detailed examination of LaHaye's position. Since it is by going to Scripture that dispensationalists like LaHaye believe they have assurance that these things are true, it is important to consider their biblical foundation. The next chapter will consider their most important biblical arguments. Inherent in their biblical interpretations, however, are more reasons for apocalyptic anxiety. Their exegetical approach seems to serve their belief that the end is imminent and it fuels their tendency to conform to a millenarian identity. When pretribulational exegesis is combined with their historical tradition, American evangelicals are all the more subjected to increasing apocalyptic anxiety.

CHAPTER 2: LAHAYE'S EXEGESIS

Robert R. Wilson writes, "For centuries in the West, the Bible has provided a paradigm for the identification and analysis of contemporary apocalyptic movements (2002: 56)." He goes on to identify the books and sections of books that Biblical scholars commonly identify as apocalyptic literature: Daniel 7-12 and the Book of Revelation, but there are other isolated passages such as Mark 13, Isaiah 24-7, Ezekiel 38-9, Joel, Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi. These are sometimes labeled as "proto-apocalyptic (2002: 56)." While theories abound in hypothesizing roots in Persia, Mesopotamia and Egypt, it seems apparent that the phenomenon of apocalypticism lies within the biblical tradition itself (2002: 63-66).

While Tim LaHaye disagrees with the designation "apocalyptic" (something we will address below in the hermeneutic section), he nevertheless emphasizes these very same texts while calling them "prophecy." If, however, we understand the dispensational exegesis of these same texts, we will be in a better position to observe how their use or misuse affects the popular understanding of modern apocalypticism in the United States.

To study the LaHaye corpus is to encounter his attempt to buttress his theological position through his emphasis upon those texts otherwise known as "apocalyptic." In this consideration key passages emphasized by LaHaye have been chosen for exegetical examination (two from the Old Testament and three from the New Testament). The goal of course is to compare and contrast traditional perspectives with LaHaye's dispensational exegesis. The five examples will progress from the longest to the shortest. The first two examples consist of two Old Testament apocalyptic sections (one from Ezekiel 37-9 and the other from Daniel 9). The last three examples are short sections from three New Testament books, two of them involving apocalyptic sections in Matthew 24 and Revelation 20. The

other text (1st Thessalonians 4) is not apocalyptic, but is a text LaHaye treats as “prophecy” that is vital to his overall eschatology.

The first exegetical example is from the book of Ezekiel. It is chosen due to its crucial place in LaHaye’s theology in terms of portraying dispensationalism’s most important preliminary sign leading up to the last days: the reestablishment of the nation of Israel (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 54-55). With this sign we can be sure – according to LaHaye – that the rest of his end-time predictions are soon to take place. Traditional exegesis, however, simply does not support LaHaye’s theory and it is this traditional position that we now consider.

Traditional Exegesis on Ezekiel 37:1-14

The vision of the dead bones in Ezekiel chapter 37:1-14 is a parabolic event in which Ezekiel is announcing salvation and also the national restoration of Israel (Eichrodt, 1970: 506). The perfect form of the verb in the absolute state at the beginning of the narrative invites a statement of a past date (1970: 506). The Hebrew conveys completed action in the following perfects: “*was upon me*” (37:1), “*And he led me*” (37:2), “*Thus says*” (37:5), and “*and you shall live*” (37:5) to cite a few examples (Owens, 2000: 629-630). While a date is not stated, verse 11 records the identification of the bones as “the whole house of Israel” and they say, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.” This is related to the statement in Ezekiel 33:10 in which Ezekiel speaks to Israel: “Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?”

These words describe the people Ezekiel was ministering to during his lifetime. They were people associated with the fall of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586/587 B.C. Dried bones, lost hope, the imputation of sin and rot are the antitheses to life, life that is associated

with blessing from God and the promises associated with their homeland, Israel. Eichrodt points out, however, that to endeavour to assign a fixed date to the events is to “follow only the uncertain lines of psychological conjecture (1970: 507).”

Ezekiel emphasizes the breath (vv. 8-10). Eichrodt explains, “This is the same life force which the prophet recognizes as having again and again lifted him up out of his helplessness and made him ready for carrying out God’s commissions (cf. 2:2; 3:12; 11:1,4; 43:5) (1970: 509).”

The pericope in question, therefore, is not a presentation on the resurrection of the dead, but it is God equating the dead bones with the house of Israel fully depicted in the living representatives receiving the prophet’s words. Eichrodt provides this important summary:

The house of Israel, with whom the prophet now has to deal and whose despairing complaints he must hear, is to experience liberation from the power of death, by which it is at present dominated. Only now do we begin to realize that the vision has come as a mighty answer from God to the despairing laments of the exiles (1970: 509).

In the prophecy, Ezekiel is giving the “consoling forces of divine promise” for the “revival of the nation” of Israel now in exile (1970: 510). Ezekiel is predicting the exodus of the people from Babylon and their return to their home country (1970: 510).

The traditional interpretation is reinforced by Leslie C. Allen who states that “there can be little doubt that this unit reflects a situation not long after 587 B.C., when sentiments of death-like hopelessness occasioned by the shock of Jerusalem’s fall, the dissolution of Judah and the Babylonian exile must have been rife (1990: 184).” The “bones” applies to a whole person sapped of vitality by the crisis of the exile; “death” refers to the death of hope, and being “clean cut off” signals being reduced to a deathlike state (1990: 186).

That is to say we are dealing with a metaphor of death and one that is not at all uncommon to the Old Testament. “It is used to described [sic] an abysmally low level of human existence that, crushed by crisis, lacked any of the quality that life ordinarily had (1990: 186).” This metaphor of the graveyard (v. 12) compares the exile to a return to the land of promise representing new life. That is, Ezekiel’s vision is describing a new exodus and “of a return to the land that symbolized return to living fellowship with Yahweh (1990: 187).” This is also the significance of the breath given by the Lord: the breath and life the people of God will know is “related to a new potential, the opportunity to comply with Yahweh’s covenant terms and so to enjoy the life that is life indeed (cf. 20:21; 33:19) (1990: 187).”

Daniel I. Block also supports the traditional perspective. He cites that the very occasion for the prophecy is indicated by v. 11 that says in essence: “[They had] lost all hope in their future and all hope in God (1998: 372).” Exile was not the only problem, so was their utter despondency. The bones represent the exiles and when Ezekiel adds the words, “our hope has vanished” (v. 11), he interprets the metaphor (1998: 379-380). But Yahweh took the Israelites back as his people, returning them to their homeland and this historical event was accompanied by a spiritual revival as well (1998: 382).

LaHaye’s Dispensational Position on Ezekiel 37

LaHaye abandons the traditional exegesis on Ezekiel 37, because he argues that the text in question describes modern-day Israel (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 49). LaHaye sees fulfilment of prophecy in Ezekiel’s “noise and shaking” which he believes is a historical alignment with the 1917 Balfour Declaration establishing Palestine as a national home for the Jews. LaHaye explains this ostensibly random connection by citing mass production of TNT and gunpowder detonated during World War I (the historical timeframe of Balfour) (1999:

52). LaHaye asserts that “the parallel between dynamite and a ‘noise’ and a ‘shaking’ does seem noteworthy.” LaHaye’s military experience has contributed to his theological perspective. He elaborates upon Ezekiel 37:7:

Is it just a coincidence of language that the impetus to start the regathering of Israel was prophesied as “a noise and ...a shaking” (Ezekiel 37:7) and the fulfillment took place during the world’s loudest war amid TNT and gunpowder? I know from firsthand experience in World War II that TNT always involves great shaking...For two months the air base where I was stationed was “shaken” by detonating TNT as the fighter planes were destroyed. The biblical image indeed reminds us of dynamite (LaHaye, 1984a: 64).

Furthermore, the gradual “bone to his bone” reconstruction of Israel is (according to LaHaye) seen through the 20th-century increasing population and geographical size of the nation of Israel (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 52). LaHaye explains why Ezekiel’s prophecy has been applicable for the first 1,900 years since Christ: “All Jews were at the mercy of the host nations wherever they live [sic] – England, France, Russia, Poland, Germany, the United States, and elsewhere. They had as much chance of becoming a great nation, humanly speaking, as old cars in the junkyard have of suddenly becoming to life as new models (LaHaye, 1984a: 88).” The prophecy in Ezekiel 37 describes a gradual coming together and the dead bones of Israel would “gradually leave the graveyard and once again become a living nation (1984a: 88).” LaHaye states that the resurrection took 31 years to complete.

LaHaye mathematically demonstrates this time-span by virtue of the time that elapsed between the signing of the Balfour Declaration in 1917 to the establishment of Israel as a sovereign state in 1948. For LaHaye, it took 31 years from the rattling of the TNT during World War I to the bones, tendons, flesh and skin coming together as an official nation

recognized by the U.N. He elaborates on this idea: “The skin could very well signify the organizational unity of self-government (1984a: 89).”

When complete re-establishment of the nation occurs, LaHaye asserts that the Jews will experience a great spiritual awakening. LaHaye explains that by virtue of Ezekiel 37:8 (“but there was not breath in them”), the Jews are yet to receive the Holy Spirit since “breath” or “wind” often refers to the Spirit. The re-established Jews will soon be converted to the Christ they rejected since the first century A.D. (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 55).

LaHaye Identifies Russia in Ezekiel 38-39 to Justify His Position on Ezekiel 37

An exceptional and large-scale event, however, must take place in order to inspire such a great Jewish spiritual awakening that would also legitimize LaHaye’s position on Ezekiel 37. According to LaHaye, the event in particular that will precipitate Jewish enlightenment will be God’s future and miraculous intervention to save Israel from a great military assault led by the *Russian* armies:

The Hebrew prophet Ezekiel was given a detailed prophecy twenty-five hundred years ago foretelling that Russia would become a dominant player on the world scene in the last days (Ezekiel 38-39). He even predicted that her allies would march with her against the mountains of Israel. Their objective would be to finish what Adolph Hitler had been unable to accomplish, the destruction of the Jews from the face of the earth (1999: 84).

LaHaye goes on to explain: “Ezekiel also predicted that God would supernaturally destroy the attacking armies of Russia in order to show His omnipotent power to the world and to demonstrate that He has unfinished plans for the nation of Israel (1999: 84).” Based on these observations, it is evident that the identification of Russia in Ezekiel is crucial to LaHaye’s eschatological system in general and his interpretation of the re-establishment of

Israel in particular. LaHaye has held this interpretation for decades and he claims that he has only become increasingly confident in this view. But how does LaHaye justify Ezekiel referring to modern-day Russia? LaHaye uses three main arguments.

His first justification for Russia representing the evil Magog in Ezekiel is Russia's philosophy as a nation. LaHaye describes Russia as spiritually depraved: "Philosophically and religiously, the nation of Russia qualifies [as Magog] in every way. It is anti-God, anti-human, anti-Bible, and anti-Israel (1984a: 119-120)." LaHaye's conviction is strong: "The Communist government of Russia is the most evil government in the history of mankind (1984a: 109)." In LaHaye's opinion, Russia's motive for spending so much money to arm the Arab world was to offset the power of the nation of Israel. After all, LaHaye reasons, Israel in being an ally of the United States has only been "a thorn in the Russian side (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 91)."

The other justification for his Ezekiel-Russia interpretation is Russia's geographical location. Ezekiel 38:15 and 39:2 describe Israel's enemy as coming from the "far north" or "uttermost parts of the north". LaHaye points out that whether Ezekiel was speaking from the perspective of Israel or Babylon, that either way, Russia matches such a geographical reference (LaHaye, 1984a: 121).

The first two justifications, however, are essentially circumstantial. If LaHaye is wrong about Ezekiel's timeframe, then there is no shortage of evil nations from the north. The *Left Behind* co-author supplies his most important justification, however, upon etymology. His most serious claim seems to be that the "Gog" and "Magog" of Ezekiel 38-9 can only mean modern-day Russia (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 86).

In trying to substantiate his claim that “Magog” is “Russia,” LaHaye extensively relies on and quotes another premillennial dispensationalist named Hal Lindsey (LaHaye, 1984a: 122-132). Before Tim LaHaye became famous for his eschatology through *Left Behind*, Hal Lindsey had already written perhaps the single most popular book ever written popularizing premillennial dispensationalism: *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Boyer points out that this “breezy and simplified exposition explaining current global realities in terms of Darby’s prophetic system, ranks as *the* non-fiction bestseller of the 1970s (2002: 315).” It is in this book that Lindsey puts forth the dispensational case regarding the etymology of “Russia.”

Lindsey explains that the prophet Ezekiel at 38:2 “gives the family tree of this northern commander [that leads the attack upon Israel] so that we can trace the migrations of these tribes to the modern nation that we know (1981: 52).” In addition, in the Genesis 10 “Table of Nations,” Lindsey says that the grandsons of Noah have the original names that Ezekiel the prophet uses to describe Israel’s enemy from the north (Genesis 10:2 includes Magog, Tubal and Meshech). Lindsey also cites such historians as Herodotus, Josephus and Pliny to substantiate these connections, but all of these citations are from secondary sources (1981: 53). Lindsey’s point, however, is that Israel’s enemies from the north are identifiable and are confirmed as having migrated somewhere to the north of Israel.

While these possible historical connections may be interesting, it remains to be seen if anything could justify a reference to Russia (beyond its geography). Lindsey’s most substantial evidence, however, is from the exegetical conclusion coming from Wilhelm Gesenius. The 19th-century Hebrew scholar in defining *Ro’sh* from Ezekiel 38:2, 3 and 39:1 wrote that the word mentioned with Tubal and Meshech is “undoubtedly the *Russians*, who are mentioned by Byzantine writers of the tenth century...(Gesenius, 1857: 752).” As a result

of this lexical entry, Gesenius has taken on (as Boyer says) a “key role” in perpetuating the dispensationalist’s argument (1992: 154). This is true even though Gesenius himself did not share dispensational ideas. In the meantime, Gesenius’ opinion has become the best foundation for the dispensationalist’s position. This position, however, must be scrutinized.

Two Interpretations Collide

The ramifications of LaHaye’s departure from traditional exegesis are enormous. The two interpretations could hardly be further apart. Needless to say, if the traditional interpretation is the correct one (the restoration of the Babylonian exiles to their homeland), then the futurist concept of a 21st century Israel as the subject of the restoration is rendered completely untenable. It specifically undermines LaHaye’s position on the most important supposed anticipatory sign of the pre-millennial eschatological last days.

As clear as the traditional view may be in regard to Ezekiel 37, however, LaHaye appears unfazed because the dispensationalists do not believe there are any other adequate answers as regards the identities of the northern attackers upon Israel. LaHaye holds to his position: “Nothing in this prophecy corresponds with the details of Israel’s invasion by either the Babylonians (586 B.C.) or the Romans (A.D. 70). Therefore, any literal fulfillment of this prophecy must yet be in the future (LaHaye and Hindson, 2004: 99).” Dispensationalists view their most powerful argument against other views as simply this: “[N]othing even remotely similar to the events in Ezekiel 38-39 has ever occurred in the past (Hitchcock and Ice, 2004: 47).”

But this dispensationalist perspective is not only relatively recent, but in respect to its interpretation of Ezekiel 38, has undergone considerable evolution. Boyer points out that “prophecy interpreters routinely treated Islam as a forerunner of the Antichrist and identified

the Ottoman realm as Gog. Only after 1917, when the weakened Ottoman empire finally collapsed and the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia, did prophecy popularizers downgrade Islam and move Russia to centre stage as a sinister actor in their end-time drama (2002: 321).” In addition, Timothy Weber cites that “Adolph Hitler and Nazi Germany also seemed to have major prophetic significance...With few exceptions, premillennial students of prophecy expected Germany and Russia to become the backbone of the northern confederacy (1987: 182).”

The greatest problem, however, is that the dispensational argument is a straw man argument. For example, to say that “nothing even remotely similar to the events in Ezekiel 38-39 has ever occurred in the past,” simply ignores the traditional interpretation that treats Ezekiel 38-39 as an apocalyptic text. To say that that which is inherently metaphorical has not occurred in actual history misses the deeper meaning of the text and is misleading. The crux of the matter involves literalistic chronology versus apocalyptic imagery.

Gog of the Land of Magog Surpasses Russia

Ezekiel is seeing visions in his prophecy (Ezk 1:1), and it should not surprise anyone that when the traditional perspective on Ezekiel 37 is considered we encounter much symbolism. The figures of speech continue into the 38th and 39th chapters. LaHaye agrees that these chapters contain symbolism, but the question has to do with the scope of the vision and the specific approach to the Gog unit represented in these two chapters of Ezekiel. While the exact nature of Ezekiel as a piece of literature continues to be scrutinized, there is little doubt that it contains aspects of traditional apocalypics, such as, cosmic dualism (Yahweh and Gog), symbolic language, the prominence of the number seven and the enigmatic nature of the names of peoples (Block, 1998: 427).

In light of such characteristics within Ezekiel, the dogmatic assertions about the identification of Russia are not at all universally agreed. In fact, in many traditional sources, they are patently denied. While pro-LaHaye scholars Hitchcock and Ice (as well as Lindsey mentioned above) cite C.F. Kiel as supporting the idea that *Rosh* is a proper noun associated with geographical location, they fail to include the rest of Kiel's evaluation: "by explaining this name as formed from a combination of *Rhos* (*Rhox*) and *Alani*, is just as doubtful as the conjecture founded upon the investigations of Frahn [1823]...that the name of the Russians is connected with this [*Rosh*] (Keil, 1966: 160)." In addition, Block is insistent on this point: "The popular identification of Rosh with Russia is impossibly anachronistic and based on a faulty etymology, the assonantal similarities between Russia and Rosh being purely accidental (Block, 1998: 434)."

Block provides deeper background by pointing out "The name Russian, of northern Viking derivation, was first used for the region of the Ukraine in the Middle Ages (1998: 434)." Block also cites that the concept of Russian identification was substantially perpetuated by the Scofield Reference Bible and done so with bold expression: "That the primary reference is to the northern European powers, headed up by Russia, all agree (1998: 434)." Gary DeMar also cites Edwin M. Yamauchi, professor of history at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio: "[The Hebrew word *rosh*] can have nothing to do with modern 'Russia.' This would be a gross anachronism, for the modern name is based upon the name *Rus*, which was brought into the region of Kiev, north of the Black Sea, by the Vikings only in the Middle Ages (DeMar, 2001: 7)." DeMar also points out that *Rosh* is a common Hebrew word that is used more than 600 times in Scripture and translated as "chief," "head," or "beginning." *Rosh Hashanah*, the beginning of the Jewish new year, is a good example.

Perhaps more revealing of possible motives surrounding such 21st century dispensational hermeneutics is this evaluation by Allen:

There has been a Christian tendency to actualize biblical eschatology exclusively in terms of one's own generation and political circumstances. Thus Luther true to the original geography, interpreted God's forces as the Turks. With the principle of wordplay replacing that of geography, modern dispensationalism, taking [*Rosh* as a noun] has seen communist Russia as the great threat to the faithful, further equating Meshech with Moscow and Tubal with Tobolsk (and earlier in this century [20th] Gomer with Germany...)...(Ellison...characterized a reference to Russia as "an excellent example of the wish being father to the thought"...)(1990: 210-211).

Furthermore, word origins aside, LaHaye's view does not do justice to the full import of Ezekiel's prophecy in chapters 38 and 39. While some have attempted to assign the northern evaders to specific historic parameters, the Gog unit will not accommodate such an approach.

The time of Gog in Ezekiel 38 and 39 is a time when all the former foes of Israel have passed away, "and the people of God will stand in the centre of the historical life of the world, and will have spread so widely over the earth, that its foes will only be found on the borders of the civilized world (compare Rev. xx. 8) (Keil, 1966: 161)." That is to say Ezekiel is transporting us to the Messianic days, "when the Lord will have destroyed the horses and war-chariots and fortresses (Mic. v.9), and Jerusalem will be inhabited as an open country because of the multitude of the men and cattle, and the Lord will be a wall of fire round about her (Zech. ii.8,9) (1966: 165-166)." In these two Ezekiel chapters we see the epitome of apocalyptic imagery. "The Gog unit is proto-apocalyptic in its forward look into the future. It is 'an example of apocalyptic taking off but still touching the runway (Allen, 1990: 210).'"

The numerology for example is remarkable. Gog is accompanied by a total of seven allies in 38:2,5-6 (Meshech, Tubal, Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer and Beth-togarmah); in 39:9

seven distinct weapons are mentioned; in the same verse there will be seven years worth of fuel these provide; and it will require seven months to bury the enemies' remains (39:12) (Block, 1998: 441).” When seven is applied so thoroughly to Israel’s enemies we are led to understand this overthrow as “the completion of divine judgment (Keil, 1966: 173).”

In the meanwhile, the seven nations standing against Israel symbolize totality and completeness and “raises the conspiracy against Israel from a minor opportunistic incursion into her territory to a universal conspiracy (Block, 1998: 441).” But the Lord gives Ezekiel this vision to describe his response to such an assault. Block elucidates on the completeness of divine judgment:

All in all, the Gog pericope consists of a series of fragmentary proof sayings that, when brought together in this fashion, result in a single powerful proof oracle. Above all else, this complex divine speech expresses Yahweh’s determination once and for all to reveal to the nations his holiness, and to his own people his covenant loyalty...[the Gog pericope does not] offer a phrase-by-phrase commentary or adhere to Western canons of logic and progression. The demand for the latter in particular has led astray many interpreters (1998: 431).

Furthermore, through this particular oracle in Ezekiel 38-39, God shows utter victory in this ultimate duel (1998: 431-432). The Lord permits the confrontation with Gog in order to fulfil his most important purpose: “the universal recognition of his person (1998: 451).” “Like Pharaoh in Egypt (Exod. 7-14), however, Gog is an agent of the revelatory purposes of Yahweh. That purpose has two dimensions: to declare the greatness, holiness, and glory of Yahweh’s person, and to declare the firmness of his commitment to his people...In short, Gog becomes the agent through whom Yahweh declares concretely that the events of 586 B.C. will never be repeated (1998: 489).” Keil says something very similar here: “The terrible judgment upon Gog will have this twofold effect as a revelation of the glory of God – *first*, Israel will know that the Lord is, and will always continue to be, its God...*secondly*, the heathen will

know that He gave Israel into their power, and thrust it out of its own land, not from weakness, but to punish it for its faithless apostasy...But because this was the purpose of the Lord with His judgments, He will now bring back the captives of Israel, and have compassion upon all His people (1966: 177-178).”

All of this is to say that the terminology of Gog goes beyond the chronological arena to an apocalyptic arena that also surpasses identifying *rosh* with Russia. The terms of Gog and Magog designate the evil forces on earth opposed to God and godliness (Brighton, 1999: 573). Brighton points out that in rabbinic literature the terms frequently appear “as types of the nations who war against God’s people and their Messiah (1999: 573).” In fact, the applications have been numerous: “Eusebius (ca. 260-ca. 340) identified Gog as a representative of the Roman Empire. Ambrose (ca. 339-397) identified Gog with the Goths, a Germanic people who invaded the Roman Empire. Andreas (sixth century) in his Greek commentary on Revelation mentions that some identify Gog and Magog with the ‘Scythian peoples’...which, Andreas says, ‘we call the Huns’ (Brighton, 1999: 574).” But it was St. Augustine who was lucid and powerful in his application of this interpretive approach. Brighton explains:

Augustine was correct when he rejected all narrow interpretations that tried to limit them [Gog and Magog] to certain historical peoples or nations. He said in *The City of God* (20:11) that Gog and Magog symbolize *all the nations of the earth* which will rise up against the church in a final protest, “for this will be the last persecution...which the holy church will endure from the whole world; just assuredly as the entire citizenry of Christ [is persecuted] by the entire citizenry of the devil, so much will it be everywhere over the earth (1999: 574).”

It may very well be that Ezekiel 38-9 serves as a prophetic type to Revelation 20:7-10, the only other place in Scripture that presents Gog and Magog side-by-side (1999: 577). By

describing the overthrow of all nations of the world for the salvation of the people of God, Ezekiel depicts a trans-historical and trans-cultural salvation which also anticipates the picture in the book of Revelation where John saw the overthrow of the false prophet and the beast by the Lord Jesus Christ (1999: 573). In this alternative to dispensationalism, Russia and her Arab allies in the 21st century do not possess the exegetical credentials to represent God and Magog within the book of Ezekiel. What is more, with Russia removed, LaHaye's imaginative interpretation of Ezekiel 37 cannot be considered a viable option.

Traditional Exegesis on Daniel 9:24-27

The dispensationalist view on Daniel 9:24-27 is only one among many in Christendom. While it suggests great confidence in pinpointing the historical markers relating to the Daniel text, there is good reason to reconsider their level of certainty. The fact of the matter is that the Daniel pericope is one of the most challenging in the entire Bible, not to mention the fact that the book of Daniel itself is renowned for generating a wide spectrum of interpretative positions. As Hummel observes, "It is safe to say that virtually all problems of Biblical study 'come home to roost' in connection with the Book of Daniel (1979: 549)."

What is easy to miss is the very real possibility that the proper interpretation of the book has two levels of meaning. Typological interpretation may not only be appropriate, but necessary for the right understanding. It seems apparent that Israel's historical seventy-year captivity in Babylon is a type of supra-history: God's people held captive or at least persecuted by the powers of evil until a great deliverance is rendered (1979: 583).

The most serious challenge, however, is in the handling of the seventy years. First of all, it is difficult to establish the time of the beginning and the end of the seventy years. Secondly, it is less than clear to know exactly what the "seventy" units are, because many

scholars would argue that the dispensationalists have assumed too much in assigning those units to years. The original Hebrew simply states “seventy sevens” and is unusual in that the masculine plural is used. And while it is true that an ancient and common understanding was to assign these years, there is the reasonable possibility that the units are not years at all, but some other form of “sevens” which need not be a specification of time (1979: 584).

Hummel is right in reminding us that “the big questions, as always, are hermeneutical or presuppositional, and the exegetical decisions are largely determined by these (1979: 583).” Exegesis is directly influenced by the theological convictions of the biblical expositor and much of his interpretation will flow from one of four major approaches to the apocalyptic literature in Daniel. The four major positions are as follows: 1) the liberal-critical; 2) the dispensational-premillennial (LaHaye’s position); 3) the traditional or Messianic; and 4) the typical-Messianic or Christian church view (1979: 586-587).

Inherent in the non-dispensationalist views are significant challenges towards the dispensational-premillennial position. To be dogmatic on the matter of Daniel 9:24-27 implies that no such hermeneutical diversity exists to challenge a preferred position. This is not to say that nothing can be deduced from Daniel 9:24-27, but the detailed timelines of dispensationalism probably surpass the intent of the text. For the purposes of this study, I will not outline all of the positions, but simply describe one (the liberal-critical) to demonstrate the diversity of interpretation that exists and to warn against some of the dispensational tendencies that will be shown.

The so-called “liberal-critical” position usually understands the seventy “sevens” as 490 years, but the first 49 years are typically attributed to the destruction of Jerusalem (586/587 B.C.) to Joshua or Zerubbabel (538 B.C.). The following 62 “sevens” (434 years)

that includes the rebuilding of Jerusalem, terminate with the murder of the priest Onias III in 171 B.C. During the seven years to follow the one who makes desolate is Antiochus Epiphanes who persecuted the people of Jerusalem and in the middle of that persecution prohibited temple worship in 167 B.C. This interpretation typically maintains a late date for Daniel and dismisses the idea of predictive prophecy and what some consider to be “Messianic prophecy” about Jesus Christ in Daniel 9:24 (CTCR, 1989: 51).

At the same time, while the liberal-critical position will not suit everyone, some of the scholars behind it bring out excellent exegetical considerations that inherently challenge – and legitimately so – LaHaye’s position. For example, while John E. Goldingay recognizes Daniel’s awareness of the 70 years of punishment revealed in Jeremiah 25:11/29:10, he warns against the preoccupation either to vindicate or to fault Daniel’s figures mathematically. He explains, “[it is a mistake to interpret] the 490 years as offering chronological information. It is not chronology but chronography: a stylized scheme of history used to interpret historical data rather than arising from them, comparable to cosmology, arithmology, and genealogy as these appear in writings such as the OT (1989: 257).”

This is a bold assertion, but he backs it up in intelligent fashion. The number 490 seems to have been used as a principle for periodizing history (in much the same way as the number 40 is used as the Judges speak of 40 year periods of oppression, peace, or some other experience) such is the case with *Jubilees* which structures the whole of history by periods of 490 years (1989: 258). This is not a random idea because of the structure of 490 which is based on 70 (10 x 7, both numbers of completion) x 7 (again, a number injecting the emphasis of completion). The time frame is providential and Daniel is being assured that God’s plan will unfold despite the crisis the people of God may face.

Furthermore, not only does the liberal-critical position have merit, it asks good questions of those who insist on chronology. Goldingay asserts that “we cannot certainly identify either their [the seventy sevens in 9:25] beginning or their end (1989: 260).” He goes on to explain:

By the proclamation to restore Jerusalem, Gabriel may have meant Jeremiah’s prophecy referred to in v 2 (605 B.C. in the case of 25:12; 597 B.C. in the case of 29:10); or his prophecies recorded in connection with the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. (30:18-22; 31:38-40); or Gabriel’s own words in Daniel (?539); or the decree of Cyrus in 539 B.C. (Isa 45:1; Ezra 1:1-4; seen as a rebuilding of *city*, not just of *temple*, in 4:12-16); or the decree of Darius in 521 B.C. (Ezra 6:1-12; also seen as a rebuilding of city in anticipation in 4:21); or the decree of Artaxerxes in 458 (Ezra 7:12-26); or the warrant given to Nehemiah in 445 B.C. (Neh 1)...It would be wooden to suggest it could only denote one or another of the events envisaged by these passages. All were part of the restoration of Zion (1989: 260-261).

Goldingay is therefore convinced that instead of 490 being an “arithmetical calculation to be pressed to yield chronological information,” that it is a figure used to bring two other symbolic figures together: the seventy years (a lifetime) of Jeremiah 25:11/29:10 and the sevenfold chastisement of Leviticus 26:28 for the neglect of the promised land through the many Sabbaths forgotten by the people of God. What is more, however, the seventy sevens will lead to a promise that predicts the purging of evil by God (1989: 266-267).

LaHaye’s entire system, however, is built upon that which Goldingay warns against, the assumption of the translation of “seventy sevens” = “seventy years.” Keil clarifies the great concern this should raise: “[Daniel] does not use the word *year* in any of the passages...but only...time, definite time. That by this word common years are to be understood, is indeed taken for granted by many interpreters, but a satisfactory proof of such a meaning has not been adduced (1968: 338-339).”

While discussing Daniel 9:25-27, James A. Montgomery cites the “scholar’s dictum”:

The more the difficulties in understanding an important passage of the Book of Daniel accumulate, the less we are permitted to make an attempt at overcoming them by mere alteration of the text. In such cases the text has been transmitted with especial care (1989: 377).

Contrary to the dictum and for LaHaye to be correct, one must look for alterations in the text of Daniel 9:24-27. LaHaye’s dispensational perspective adds such elements as “Antichrist,” “years,” certainty that the “prince” is evil, the Antichrist making and breaking a covenant with Israel, and the rebuilding of the temple (DeMar, 2001: 44). None of these are in Daniel 9:24-27, but as we shall see LaHaye purports they are.

LaHaye and Daniel 9:24-27

LaHaye considers Daniel 9 the starting point for one of the most defining features in dispensationalism: “The Tribulation officially begins when the Antichrist signs a seven-year covenant with Israel [LaHaye’s understanding of Daniel 9:27]....He will not fully honor that covenant but will break it in the middle of the seven years, desecrate the new temple, then launch the most anti-Semitic crusade in history (the *great* tribulation) (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 127-128).” To be sure the dispensational importance of this interpretation of Daniel 9 cannot be overstated, because LaHaye’s eschatology requires the signing of the peace treaty described above. LaHaye explains, “No significant Scripture links any specific leader to any peace treaty until the Antichrist is revealed and signs a seven-year peace accord with Israel...That *would* be [meaning it will be] a sign of the end...(1999: 27).”

This dispensational “peace treaty” of course occurs within the context of Daniel 9:24-27 that includes the important reference to the 70 weeks. The 70 weeks is crucial to LaHaye’s overall system and is considered by dispensationalists as *the* prophecy that serves as the

“framework within which the seven-year Tribulation (or the seventieth week) occurs (LaHaye and Ice, 2001: 89).” Here, within Daniel 9:24-27, the dispensationalist finds its source for positing that the Antichrist will come to power during the seventieth week (2001: 89).

Furthermore, for the dispensationalist like LaHaye, this pericope in Daniel also provides an all-encompassing chart for the end-times. The text refers to a total of 70 weeks and then breaks down these weeks in three parts: 7 + 62 + 1. With this basic format LaHaye conducts the following mathematics to explain Daniel’s teaching (in the formulations he is deliberately leaving out the one, final week which will be addressed later) (2001: 89):

$$69 \times 7 \times 360 \text{ [days]} = 173,880 \text{ days}$$

March 5, 444 B.C. [the date of the decree to Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem] +

$$173,880 = \text{March 30, A.D. 33 [the date of Christ’s crucifixion]}$$

LaHaye’s Verification:

$$444 \text{ B.C. to A.D. 33} = 476 \text{ years}$$

$$476 \text{ years} \times 365.2421989 \text{ days/year} = 178,855 \text{ days}$$

$$+ \text{ days between March 5 and March 30 (25 days)} = 173,880 \text{ days.}$$

Notice that in the very first line of the above computation that 360 is used for the number of days in a year. His rationale for this begins with the idea that since one week stands for seven years, then half of the week (mentioned in Daniel 9:27) must be 3½ years. To continue his thought, he believes that the book of Revelation also describes the time of the seven-year tribulation. Its contribution to understanding an apocalyptic year of 360 days is that while both Revelation 11:3 and 12:6 mention 1,260 days, they are referring to a singular

block of days (1,260). For LaHaye, this represents the first-half of the seven-year tribulation (the first 3½ years). Similarly, LaHaye believes that Revelation 11:2 and 13:5 refer to the same block of 42 months, and these in organized fashion represent the second-half of the seven-year tribulation (the second 3½ years). LaHaye therefore sees a significant correlation between Daniel and Revelation: 42 months = 1,260 days = 3 ½ years, therefore one month = 30 days. Consequently, one year (according to the apocalyptic genre of Daniel and Revelation) = 360 days (2001: 90).

As was mentioned above, a crucial matter in the discussion of Daniel's 70 weeks is establishing when they begin and end. For his eschatological timeline to function, LaHaye must be exacting in his calculations. Where the angel speaks to Daniel (9:25), "from the going out of the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem," LaHaye sees this as a direct reference to the book of Ezra and Nehemiah as the time when the walls and the temple were rebuilt (LaHaye, 1998b: 46). The actual command to rebuild to the rebuilding itself accounts for the first seven weeks. As for the next 62 weeks, LaHaye views these as consisting from the time of the accomplished rebuilding to the "the crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah (1998b: 46)." The crucifixion of Christ is connected to the completion of the 62 weeks because Daniel 9:26 states, "And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off." What remains is the last week, the 70th week, and the event representing the end of the 70 weeks.

LaHaye maintains the dispensational view that this last seven-year period given to the Jews in prophecy has never been fulfilled and is therefore still in the future. The 70th week is what LaHaye and dispensationalism calls "the tribulation (1998b: 46)." This last week, however, does not immediately follow Christ's crucifixion. Within LaHaye's system, there is an important reason for the delay. This delay allows for another pre-determined dispensation

called “the church age” which began with the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost so that the remaining last week promised to Israel is yet to come (1998b: 48).

The church age, however, is a parenthetical period recognized within the “gap” between verses 26 and 27 of Daniel 9 (LaHaye and Ice, 2001: 90). The church age comes to conclusion when the rapture occurs (between verses 26 and 27). By the time we come to the prophecy of Daniel 9:27 the church is removed from earth. With the words of Daniel 9:27 on the “strong covenant,” dispensational history sees Antichrist strike a peace accord with Israel and the seven-year tribulation will begin, the seventieth week will finally come into play. Here is the summary of what has just been described from the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*:

Some biblical scholars suggest that the first sixty-nine “weeks” (483 years) began with the decree that was issued to Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem in 445-444 B.C. and ended during the week of Jesus’ crucifixion. A gap apparently exists in this prophecy between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. Many prophecy scholars believe that this gap corresponds with the Church Age; therefore, as long as the Church Age continues, the “seventieth week of Daniel” will remain future. According to this teaching, after Christ raptures His Church, the clock of God’s judgment will count off the final “week” of Daniel. This “seventieth week” of Daniel (v. 27) then is synonymous with the seven-year Tribulation (LaHaye and others, 2001: 1011).

With such a precise interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27 the dispensational timeline is clearly laid out and the stage is set for the completion of the 7 + 62 weeks (the rapture). This stage, however, is one that diametrically opposes everything discussed above under the heading of “traditional exegesis.” LaHaye’s entire approach to Daniel 9 is based on mathematics. He assumes that “sevens” are years, he assumes the exact date of Nehemiah’s commencement of the rebuilding, and he assumes the exact date of Christ’s crucifixion. But these things only begin to list the problems with LaHaye’s approach, because he has invested far more meaning into Daniel 9:24-27 than the text can possibly bear. Whether the additions

are based on speculation or imagination, the most incredible theory is the idea of a 2000 year “gap” between v. 26 and v. 27. Perhaps the greatest problem, however, is that a section in Scripture that is written in rich apocalyptic apparently designed to communicate God’s comfort is used as a pre-determined timeline which emphasizes the work of the Antichrist. LaHaye’s exegesis appears purposefully to perpetuate anxiety.

Traditional View of “This Generation” in Matthew 24:34

According to LaHaye, the Olivet Discourse “is the most important single passage of prophecy in all the Bible (LaHaye and Ice, 2001: 35).” In the discourse that ranges from Matthew 24-25 with parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21, Jesus presents extensive descriptions of a terrifying tribulation and these will be experienced by those referred to in Matthew 24:34 which states, “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.” The questions that arise are *what* is this tribulation and *when* does it occur. LaHaye answers the questions by predicting the diabolical Antichrist coming to persecute those not raptured (and consequently left behind). LaHaye teaches that a seven-year tribulation will occur not long after the rapture takes place (within the same generation) in the early part of the 21st century (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 61). Traditional perspectives go a different direction.

One traditional view is that Christ in Matthew 24:34 gave solemn assurance to his disciples that what would come to pass was in application to the lifetimes of the then-living generation he was speaking to (Nicoll, 1961a: 296). In fact, Matthew 24:34 is reminiscent of Matthew 16:28 that says, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” Christ could not have been more explicit that he was indeed speaking to those physically standing before him and spoke clearly

about them witnessing “the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” Many possible referents are offered by traditional scholars, all of which describe glorious manifestations of the kingdom of God during the lifetime of the original disciples: the resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, and Christ’s glory manifested at the transfiguration (Sproul, 1998: 53-54).

This traditional view maintains that most people would immediately understand Jesus to mean that the events he was predicting would fall within the limits of the lifetime of an existing generation (1998: 53). Sproul cites J. Stuart Russell who argues that the self-evident quality of this view is prevalent throughout the gospels (1998: 60-61). In Matthew 23:36 for example, Jesus said, “All things shall come upon *this generation*.” Russell points out that no commentator has ever proposed to understand this as referring to any other than the *existing* generation (1998: 60).

Upon closer inspection of Matthew 24:32-35, however, it appears that we need go no further than the immediate context itself in establishing the Matthew 24:34 referents. Christ presents a didactic comparison from the natural patterns of fig trees for the sake of the disciples listening to him. Gibbs explains, “The address to the disciples in the narrative is evident from the four second person plural verbs (‘learn’; ‘you know’; ‘you see’; ‘you know’) and the two second person plural pronouns (note the emphatic ‘so also, *you*,’ 24:33) (2000: 204).” The original disciples were part of that generation to learn, to know, and to see all of these things which were to happen before their passing away.

LaHaye’s Objection and Matthew 24:34 Position

LaHaye’s dispensational view, however, insists that Gibb’s traditional perspective must be in error. The reason from the dispensational perspective is simple: the coming of the Son of Man clearly described in the context of Matthew 24 has never occurred in human

history. At this point, dispensational logic dictates their preferred scenario: since the coming has never occurred, then Christ could not have possibly been referring to the first-century disciples when he said “this generation.”

Furthermore, LaHaye defends the dispensational position by arguing that the “fig tree” of verse 32 symbolizes the nation of Israel (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 57). He goes on to explain that the blossoming of the fig tree (also described in verse 32) was Israel becoming a nation in 1948. LaHaye explains that it is from this perspective that one may properly understand when the ‘end of the age’ is ‘near’ (1999: 57).” From this dispensational view, when Christ used the demonstrative pronoun *haute* (“this”) at Matthew 24:34, he was referring to the blossoming nation of Israel in 1948 (1999: 58). Furthermore, LaHaye considers a “generation” to have a range of 20-100 years. As a result, he wrote in 1999: “[Christ is coming] sometime between the turn of the century and the first quarter of the twenty-first century (1999: 61).”

Matthew 24:34 in Light of Its Apocalyptic Genre

Sometimes, however, a fig tree is only a fig tree. In the case of Matthew 24:34, the fig tree illustrated the time of the first disciples. Dispensationalists discount the possibility of an *apocalyptic* coming of the Son of Man. Gibbs explains that the language of Matthew 24 includes the apocalyptic quality of “cosmic distress (Gibbs, 2000: 189).” Such language possesses the characteristics found in the Old Testament language of theophany. This tradition expresses two ideas in particular: “the coming forth of the Lord,” and the “reactions of nature at his coming.” Furthermore, closely related to these is the Old Testament concept of “the Day of Yahweh (2000: 189).” Gibbs cites Beasley-Murray who describes the accompanying characteristics of such language: “The decisive element in the theophany descriptions of the

Old Testament, accordingly, is the concept of the coming of God; the descriptions of accompanying phenomena in the natural order are to be viewed as parabolic (2000: 190).”

That is to say, they are to be viewed apocalyptically, but dispensationalism (as we shall expound upon in the coming section) appears to dismiss the entire genre of apocalyptic with all of its hermeneutical ramifications. The overarching concern here, however, is that there is more than adequate evidence to view Matthew 24:34 as presenting “this generation” as corresponding to the first-century disciples. Evidently their generation was in fact living when all of the signs Christ spoke of occurred, including the sign of the Son of Man which was one of judgment in the tradition of the theophany and a/the Day of the Lord (the indefinite or definite article though distinct, always return to the judgment of *The Lord* either typological or final). Indeed, when Matthew 24:30 speaks specifically of “the sign of the Son of Man,” then “that sign will be the destruction of Jerusalem, for in that event the implied reader perceives the truth that God has vindicated Jesus over his enemies, the religious leaders of Israel (Gibbs, 2000: 190).”

The powerfully graphic and yet figurative reference to the destruction of Jerusalem is more than tenable due to the following points: 1) Other world history events have been described this way in Scripture (for example, Isa 13:10); 2) Matthew’s Gospel up to this point has established the eschatological reign of heaven through powerful, hidden and sometimes paradoxical manners; 3) Eschatological language can be used both for the end of history and for events within the course of history; 4) Matthew 24:29 reference to divine judgment specifically upon Jerusalem is consistent to the scenes of divine judgment upon Babylon (Isa 13:10) and Egypt (Ezek 32:7-8); 5) In a wider sense, St. Matthew presents Christ as the prophet of judgment (for example, from cleansing the temple in 21:12 to announcing those who will not and will enter the reign of heaven in 21:31) (2000: 195-197).

What is before us therefore is an increasingly distinguishable pattern according to LaHaye's eschatology: Ezekiel chapters 38-39 was treated as chronological history over apocalyptic supra-history; Daniel's 70 weeks was reduced to the same and its chronography dismissed; and Matthew's signs are also understood according to a "prophetic" timetable that ignores the apocalyptic aspect of theophany. So while LaHaye champions a "literal" approach to Scripture, he also seems to reject anything that would undermine his prior dispensational, hermeneutical commitments so that the exegetical implications of apocalyptic as a genre are significantly curtailed. Such reductionism is seen perhaps even more clearly in the last two New Testament examples.

LaHaye's Dispensational Version of the Rapture based on 1st Thessalonians 4:15-17

While Ezekiel, Daniel and the short section of Matthew's Gospel thus far considered are examples of apocalyptic, there are other genres related to eschatology that are not. It is likely that 1st Thessalonians 4:15-17 is an example of an important eschatological passage that is not apocalyptic. While the other passages are impacted by LaHaye's lack of apocalyptic appreciation, this passage is also affected by LaHaye's prior hermeneutical presuppositions. For now, it is important to understand the difference in interpretations.

LaHaye's position is easily summarized. First of all, regardless of the various views on the rapture, it is commonly recognized that this passage is *the* passage teaching the rapture. The question is "which version of the rapture?" For the dispensationalist their version of the rapture precedes the tribulation while the traditional versions do not. LaHaye says that the 1st Thessalonians text gives "the most complete description of the 'rapture' phase of Christ's coming, the rapture preceded by the resurrection of all Christians who have died since the founding of Christianity (LaHaye, 1998b: 35)." By providing such detail, it is clear that other

idiosyncratic dispensational doctrines come out. One of these is that the second coming of Christ is understood in two phases. LaHaye reasons that there “are far too many conflicting activities [in Scripture] connected with His return to be merged into a single coming (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 98).” LaHaye outlines the plan of God:

[God] is talking about one “coming” in two stages. First, He will come suddenly in the air to rapture His church and take believers to His Father’s house, in fulfillment of His promise in John 14:1-3. There, they will appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8-10) and participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:1-10). Then Jesus will finish His second coming by returning to earth gloriously and publicly in great power to set up His kingdom (LaHaye and Ice, 2001: 52).

For LaHaye, the first stage or phase of Christ’s coming (the rapture) is also known as “the blessed hope” based on Titus 2:13. The second stage or phase of Christ’s coming (which occurs at the end of the seven-year tribulation), is “the glorious appearing” based on Matthew 24:30 and Revelation 19:11-21 (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 98-105). Recall that these two stages or phases account for “the second coming of Christ (LaHaye, 1998b: 35).” But what is the purpose of the two stages? LaHaye explains, “The coming of Christ *must* occur in two installments because they are for two different groups of people and fulfill two different purposes. The first is the Rapture, when all living and dead Christians will be snatched up to be with Christ in our Father’s house. The second is for all the people of the world, who will be judged for rejecting Christ. The first is secret, for a special group; the second is public, for everyone left on the earth (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 103-104).”

The rapture therefore epitomizes the dispensational system itself. 1st Thessalonians 4 cannot, by definition of this system, represent the final consummation. Fellow dispensationalist Hal Lindsey explains that the rapture is specifically applied to the Church, because “the Church must be removed before God can deal specifically again with Israel as

defined in Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:24-27) (Lindsey, 1983: 70)." Once again, the dispensational, hermeneutical position is put forward: the Church and Israel are distinct. For pretribulationists, this must be realized for the proper interpretation of the Bible. While the Church/Israel distinction will be carefully analyzed in the upcoming chapter, it is mentioned now to highlight the importance of the rapture within the dispensational system, especially as they interpret it in 1st Thessalonians 4:15-17.

LaHaye's View Examined

As seen above, LaHaye describes the rapture in a remarkable way: it is "secret" and for a "special group." Sproul states that "the genre of the text makes it highly unlikely that Paul was describing an event hidden from earthly view (1998: 169)." This is the line of concern that seriously challenges LaHaye's interpretation that wants to treat the passage as a "secret" or invisible rapture. The Thessalonian Christians were troubled as to whether or not their departed loved ones would share in the great events in connection to the *parousia* (Morris, 1959: 141). St. Paul is here describing the *parousia* in a didactic manner in a context that is marked by historical narrative. He is giving comfort to the Thessalonians in such a way as to describe the actual events of Christ's final coming.

Morris makes it clear that in 1st Thessalonians 4:16 St. Paul is making three fundamental points: 1) The Lord himself will come at the end of the age; 2) The Lord's second coming will be one of majesty and honour; and 3) That the faithful departed shall rise first (1959: 143-144). But it is in connection to the second point that there is compelling reason to consider this the *final* coming, *the* last day. Whether St. Paul is describing three distinct sounds or three aspects of one, he lists in this 1st Thessalonians text the "shout," the "voice of the archangel," and the "trump of God." The shout describes an authoritative or

military utterance, the voice of the archangel is evidently so powerful that it wakes the dead, and the trump of God occurs in other Scriptures, but -- as is consistent with 1st Corinthians 15:52 -- it is here in 1st Thessalonians presenting a certain pageantry that stresses the majesty of the Lord and the greatness of the day (1959: 143-144).

These words lead directly up to the verb *harpazō* translated -- especially by the pretribulationists -- as “rapture.” But Morris has definite concerns about the elaborated teaching attached to this word by figures like LaHaye:

Some have seen in this a secret action which suddenly removes the saints from the world preparatory to the great tribulation (Rev. 7:14). To this two things must be said. The one, that this is the only place in the New Testament which speaks unambiguously of the rapture (there are other places which may justly be held to refer to it when it is established by this passage, but none which is sufficient to establish it). Therefore we must not be unduly dogmatic about it. Had we an abundance of detail recorded we could say a great deal. But we have no more than a few simple facts, and we must not read our pet theories into them. The other is that it is very hard to fit this into a secret rapture. In v. 16 Paul speaks of the Lord descending “with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.” It may be that from this he intends us to understand that the rapture will take place secretly, and that no one except the saints themselves will know what is going on. But one would hardly gather this from his words. It is difficult to see how he could more plainly describe something that is open and public (1959: 145).

It is also interesting to note that when *parousia* is used by St. Matthew in 24:27 that it is described with graphic language that is also open and public (e.g. as “lightening”), but what is most revealing about this reference is that Jesus is making a contrast to the false Christ’s who are in the inner/secret chambers (Wohlerg, 2001: 18). In other words, *parousia* appears diametrically opposed to anything secretive. It is rather an event that is painstakingly public. In the very next chapter, St. Paul goes on to discuss the timing of this great event and makes it clear that it will occur as “a thief in the night (1st Th 5:2).” Wohlberg opines, “Jesus’ coming [this way] does not mean He will come quietly and invisibly to steal believers...[but] it means

He will come unexpectedly, bringing ‘sudden destruction’ [1Th 5:3] upon the unsaved (2001: 15).”

It is also interesting to note that the 1st Thessalonians 4 text says absolutely *nothing* about what is inherent in LaHaye’s version of the rapture, namely that the Lord will reverse his direction after meeting those who are raised and those who come to him in the air. The text is silent in regards to returning to heaven and keeping those who experienced the rapture for seven years before returning with them to commence the millennium (DeMar, 2001: 23). “Snatched in the air,” Lenski maintains, does not mean into heaven, but simply that the Lord returns to the earth where the judgment takes place (1961: 337). “We read nowhere that the Lord will return to heaven after the Parousia, but rather that heaven and earth shall be one (1961: 337).” LaHaye *must* insert other Scriptures like John 14:3 into the text of 1st Thessalonians 4:15-17 in order to sustain his interpretation.

This method of merging Scriptures, however, raises concern about LaHaye’s hermeneutical approach. LaHaye is among those rapture teachers who emphasize that some Bible passages about Christ’s return to earth omit details that others do not. Paul Thigpen warns that rapture teachers take these deviations to represent two different events (Thigpen, 2001: 120). This is exactly what LaHaye does as his version of the second coming is stage one/“blessed hope” (rapture) + stage two/“glorious appearing” (judgment of nations to commence the millennium).

As Thigpen shows, however, such claims cannot be supported on the basis of omitted material. Moo crystallizes this insight: “New Testament texts are almost universally directed to rather specific situations in the life of the church. This means, however, that the author will generally include only what he wants in order to make his point and he will omit much that is

unnecessary for his immediate purposes (1984: 99).” For example, in 1st Thessalonians 4:13-18 St. Paul seeks to comfort the believers who are grieving departed brothers and sisters in Christ, he therefore focuses on the rapture and resurrection that will reunite the saints. But later when St. Paul seeks to encourage the same church in Thessalonica suffering tribulation, he describes the same second coming in terms of judgment upon those persecuting them (2 Th 1:3-10) (1984: 99-100). Thigpen makes it clear that this does not mean St. Paul is speaking of two different comings or stages of coming, but “the same event: the single, glorious return of our Lord to the earth (Thigpen, 2001: 121).”

LaHaye’s tradition, however, maintains that the interpretation of 1st Thessalonians 4 is facilitated by the plain reading of Matthew 24:37-40. This claim actually turns out to be an embarrassing one for the dispensationalist position. In these verses in Matthew, Jesus says: “As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left.” McGuire elaborates on the dissonance within the *Left Behind* theory:

The authors of *Left Behind* take for granted that the “one taken” is a believer and the “one left” is an unbeliever. In Matthew 24 and Luke 17, Jesus does not expressly identify which is which. However, the immediate context of the verses in Matthew 24 suggests that the “Left Behind” books have it *entirely backwards!* In the verses immediately preceding the passage, “One will be taken and the other left,” Jesus draws an analogy to the days of Noah (Matt. 24:38-39). In the example, the ones who are removed from the earth are the men and women who were destroyed in the Flood – “and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.” The ones who are left are Noah and his family... The word for “taken” in the original Greek of Matt. 24:40-41 and Luke 17:34-35 can also be used to mean “seized” or “taken prisoner.” For instance, Jesus is “taken” by the soldiers prior to His crucifixion (Matt. 27:27). Moreover, the word for “left” is often used in the Bible to mean “to pardon” or “to forgive.” The same verb is used in the Lord’s Prayer:

“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us” (Matt. 6:12; Luke 11:4). Given the immediate context and the different meanings possible for the words “taken” and “left,” a strong case could be made that when Jesus refers to the “one taken” he speaks of those who will be judged at the Second Coming. Those who are “left,” then, are those who are forgiven and receive eternal life. Thus, the fundamental premise of *Left Behind* is based on a questionable interpretation of Scripture (2001: 6-7).

The hermeneutical questions for the dispensational understanding of the rapture do not end here. Fundamental to LaHaye’s pretribulational position is – by definition – that the rapture must *precede* the tribulation. The “rapture” described by St. Paul, however, occurs *after* significant descriptions of biblical tribulation. Furthermore, when believers are raised (according to 1st Corinthians 15:26, 51-57), death is destroyed and its destruction occurs after the 1000 years of Revelation. That is, it appears -- in contradistinction to the dispensational system -- that the “rapture” is after the millennium itself (CTCR, 1989: 30). Because of the disparity of views, however, it is crucial to identify the millennium itself. This is why we now turn to Revelation chapter 20.

LaHaye on Revelation 20, the Millennium

Revelation mentions the duration of what LaHaye refers to as “the kingdom age,” six times. St. John the apostle says in Revelation 20 that this age will last for one thousand years. From the Latin *mille* (thousand) and the Latin *annum* (year), the common term is “millennium.” LaHaye puts forth his belief that this is “one thousand years of peace on earth (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 235)!” In the dispensationalist economy Ezekiel supplies the super sign of Israel re-established as a nation. This sign indicates that the millennium is drawing near. Daniel reveals the seventieth week that is the seven-year tribulation, the end of which ushers in the millennium. Matthew 24:34 identifies the generation that will include some who will witness the glorious appearing of Christ to commence the millennium. Finally,

1st Thessalonians 4:15-17 is treated as that event that will spare Christians from the tribulation as they will be raptured so that they may return seven years later to commence the millennium. Needless to say, the millennium is always before the dispensationalist.

LaHaye explains that not all Christians agree with his interpretation on the millennium, and that the two other popular views are amillennialism and postmillennialism. LaHaye easily dismisses the postmillennial view by stating that the “savagery of the twentieth century makes it difficult to maintain postmillennialism today (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 238).” He also quickly dispenses with the amillennialism viewpoint. Of this belief system LaHaye says, “Amillennialism is the belief that there is no future Millennium but that prophecy will be fulfilled in eternity (1999: 237).”

The summary is less than accurate. First of all, it allows for a common false impression that amillennialism – as the name suggests – advocates no millennium at all. This is a popular misunderstanding. The amillennial position confirms that the millennium of Revelation is in fact the age of the Christian Church (which includes the future until Christ comes again). That is, it advocates viewing the apocalyptic genre of Revelation as symbolic and therefore its reference to one thousand years as symbolic.

These facts are mentioned at this juncture, however, to highlight a very common teaching of LaHaye: namely his attributing the amillennial position to St. Augustine who according to LaHaye “introduced the practice of spiritualizing and allegorizing Scripture (1999: 238).” This claim will be examined in chapter 3, but it is mentioned here in order to explain that the “spiritualizing” practise of amillennialism is viewed as an inferior approach as compared to the “literal” one of premillennialism. While spiritualizing and allegorizing is viewed as diminishing Scripture, premillennialism is presented as that teaching which comes

from “people [who] have taken the Bible at face value and interpreted it as it reads (1999: 238).”

As a result of such reading, LaHaye teaches that the coming kingdom of peace on earth is assigned many names in the Bible such as the Kingdom Age, the Millennium, the Age of Peace, and the Reign of Christ, but “the best known is simply the Kingdom (1981: 73).” LaHaye explains that the “Kingdom Age will usher in the utopian kind of peace for which every normal human being has yearned...As long as Satan is roaming free on this earth [however], there will always be wars (1981: 73-74).” In contrast to the conditions of present earth, the millennial kingdom will be an age of righteousness for two reasons: 1) Christ will be the sovereign who will “tolerate nothing less than righteousness;” and 2) The fact that Satan will be bound in the bottomless pit unable to deceive the nations (1981: 80).

What is perhaps one of the more bold statements by LaHaye as it stands against Christians who believe the Lord’s Prayer petitions are granted for our life here on earth, is what he writes in his Revelation commentary: “[The millennial kingdom] will literally fulfill the [petition] our Lord taught His followers to pray, ‘Your kingdom come’ (Matt. 6:10) (1999: 331).” This explains why dispensationalists consider other millennial views as untenable: the kingdom is strictly yet to come.

An Alternative View: The Millennium Here and Now in Christ’s Church

The only chapter in the Bible that mentions *chilia*, the one thousand years, is Revelation 20. Moreover, from the amillennial standpoint the reference itself in no way requires belief in a strictly future kingdom, but allows for the understanding of a *present* one. The differences between the two positions therefore are vast. Essentially, there is no delay in Christ’s reign from the amillennial perspective. Indeed, this position agrees with Moffatt’s

estimation: “[through such systems as premillennialism] the millennium or messianic reign was thus abbreviated into a temporary phase of providence in the latter days (Nicoll, 1961c: 473).” It is against this tendency that the alternative view stands.

In Revelation 20:2, there are four names listed referring to Satan: “the dragon,” “ancient serpent,” “devil,” and “Satan.” Revelation 12:7-9 employs the same four names after mentioning the birth of Jesus Christ (12:5). Yet chapter 12 also clearly describes Satan cast out of heaven, while chapter 20 presents his final judgment. It appears, therefore, that the one thousand years could easily be describing the time extending from the incarnation and the enthronement of the Son (12:5) to Satan’s final destruction (20:10). This is the entire New Testament period (Lenski, 1963: 564-565).

This is a fundamental insight in distinguishing between the two systems. LaHaye also identifies Christ in Revelation 12:5, but interprets “[Christ] to rule all the nations with a rod of iron” to mean “Christ’s rule during the millennial kingdom, when he will be the absolute ruler of the world (LaHaye, 1999: 201).” The difference, however, is that amillennialism sees no reason for the delay for Christ to be the “absolute ruler of the world” even if historical circumstances shift. For example, the amillennialist would apply Christ’s announcement at the Great Commission in Matthew 28 which includes his announcing “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” as indication that the premillennial delay is completely unnecessary.

This is not to say that the words of Revelation 12:5 do not describe a future reign. The future sense is certainly there, but this fact in no way excludes Christ’s victory (this is no either-or fallacy). “The fact that Christ was taken ‘to God and to his throne’ (12:5), his ascension, demonstrates and vindicates his victory over the dragon and the session at the

Father's right hand is the ultimate confirmation of his victory, and here it is reenacted and dramatized for John in order to confirm his faith in the victory of the Lamb over the dragon, won years before at the cross and empty tomb (Brighton, 1999: 330-331)."

The victory of the Lamb over Satan also means from the amillennial perspective that Satan is bound by virtue of the culmination of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. The specific concern from a premillennial standpoint, however, is that surely Satan is *not* bound. The basic objection will seem familiar by now: there is nothing in history that would appear (from the dispensational viewpoint) to have given fruition to this prophecy, so how could he be bound?

The amillennial answer certainly emphasizes Christology: This work of binding began when Christ triumphed over Satan during the wilderness temptations. It was after this, that Jesus began casting out demons, and before the eyes of those who witnessed his public ministry, Satan's influence was on the decline. Even his witnesses came back to Christ reporting their success in ministry over demons and this was when Jesus reported on what he saw in Satan falling as lightning from heaven (Lk 10:17-18) (Hendriksen, 1991: 187). Christ triumphed over rulers and authorities (Col 2:15), he came to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn 3:8), he assured his disciples that the prince of this world is judged (Jn 16:11), and he came so that through his death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb 2:14). Thus, "in [passages such as these] the binding and casting out or falling of Satan is in some way associated with the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1991: 188)."

Still, premillennialists will object because the world simply seems a far cry from being spared of Satan's deception (Rv 20:3). However, sometimes human expectations preclude theological comprehensiveness. Martin H. Franzmann warned, "Those who cherish and foster

the millennial hope...need to ask themselves whether the desire to have and enjoy a visible victory before the final victory of the Crucified is not a subtle and unconscious form of objection to the Crucified...He has promised to be with His church, under the cross, 'to the close of the age.' (Matt. 28:20) (Franzmann, 1968: 133)”

Amillennial exegesis also addresses the concern from the premillennial perspective that Satan is not bound. The binding of Satan is not a matter of less alcohol and drugs, but a matter of the Gospel less impeded. Lenski therefore elucidates upon a missiological perspective: “The binding of Satan means that he shall not prevent this heralding of the gospel to all the nations (Lenski, 1963: 575).” Brighton also supports this “Great Commission” focus: “In order for the church to fulfill her mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all peoples (cf. 10:11), the devil must not be permitted to ruin the church and thwart her efforts (1999: 552).” Before Christ’s ministry, Satan was able to come before God’s heavenly throne to accuse the saints (Job 1:6-11; 2:1-5; Zech 3:1-5), but upon the completion of Jesus’ soteriological mission, Satan was cast out of heaven (Rev 12:7-12) (1999: 553).

The last question to be considered here pertains to the meaning of “one thousand years.” LaHaye’s literal approach views these years as a strict millennium; Christ will reign on earth for one thousand years, no more, no less. But LaHaye’s mantra to take the Bible literally simply does not seem to appreciate the uniqueness of apocalyptic literature. Revelation is a perfect example of this dispensational problem. Though it is one of the primary examples of biblical apocalyptic, these six references to one thousand years must be exactly one thousand literal, actual years in the mind of the premillennialist.

It is widely understood that in Revelation, however, we are presented with symbolic numbers. As ten is a rounded whole, 10 times 10 times 10 is the definitively rounded whole

(Franzmann, 1968: 130). In Revelation 20 “1000” is the number of highest completeness representing the era of the New Testament Church in which Christ reigns through his Word and Sacraments.

Dispensationalists reject such positions, however, because their ability to recognize the unique characteristics of the apocalyptic genre must capitulate to dispensational, hermeneutical presuppositions. The hermeneutical system itself must therefore be analyzed and in this we will gain a better understanding of one of the key reasons why evangelicals in America experience apocalyptic anxiety: their interpretation of Scripture invites it. Such a state of affairs seems hard to understand: why would one welcome apocalyptic anxiety? We are already anticipating the clear answers that will be revealed in the survey chapter (chapter 4), but for now we note that pretribulationism also offers benefits to those who believe: in recognizing themselves as the people of the end, they hold a special place in the world and in the history of the world. Such an identity is in fact a coping mechanism for all that threatens evangelical identity in the 21st century.

While apocalyptic anxiety may exist, their special religious status means -- from their perspective -- that they are true to God’s Word. In this, they perpetuate a vital consolation in believing that they are being faithful to God in an age that will soon be overrun by evil. To maintain this level of confidence, however, it is necessary that this religious tradition hold to some sort of guarantee that their faith is true; a kind of “objective” standard that their identity is right. The hermeneutic approach represents such a foundation. In the pretribulationist hermeneutic they possess a view of Scripture that makes them completely unique and they also possess an external verification (the nation of Israel) that “proves” their understanding of the Bible. And while they receive comfort in this for the reasons just stated, they also continue

to mount apocalyptic anxiety on themselves since their view of Scripture and their external sign (Israel) means that they are the generation that will see the rapture.

CHAPTER 3: LAHAYE'S HERMENEUTIC

LaHaye's Starting Point: Millenarianism and "Prophecy"

A dispensational teacher like LaHaye working from the apocalyptic Scriptures will produce a distinct eschatology and from that peculiar eschatology follows a distinctive brand of millennialism. The heavy emphasis upon the coming millennium and preparation for it as depicted in LaHaye and Jenkins' *Left Behind* series of novels classifies LaHaye and his followers as "millenarian." The term refers to all religious movements that have a belief in a coming golden age (Bryant and Dayton, 1983: ix). Millenarianism, however, is not the same as apocalyptic belief. Indeed, there are many Christian traditions that hold the apocalyptic texts either as sacred or at least as important in perpetuating the Christian faith -- as well as the teaching of a millennium embedded within them -- but these other traditions do not find in these the basis for perpetuating millenarianism.

Thompson's stricter definition in explaining "millenarian" is helpful: "the word applies to people who live in daily anticipation of the dawn of the 'millennium' described in the book of Revelation (1996: xi)." Furthermore, the one-thousand years consists of Christ reigning on earth before the last judgment, that is, millenarians fully "expect a time of supernatural peace and abundance *here on earth* (Landes, 2000: 257)." It is to be kept in mind, however, that while all millenarianism is apocalyptic, not all apocalyptic belief is millenarian (Thompson, 1996: xiv).

LaHaye's millenarianism also emphasizes "prophecy." The basic distinction between foretelling and forthtelling reminds us of the difference between future prediction and proclamation of God's Word to a contemporaneous generation. Depending on the Christian

tradition, foretelling is considered either impossible or it is retained in a very circumscribed way. It is, however, almost always tempered to avoid a strict determinism and fatalism. “Prophecy, according to the Scriptures, is not primarily a prediction of future events (Terry, 1999: 313).” “Even [the prophet’s] eschatological predictions were given not to provide unrelated bits of information or to satisfy curiosity about the future, but to lead their hearers to repentance and faith (CTCR, 1989: 13).” LaHaye, however, makes claims about prophetic foretelling which appear extreme. It is for him, “history written in advance (LaHaye and Ice, 2001: 11)” and implies a form of radical determinism.

LaHaye claims that “God must have wanted His followers to learn Bible prophecy, because He dedicated almost 30 percent of His Scriptures to it (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 3).” LaHaye then expounds on his logic: If the Old Testament features over one hundred prophecies on the first coming of the Messiah and if the coming of Jesus Christ fulfilled all of those prophecies, then the believer should also be confident that Christ will also come to fulfil all prophecies of His second coming and millennial kingdom. In fact, because the second coming of Christ is described five times more than his first coming and because “his first coming is a fact of history, we can be at least five times as certain that He will come the second time (1999: 3).” Thus prophecy for LaHaye is essentially about that which predicts the future coming of Christ and all of the events attached to it. LaHaye explains, “properly taught, prophecy emphasizes the ‘imminent’ return of Christ – that He could come at any moment (1999: 6).” The practical consequence for the Christian is that the “faithful believer is to be found watching and waiting for our Lord’s coming (LaHaye and Ice, 2001: 11).”

For LaHaye, therefore, there has never been a historical Christian Church problem of non-fulfilment in regard to prophetic prediction. Such a view, however, is contrary to the traditional view of actual Christian history. For example, 1st Thessalonians depicts St. Paul

addressing this very concern. In facing this, the Church experienced what Thompson refers to as a “shift” to apocalypse (1996: 14). But LaHaye denies that “apocalyptic” is even an actual biblical category. Despite LaHaye’s objections, however, with the advent of apocalyptic literature eschatological systems on the last things became more developed and apocalyptic was understood as touching on this realm especially. LaHaye is an example of this development since his eschatology is immensely detailed and confined to an earthly space-time fulfilment. Bryant and Dayton describe this state of affairs as representing when “the tension between vision and reality falls apart (Bryant and Dayton, 1983: 140).”

In LaHaye’s pretribulationism the tension is (for all intents and purposes) no longer existent. Even prophecy in apocalyptic literature is fulfilled in a wooden and literalistic fashion. For LaHaye, prophetic predictions from the Bible will continue to unfold within observable history. Needless to say, it would be helpful to gain a fuller understanding of his version of “prophecy” and this is accomplished when one understands his version of “literal” as it applies to biblical hermeneutics.

Literal and Literalism

In LaHaye’s mind the two most important keys to understanding the prophetic Word of God are the following: “First, one must interpret the Bible literally unless the context provides good reason to do otherwise. Second, we must understand that Israel and the church are distinct! They had different beginnings, purposes, and commissions, and they have different futures. If a person fails to acknowledge these two facts of Scripture, all discussion and argument is fruitless (LaHaye, 2002b: 231-232).” In LaHaye’s opinion, the issue is therefore not so much about prophecy [neither eschatology nor apocalyptic literature for that matter] as much as it is about one’s convictions on Scripture and the Church (2002b: 232).

In respect to LaHaye's conviction about interpreting Scripture "literally," Dennis Nineham warns against what he considers to be an overly-simplistic and from his point-of-view inadequate perspective:

It has been a cardinal principle of all previous Christian theology, in whatever form it may have been expressed, that once the literal meaning of each passage -- the *sensus literalis*...-- has been established, then if the truths expressed in all the various passages are synthesized in the right way, the essential truth of the Christian faith will emerge, or will be capable of being deduced by a logic so rigorous that no sober judgment will be able to doubt its validity (1976: 198).

Nineham goes on to defend his concerns through an example of theological pluralism even amongst Christian denominations (thus he argues against the possibility of an established *sensus literalis*) (1976: 199-200). Whilst it may go too far to say that the existence of pluralism proves that a correct position is impossible, Nineham's point warns against hermeneutical arrogance. He cautions that there looms the constant threat of "the scandal of particularity (1976: 83)." In this respect, LaHaye seems to demonstrate Nineham's concern. For LaHaye, if his version of "literal" interpretation is rejected, then all is lost in the hermeneutical enterprise. In this spirit, LaHaye must attack other views. This is why he labels the most prevalent form of Christian hermeneutics (competing against his own) a form of "Christianized paganism":

Not until proponents of the Alexandrian School began to allegorize and spiritualize Scripture in the third century did anyone start to doubt the premillennial return of Christ. Origen, the Greek heretic, was among the first. Later, Augustine laid the foundation for destroying doctrinal integrity by introducing Catholic doctrines that have lasted until this day in a form of Christianized paganism – Christian in name, pagan in origin and practice. This never would have happened if people had continued to take the Bible literally wherever the plain sense of Scripture made common sense. Amillennial or postmillennial positions would never have gained much influence in the church without this nonliteral system of interpreting the Bible (LaHaye, 2002b: 232-233).

With such an understanding of history and hermeneutics, LaHaye goes on to share his convictions on the matter: “I doubt a person could arrive at an amillennial or postmillennial position simply by reading the Bible literally. Instead, a system of interpretation or theology must first be applied to explain away the many promises of the future kingdom age and the 1,000-year time period mentioned in Revelation 20 (2002b: 233).” This is an interesting statement since – as I will later demonstrate – LaHaye represents the most complex eschatological system within Christendom by virtue of his application of formal dispensationalism. He too has “a system of interpretation [and] theology.”

At the same time, LaHaye continually warns against “allowing your theological presuppositions...determine your hermeneutics (2002b: 237).” Even while making his readers aware of the various theological presuppositions which drastically affect interpretation, he does not hesitate to describe his own (LaHaye, 1999: 19). In spite of his own warning about predetermined approaches, LaHaye recommends the use of the New Scofield Reference Bible which is the reference Bible outlining the dispensational position replete with theological presuppositions (LaHaye, 1976: 111).

When approaching the book of Revelation, LaHaye continues to make his readers aware of the impact of theological presuppositions. For example, he teaches that there are four interpretations that will determine its message: 1) Futurist; 2) Historical; 3) Spiritualizing; and 4) Preterist. He explains that the futurist interpretation (his own) is “the most satisfactory,” because this is the view which supposedly takes the book of Revelation in a “literal” fashion and sees the vast majority of the book (from chapter 4 on) as prophecies yet to be fulfilled (LaHaye, 1999: 19).

LaHaye believes that since his particular theological position is the most “literal” that he is properly honouring the two hermeneutical keys mentioned above. He passionately defends the first key of verbal inspiration. We must – at all costs – avoid the “spiritualization” of the biblical text. He cautions that “much harm has been done by trying to spiritualize the Bible instead of taking it literally (LaHaye, 1976: 122).” To avoid what he perceives as spiritualization, LaHaye continually quotes the words of the late David L. Cooper (Cooper’s “Golden Rule of Interpretation”):

When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, but take every word at its primary literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise (1976: 122).

By being true to this rule, says LaHaye, the sincere Bible student will become a premillennialist. To violate the rule, however, is to fall victim to spiritualizing and allegorizing the text which leads the expositor to being “hopelessly doomed to confusion and error (LaHaye, 2002b: 238-239).”

While keeping this guideline before him, LaHaye gives further counsel: “When language is not used literally, the author will often resort to figures of speech (LaHaye, 1976: 123).” This reveals much about what LaHaye means by “literal.” It tells us that when he says “literal” he discounts the fact that metaphors, figures and symbols are also literal forms of Scripture. The problem here (for LaHaye) is that a metaphorical understanding of a given text may be *the* one, true, actual and honest (i.e. literal in the proper sense) meaning of that same text. It appears that LaHaye’s form of “literal” is a wooden literalism that prejudices a text and circumscribes possible meanings so that symbols are eliminated or at least reduced in Scripture. This becomes an acute problem in apocalyptic literature which obviously (to many) relies on symbols, metaphors, and other figures of speech.

LaHaye, however, does not want to be seen as discounting symbols so he further qualifies that symbolism almost always represents “real people, things, and events” referred to within the text. By saying this, however, we are led to wonder if symbols continue to serve any purpose. Given this tenuous position on biblical symbolism, Hitchcock and Ice cite the dispensationalist scholar Charles Ryrie in order to defend LaHaye:

Dispensationalists...[give] to every word the same meaning it would have in normal usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking....Symbols, figures of speech and types are all interpreted plainly in this method and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation. After all, the very existence of any meaning for a figure of speech depends on the reality of the literal meaning of the terms involved. Figures often make the meaning plainer, but it is the literal, normal, or plain meaning that they convey to the reader. [Ryrie then quotes J. P. Lange from his *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, New York: Charles Scribner, 1872, p. 98] “The literalist (so called) is not one who denies that *figurative* language, that *symbols*, are used in prophecy, nor does he deny that great *spiritual* prophecies are to be *normally* interpreted (i.e. according to the received laws of language) as any other utterances are interpreted – that which is manifestly figurative being so regarded (1965: 86-87).”

For dispensationalism much depends on Ryrie’s claim that “[f]igures often make the meaning plainer, but it is the literal, normal, or plain meaning that they convey to the reader.” But who judges the “literal, normal, or plain meaning?” At the end of the hermeneutical project, symbols must be *interpreted* and if the term “literal” is used to divest meaning from figures of speech or even entire genre’s like apocalypticism, then those interpretations must be held suspect. How do we identify such problematic approaches? Perhaps the answer lies in getting back to LaHaye admitting that theological presuppositions determine interpretation. It seems important to identify LaHaye’s over-arching presupposition.

The Crux of Interpretation

So what is the issue? At the end of the interpretative process, decisions need to be made about figures of speech. Whether we are more or less consistent on a given passage is not nearly as important to the tradition of theology we represent as to whether we are more or less consistent *within that theological system, and especially in the case of what we are examining here, within that eschatological system*. Recall that LaHaye gives his opinion (this time with the fuller text): “There is such a thing as allowing your theological presuppositions to so determine your hermeneutics (your approach to understanding the Bible) that the theological presuppositions become an authority superior to the Bible itself (LaHaye, 2002c: 237).”

Bernard Ramm is favourably quoted by Hitchcock and Ice (2004: 175), but Ramm does *not* in fact take their position. Ramm does, however, help us grasp the real issue which in fact takes us back to what was intimated above in regards to presuppositions of eschatological systems and theological approaches. The ideal is that exegesis would dictate systematics, but the opposite is often the case.

Ramm is concise in illuminating the fact that for Reformers like Luther and Calvin, “literal” meant that they took a “general philological” approach to the Old Testament as opposed to the allegorical approach of the Church Fathers. However, “to a dispensationalist *literal* not only means a philological approach, but that the things predicted will be literally fulfilled (Ramm, 1987: 241).” Ramm also states that the word “spiritual” is also somewhat ambiguous. It is not simply a description of devotion, but “it means that a given prediction is not to be fulfilled in a literal way but in a different way, in a different key (1987: 241).” Furthermore, sometimes “allegorizing” is used synonymously with “spiritualizing,” and

“mystical” is certainly synonymous with the German *pneumatische*, both indicating that the interpretation of a passage is beyond the literal and historical meaning of a passage (1987: 242-243).

These considerations lead Ramm to evaluate what is actually at issue when it comes to understanding the driving force of hermeneutics in systems like LaHaye’s or any other eschatological system. He clearly presents that the issue is not over the validity of grammatical or literal exegesis (though certainly some would disagree) nor is it one of figurative or non-figurative language of the prophets. Furthermore, the issue is not between a completely spiritual or completely literal hermeneutic. Ramm seems right to assert, “Nobody is a strict literalist or a complete spiritualist (1987: 244).”

So what is the real issue in respect to what is driving the hermeneutic especially when it comes to prophecy, apocalyptic and eschatology? Ramm answers simply, “our millennial views [are] the *crux interpretum* of prophetic interpretation (1987: 244-245).”

Milton S. Terry is meticulous in his analysis of hermeneutics, but when he begins his chapter on the apocalypse of John, he begins with the words, “No portion of the Holy Scriptures has been the subject of so much controversy and of so many varying interpretations as the Apocalypse of John (1999: 356).” His *very next sentence* is, “The principal systems of exposition may, however, be reduced to three, which are commonly known as the Preterist, the Continuous-Historical, and the Futurist (1999: 356).” Why does Terry begin this way? It is because the systems of apocalyptic interpretation have a tremendous impact on hermeneutics.

Even American Evangelical scholars William Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. begin their hermeneutical evaluation of Revelation by mentioning the four

major time-orientations impacting interpretation: “The *preterist* approach sees all events as past; the *futurist*, as all still future (at least from chapter 6 on); the *historist*, as tracing the development of the entire Church Age; and the *idealist*, as a symbolic representation of the timeless struggle between good and evil (1993: 369).” They go on to say that in their opinion taking a combination of preterist and futurist interpretations is best. (1993: 369).

LaHaye, however, is dogmatic about his futurist approach and this colours every other facet of his hermeneutics. As a result, LaHaye’s hermeneutical approach – at least the first significant part of it – is fairly easy to grasp: 1) Verbal inspiration that translates to his version of “literal” that avoids “spiritualization” and allegory; and 2) A pre-established eschatological system for guiding interpretation, namely his system of pretribulational premillennial dispensationalism. This hermeneutical approach however, is countered by the more traditional views of St. Augustine. Consequently, LaHaye has maligned the Bishop of Hippo while trying to defend dispensational hermeneutics.

The Offence of St. Augustine According to LaHaye

As previously mentioned, LaHaye blames St. Augustine for introducing Catholic doctrines leading to “Christianized paganism,” and in another source LaHaye elaborates on how this has undermined his own premillennial and “literal” approach to Scripture:

Toward the end of the third century the spiritualizing and allegorizing of Scripture began to take over theological thought, and together with the merging of ecclesiastical and governmental Rome under Constantine, premillennialism fell into disrepute. With the advent of Augustine and other Catholic theologians, theology and philosophy supplanted the study of Scriptures. The Dark Ages are well named, for the Word of God, which is the light of life, was hidden from people by the Church, which has been entrusted with the responsibility of propagating it. As the light of God’s Word was extinguished, the hope of the Church, the literal return of Christ to the earth, was eclipsed (LaHaye, 1999: 334).

According to LaHaye, St. Augustine is largely responsible for injecting paganism into Christianity, spiritualizing the Scriptures, pitting philosophy over Scripture, supplanting and hiding Scripture, and denigrating the Scriptural teaching of Christ's return to the earth. Last but not least, LaHaye attributes the origin of amillennialism to St. Augustine as LaHaye reports, "[St. Augustine] produced the doctrine (LaHaye, 1999: 334)." But are these accusations true? If they are not, then LaHaye will appear even more as having alternative motives for perpetuating his eschatology. To abuse such an important Church Father should give rise to the possibility that LaHaye prefers his own agenda to accuracy. We must therefore be sure we understand what St. Augustine taught in respect to eschatology in order to test LaHaye's claims.

Before analyzing St. Augustine, however, it needs to be said that while the problem of non-fulfilment was an actual problem in the early church, it is also true – as Jaroslav Pelikan has researched – that "it would be, however, a gross exaggeration of the evidence to describe the eclipse of the apocalyptic vision as 'catastrophic' for the generation that followed the apostles (1971: 123-124)." That is, LaHaye is correct about the persistent millenarian hope present in the early church. Long before St. Augustine lived, however, there was already a plurality of eschatological viewpoints. This too LaHaye at least partially acknowledges when he draws attention to Origen. LaHaye's view of Origen, however, is that he was a Greek heretic (LaHaye, 2002b: 232). LaHaye's tendency is to give the impression that *any* counter-millenarian view was heretical. Whether or not LaHaye is aware of it, this is patently not the case.

Pelikan shows that in response to non-fulfilment, the ancient Christian texts suggest a "shift within the polarity of already/not yet and a great variety of solutions to the exegetical

and theological difficulties caused by the shift (1971: 124).” Furthermore, while there were pro-millenarian voices like Papias and Irenaeus, it is unfounded to imply that their simple millenarian understanding of Revelation 20 was tantamount to LaHaye’s full-fledged pretribulationism. LaHaye, however, compares the historical advocates of premillennialism and amillennialism and does so in the context of arguing for pretribulationism (LaHaye, 1999: 332). This is a misleading association.

But even in the early church “there is striking evidence not only that the millenarian hope continued in the church after the apostolic age, but also that, probably from the beginning, it stood in tension with other descriptions of the reign of Christ....Justin admitted that there were other Christian believers, no less pious and orthodox than he, who did not have such an expectation (Pelikan, 1971: 124-125).” It appears that in the post-apostolic era millenarianism was not considered proof of either orthodoxy or heresy (1971: 125). It should be fairly obvious as to why this is significant in regards to St. Augustine. Since the Bishop of Hippo did not live until the fourth/fifth century, no one may rightfully give the impression that he invented amillennialism. In suggesting that he did, LaHaye makes a false charge.

LaHaye also reveals remarkable inconsistency in handling his own hermeneutic. For example, the early church had a high view of the Eucharist -- and the creeds for that matter -- verifying the “already” and “not yet” quality of the coming of Jesus Christ (Pelikan, 1971: 126-127). At the same time, however, LaHaye easily dismisses the early church position when he reduces the Lord’s Supper to “the most important [metaphor] in all the scripture (LaHaye, 1976: 124).” But why would he so strongly appeal to the tradition of the early church in respect to eschatology while discarding the early church’s view of the Sacrament?

In the early church there was also great concern amongst a wide band of Christians when it came to the extremes of millenarianism. “Eusebius was certainly speaking for a large body of theological opinion in the East when he called Papias’s millenarianism ‘bizarre’ and ‘rather mythological’ (Pelikan, 1971: 129).” Included in this process of finding balance and correcting extremes was St. Augustine. It was out of his concern over extremism and always in respect to a reverential treatment of the Scriptures that St. Augustine “surrendered the millenarian interpretation of Revelation 20, to which he had held earlier, in favor of the view that the thousand years of that text referred to the history of the church (1971: 129).”

But why did St. Augustine take this position? In St. Augustine’s time and in the face of the “shift” to apocalypse mentioned above, two principal themes of medieval millennialism emerged: 1) the use of a non-apocalyptic chronology to postpone the end; and 2) the transformation of the Roman Empire into a positive eschatological force (Landes, 2000: 259). While theologians postponed millennial hopes, they also tried to over-emphasize the identity of the Roman Empire on the side of God. The “obstacle” or “restraint” against the Antichrist for example came to be identified not as the Lord, but as the Roman Empire. This tendency evolved to the point that “instead of the aniconic monotheistic political ideal of ‘no king but God,’ it offered the iconic one of ‘one God, one king (2000: 259-260).”

It might be said therefore that St. Augustine was addressing the same kinds of pastoral concerns many Christian theologians do to this day. On the one hand, he was essentially addressing the concern of the attempt to calculate the date of the second coming that Christ had clearly warned was not for anyone to know (Acts 1:7). On the other hand, St. Augustine was addressing the disturbing trend of ever discerning end-time significance in current events (Thompson, 1996: 29-30). More specific were the concerns leading to his writing *The City of God*: “Shocked by the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410, the Romans made the charge that this

disaster had come upon them because they had forsaken the old classical Roman religion and had adopted Christianity. Augustine set out to answer this charge at the request of his friend Marcellinus (Cairns, 1996: 140).”

Both Jerome and Augustine recognized the dangers of this extreme mixing of kingdoms (especially the inference that the kingdom of God is contingent upon the earthly kingdom), and thus they took a defensive posture. On St. Augustine’s part, he argued that the millennium was not a future event, but already in progress and set in motion by Christ (Landes, 2000: 260). Augustine basically removed millennialism, or the belief in a coming kingdom of God on earth, from Christian theology (2000: 260).

This is surely the reason Tim LaHaye finds St. Augustine so offensive. LaHaye is critical of his amillennialism as it is in fact the most popular Christian eschatological position (and one that is radically contrary to his own):

Amillennialism is the belief that there is no future Millennium but that prophecy will be fulfilled in eternity. This belief crept into the church after Augustine introduced the practice of spiritualizing and allegorizing Scripture, which opened the door to many pagan doctrines and practices and helped to plunge the Western world into the Dark Ages for over eleven hundred years (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 237-238).

LaHaye has consistently held these two positions side-by-side: First, “the early Christians were almost unquestionably premillennialists (LaHaye, 1999: 331).” And second, “with the advent of Augustine and other Catholic theologians, theology and philosophy supplanted the study of Scriptures (1999: 334).” As a result, Tim LaHaye cannot help but warn his readers of his grave concerns while citing one of his mentors John Walvoord: “[St. Augustine’s] view of what the City of God is, led him into teachings that have given rise to unspeakable misery, the very greatness of his name accentuating the harmful effects of the error he taught (1999: 336).” But what was his “error?”

The Greater Scriptural Substance of St. Augustine Overlooked by LaHaye

From LaHaye's perspective, the "misery" mentioned by Walvoord came through St. Augustine's spiritualizing and allegorizing. Augustine's use of allegory, however, does not imply that he did not take the art and science of hermeneutics very seriously. In St. Augustine we are not dealing with a theologian that easily or regularly discarded either Scripture or the tradition of the Church:

According to Augustine, to interpret the Bible properly one must find out what the original writer intended to say. Now this principle works well when the teaching of Scripture is clear. But what does one do when it is not? In reply, Augustine offered three criteria for finding the correct meaning of obscure texts. First, one consults the "rule of faith" (what clearer passages of Scripture say on the subject) and second, one consults the "authority of the Church" or the church's traditional interpretation of the text. Third, if conflicting views meet both criteria, one should consult the context to see which view commends itself best. In other words, plainer passages and church tradition take precedence over the contexts of obscure passages (Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, 1993: 36-37).

Indeed St. Augustine's overall exegetical approach was meticulous and he held: 1) that the exegete should consult the original texts; 2) that he be acquainted with sacred geography, chronology, science of numbers, natural science generally, history, dialectics, and the writings of ancient philosophers; 3) that he maintain the view that the Scripture is designed to have more meanings than one; 4) that he commend the method of interpreting obscure passages by the light of passages that are understood, and prefers it before the interpretation by reason; and 5) that he maintain his spirit and intent more important than verbal accuracy and critical acumen (for example one must be in sympathy with the Gospel of Christ to interpret its records) (Schaff, D. 1995: x-xi).

Especially in light of these exegetical commitments supporting his hermeneutics, it has been observed: "However much the great African bishop may have laid himself open to

the rebuke of a more critical and mechanical age in this regard and others, his exegesis will continue to be admired for the diligence with which the sacred text is scanned, the reverent frame of heart with which it is approached, and the rich treasures of spiritual truth which it brings forth to the willing and devout reader (1995: xii).”

In addition to his care in presenting the Scriptures, Justo L. Gonzales maintains that St. Augustine’s eschatology as a whole was “rather traditional” and furthermore that he “did not claim to be as certain of some inscrutable matters as some later Christians have been (Gonzales, 1971: 54).” As opposed to those who rush into matters that cannot be known, Gonzales reminds us that we have in St. Augustine a theologian who knew where the boundaries were laid (1971: 55). While his work *The City of God* is much maligned by some who hold a different eschatological system, Walker points out that the theme of his great work is “of ‘the two loves,’ one of which is directed to ephemeral and finite, the other to eternal and infinite, good (1985: 205).” With such a strong Christian theme in place, it is perhaps incumbent upon anyone who would evaluate St. Augustine to have a better view of his work and overall teaching on the matters relating to eschatology.

In going directly to St. Augustine’s work, it is important to establish that he in no way, shape or form denied the coming kingdom of Christ. That is to say, *he did not* limit the kingdom of God to earth within the Church. St. Augustine writes:

For of the kingdom do we speak which will be after the end of the world. For God hath a kingdom always; neither is He ever without a kingdom, whom the whole creation serveth. But what kingdom then dost thou wish for? That of which it is written in the Gospel, “Come, ye blessed of My Father, receive the kingdom which is prepared for you from the beginning of the world.” Lo here is the kingdom whereof we say, “Thy kingdom come.” We pray that it may come *in* us; we pray that we may be found in *it*. For come it certainly will; but what will it profit thee, if it shall find thee at the left hand (Schaff, D. 1995: 275-276)?

This shows that it cannot be intimated that because St. Augustine does not accept a millennial kingdom on earth, that he does not call on the people of God to eagerly await the coming kingdom. To say that the Church age is the millennium does not cancel a real anticipation of reigning with God in the kingdom without end. “And this His kingdom will come, when the resurrection of the dead shall have taken place; for then He will come Himself (1995: 281).”

While we wait for this kingdom, St. Augustine is a true shepherd in warning against extremisms that espouse a waiting and watching that would otherwise lead us to become spiritually confounded and dull:

But men continually say to themselves, “Lo, the day of judgment is coming now, so many evils are happening, so many tribulations thicken; behold all things which the Prophets have spoken, are well-nigh fulfilled; the day of judgment is already at hand.” They who speak thus, and speak in faith, go out as it were with such thoughts to “meet the Bridegroom.” But, lo! war upon war, tribulation upon tribulation, earthquake upon earthquake, famine upon famine, nation against nation, and still the Bridegroom comes not yet. Whilst then He is expected to come, all they who are saying, “Lo, He is coming, and the Day of Judgment will find us here,” fall asleep...And, lo, when He is not looked for, when men are saying, “The six thousand years were waited for, and, lo, they are gone by, how then shall we know when He will come?” He will come at midnight (1995: 403).

The warning is pastoral and consistent with Christ’s teaching that no one knows the last day (Mt 24:36). St. Augustine strives rather to direct a person not to the signs in the world, but to faith. “Watch with the heart, watch with faith (Schaff, D. 1995: 405).” On this proper watching St. Augustine expands: “Let no one then search out the last Day, when it is to be; but let us watch all by our good lives, lest the day of any one of us find us unprepared, and such as any one shall depart hence on his last day, such he be found in the last day of the world (1995: 411).” It is clear, however, that such an emphasis was required in St. Augustine’s time. This is what he observed happening around him:

In vain, then, do we attempt to compute definitely the years that may remain to this world, when we may hear from the mouth of the Truth that it is not for us to know this. Yet some have said that four hundred, some five hundred, others a thousand years, may be completed from the ascension of the Lord up to His final coming. But to point out how each of them supports his own opinion would take too long, and is not necessary; for indeed they use human conjectures, and bring forward nothing certain from the authority of the canonical Scriptures. But on this subject He puts aside the figures of the calculators, and orders silence, who says, “It is not for you to know the times, which the Father hath put in His own power (1995: 394).”

Furthermore, while LaHaye is fond of emphasizing the rapture as “the blessed hope,” St. Augustine’s true hope was expressed in connection to what is described in the apocalypse itself when as St. Augustine describes: “There shall there be no weariness, and sleeping; there shall there be no hunger, and thirst; there shall there be no growing, and growing old; because there shall be no birth either where the numbers remain entire (1995: 487).” In this connection of what we long for, St. Augustine teaches on the two resurrections also mentioned in the book of Revelation and taught in other Scriptures. There is the resurrection of the heart (Eph 5:14), this he calls “the resurrection of the inner man, this is the resurrection of the soul,” and he goes on, “this is not the only resurrection, there remains a resurrection of the body also (1995: 489).” To be sure, no one can claim that St. Augustine advocated Neoplatonism, because the final resurrection is of the body, the same that is buried.

With this insight, St. Augustine begins further consideration of the millennium within the book of Revelation. He is wary of those who suspect that the first resurrection is future and bodily, because such a thought is often used to serve a sensualistic expectation upon the number of a thousand years. “As if it were a fit thing that the saints should thus enjoy a kind of Sabbath-rest during that period, a holy leisure after the labors of the six thousand years since man was created...the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink such as not only to shock the feeling of the temperate, but even to surpass

the measure of credulity itself, such assertions can be believed only by the carnal (Schaff, P. 1995a: 426).” He calls such believers “Millenarians (1995a: 426).”

St. Augustine then ventures into the most important aspect of interpreting Revelation’s one thousand years. He begins by teaching that Satan is bound in accord with the sense that his power is bridled and restrained “so that he could not seduce and gain possession of those who were to be freed (1995a: 427).” Here is St. Augustine on the one thousand years:

Now the thousand years may be understood in two ways, so far as occurs to me: either because these things happen in the sixth thousand of years or sixth millennium (the latter part of which is now passing), as if during the sixth day, which is to be followed by a Sabbath which has no evening, the endless rest of the saints, so that, speaking of a part under the name of the whole, he calls the last part of the millennium – the part, that is, which had yet to expire before the end of the world – a thousand years; or he used the thousand years as an equivalent for the whole duration of this world, employing the number of perfection to mark the fullness of time. For a thousand is the cube of ten. For ten times ten makes a hundred, that is, the square on a plane superficies. But to give this superficies height, and make it a cube, the hundred is again multiplied by ten, which gives a thousand (1995a: 427).

So St. Augustine is rather lucid on his two hermeneutical choices: “either what remains of the sixth day which consists of a thousand years, or all the years which are to elapse till the end of the world (1995a: 427).” What is crucial to note here in light of some of the crass evaluations that have been put upon St. Augustine is that he does not discount the actual possibility of a literal one thousand years. Anyone who assumes that St. Augustine insisted on allegory here has not read St. Augustine. It is also true, however, that St. Augustine very much appreciates the nature of Revelation as a special genre as he also offers the possibility of another interpretation for the thousand years. Later, in this same work St. Augustine says that within the vision of St. John there is a “prophetic diction [which] delights

in mingling figurative and real language, and thus in some sort veiling the sense [of words] (Schaff, P. 1995a: 436).”

Finally, his commentary of what happens at the end of times describes that which is corporeal and actual. Leading up to that is the ongoing reign of the saints in heaven and on earth with Christ during the same one thousand years, though they do so “in another and far different way (1995a: 429).” Nevertheless, the Church “even now is the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven (1995a: 430).” This Church does not worship the beast or his image, that is, they do not accept the ungodly city nor do they accept the false believers, nor “do they receive the inscription, the brand of crime, on their forehead by their profession, on their hand by their practice (1995a: 431).” In this, LaHaye may find his spiritualizing, but it would be hard to maintain that claim as St. Augustine goes on to identify what happens in the new heaven and new earth: “our substance shall receive such qualities as shall, but a wonderful transmutation, harmonize with our immortal bodies, so that, as the world itself is renewed to some better thing, it is fitly accommodated to men, themselves renewed in their flesh to some better thing (1995a: 435).”

So this is the St. Augustine that comes into the hermeneutical consideration. He was not the first to reject premillennialism, he conducted his exegesis in an admirable fashion, he did not overuse allegory, he proceeded to instruct out of pastoral concern, he did not restrict the kingdom of God to earth or heaven, he yearned for and called attention to the coming kingdom, he acknowledged the possibility of a literal one thousand years in Revelation 20, and he foresaw a corporeal inheritance of the new heaven and earth in the bodies raised on the glorious last day. He allowed for symbolism in the interpretation of John’s apocalypse and in so doing he recognized the uniqueness of apocalyptic literature. What he did not do, however,

was neglect the primacy of Scripture. LaHaye's accusations are not sustained and one must wonder about some other agenda.

Even while allowing for "literal" interpretations as LaHaye's definition permits, however, St. Augustine came to radically different conclusions. There is one basic issue that actually divides them: prior eschatological and millennial commitments. It is this commitment that has a drastic effect on LaHaye's second of the two most important keys for understanding Scripture: the distinction between Israel and the Christian Church. If LaHaye accepted St. Augustine's position of the current kingdom, the Israel-Church dichotomy would vanish and so would LaHaye's foundational proof that the rapture is imminent.

The Intricacy of Dispensationalism and the Israel-Church Distinction

Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice consider Charles Ryrie to be an important leader for dispensational theology (2001: 81). Ryrie admits that the old Scofield definition of a "dispensation" is limited: "A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some *specific* revelation of the will of God (1965: 22)." After an etymological review of the Latin *dispensatio* to the Greek *oikonomia*, Ryrie explains that "the central idea in the word *dispensation* is that of managing or administering the affairs of a household (1965: 24-25)." This further leads Ryrie to give this more concise definition of a dispensation: "A dispensation is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose (1965: 29)."

Many object to this approach to biblical theology because the system is relatively recent. Ryrie believes, however, that the charge is a straw man argument against dispensationalism. After all, anyone who believes in progressive revelation should arrive to

the more pertinent question: Is the system *biblical*? Indeed, it is this tradition's contention that timetable prophecy is a very large part of what the Bible *is*.

Robert Dean Jr. praises the system as he brings out its true value as hermeneutical principle: "Dispensationalism is the interpretive key that unlocks the pages of Scripture, opens the door for our understanding of prophecy, and orients our thinking about God's blueprint for human history (LaHaye and others, 2001: 10)." At the same time, it is important for the dispensationalists to point out that they are not inventing different soteriologies. Dean explains: "Though each dispensation has distinct and identifiable characteristics, the truths and principles of God's revelation and plan for redemption are constant. Salvation is by grace through faith alone in Christ alone (2001: 10)." One wonders, however, if this is an unsubstantiated claim, because the question remains whether or not the system is not fundamentally distracting to the Christian message.

There are many presentations of the dispensations themselves, but the one supplied by LaHaye and Ice is certainly consistent with modern dispensationalism. These are the seven dispensations on which LaHaye relies as he constructs his eschatology (LaHaye and Ice, 2001: 83):

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. The First Dispensation: | INNOCENCE (Creation) |
| 2. The Second Dispensation: | CONSCIENCE (The Fall) |
| 3. The Third Dispensation: | HUMAN GOVERNMENT (The Flood) |
| 4. The Fourth Dispensation: | PROMISE (Tower of Babel) |
| 5. The Fifth Dispensation: | LAW (Exodus) |

6. The Sixth Dispensation: CHURCH AGE (Dispersion of Israel)

7. The Seventh Dispensation: MILLENNIAL REIGN

According to this system, we are currently living in the sixth dispensation, “the church age.” In the dispensational plan the current age will transpose into the last age known as the “millennial reign.” In between these last two dispensations, however, is an important intermediate period known as the seven-year “tribulation.” The intermediate period is much more than just a transition though, because dispensationalism identifies it as “a completion of the age of the Mosaic Law [that is, the fifth dispensation]...(LaHaye and others, 2001: 10).” This intermediate period therefore is considered a completion of Daniel’s “70 weeks,” at which point “the great parenthesis” comes to an end. God will then fulfil his promises given to Israel. This is the assertion of dispensationalism despite the fact that modern Israelis might have difficulty viewing themselves as returning to a theocracy. Nevertheless, Israel becomes the focal point. In fact, this might be an understatement.

Ryrie unabashedly asserts that a *sine qua non* of dispensationalism is that “[a] dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct....This is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not a man is a dispensationalist, and it is undoubtedly the most practical and conclusive (1965: 44-45).” When one combines the dispensational perspective on “literal prophecy” with the integral principle of Israel, then the political events surrounding 20th-century Israel *are considered the fulfilment of prophecy*. No other teaching convinces the dispensationalist that they are living in the end times more than their view of Israel. From this belief, American Evangelicals are in the position to consider additional factors (in relation to Israel) as cause for apocalyptic anxiety. LaHaye has taken full advantage of this situation through the *Left Behind* novels that elaborate upon the convergence of prophecy and Israel.

In order to perpetuate the convergence between literal prophecy and Israel, however, dispensationalism must defend its contention that the Church and Israel are distinct so that the Church cannot be the fulfilment of Israel. If Israel becomes a mere type of the Church, then dispensationalism loses its object of fulfilled prophecy. LaHaye therefore strives to defend the distinction between Israel and the Church. Such a position as LaHaye's, however, is not to be confused with -- for example -- that of W.S. Campbell's who (while making the case for the continual distinction between Jew and Gentile) also states that "The Lordship of Christ is ultimate..." and that "...Israel enables gentile believers to SHARE the inheritance and identity of Israel...as equals...(Campbell, 2004: online)." That is, Campbell does not suggest that Israel must return to animal sacrifices as LaHaye does. LaHaye's distinction between Israel and the Church is more extreme:

Before we go any further, we should recognize that the church is not Israel, and Israel is not the church. Some of the greatest confusion today in the study of Bible prophecy is caused by teachers who say that the church has replaced Israel in God's prophetic plan. They say that there is no distinction between Israel and the church, and that the church today is spiritual Israel and that the promises God originally gave to that chosen nation now belong to the church. But the church has not replaced Israel. The people of Israel still have a part in God's future plans. Scripture clearly indicates that the church and Israel are two separate entities. Those who say that the church is spiritual Israel have to allegorize the Bible in order to come to that conclusion. In other words, they do not interpret the prophetic passages of Scripture literally (LaHaye, 2001: 83).

At the same time LaHaye teaches that the Old Testament economy of animal sacrifices has passed and that the death of Christ is the final and perfect sacrifice (2001: 86). This Christology, however, is cast aside by the return to the former economy during the tribulation which includes animal sacrifices in a rebuilt temple. From LaHaye's view, however, the contradiction is legitimized as he explains that the Church and Israel have different originators, foundations, purposes, and prophetic futures (LaHaye, 2002b: 241-242). For

example, “Whereas Israel seeks nationhood, and rightly so, the church is awaiting the coming of her Lord to take her to the Father’s house as He promised. Israel plans to rebuild her temple in Jerusalem, but the church has no use for an earthly temple (2002b: 242).”

Ryrie confirms LaHaye’s position. He argues that in Paul’s prayer for natural Israel in Romans 10:1, that he makes a clear reference to Israel as a national people distinct from and outside the Church. He also brings out the fact that in 1st Corinthians 10:32 Paul lists three groups of people: Jews, Gentiles and the Church of God. Thus, if some claim that the promises given to Israel are fulfilled in the Church, why do these distinctions continue to persist *after* the Christian Church originated at Pentecost (1965: 138)? It is not the mere distinction, however, that is important to consider. The distinction leads to the concern of how “prophecy” is applied to Israel specifically and in this we encounter that which significantly contributes to apocalyptic anxiety.

The dispensationalist understands that the fulfilment of biblical prophecy pointing to an imminent rapture and tribulation *is the modern Jewish state*. The fulfilment of Daniel 9:26-27 -- which from the dispensationalist perspective is about the signing of a seven year treaty between Antichrist and Israel -- demands the pre-existence of an actual Jewish state. Thus, for example, “[the 1948 war of Israeli independence] is another way the modern state of Israel fits within Bible prophecy (LaHaye and Hindson, 2004: 156).”

Furthermore, we know that during the tribulation (in the pretribulationist system), the Antichrist must desecrate the temple. That means that Israel must possess a rebuilt temple. For this to happen, Israel must first have sovereignty over the Temple compound area. “From 1948 to 1967, the eastern part of Jerusalem, which is the biblical Jerusalem, the Old City where the Temple compound is located, was in Jordanian, not Jewish, hands. In 1967, one of

the by-products of the Six-Day War was Jewish control of the Temple compound. This is another way the story of the modern Jewish state is woven into Bible prophecy (2004: 156-157).”

LaHaye attaches to Israel the designation of “God’s Time Clock (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 47).” This brings us back to our main concern. LaHaye’s teaching is designed to make people feel an apocalyptic anxiety and strives to convince the willing reader and/or listener to consider their unique place in history as “the key generation (1999: 58).” Israel is proof for LaHaye and other premillennial dispensationalists that the return of Christ is imminent. The dates are unfolding and fulfilling prophecy left and right: the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the establishment of sovereign statehood in 1948, and expansion into Jerusalem in 1967. What’s next? LaHaye says simply, “we are indeed living in the end times (1999: 61-62).”

Another View: The Oneness of Israel and the Church

As LaHaye and other dispensationalists make their case, it appears as if they use the following terms synonymously: “Israelite,” “Hebrew,” “Jew” and “Israeli (CTCR, 2004: 10).” The problem with such treatment, however, is that these terms have very different meanings. The “Israelite” of the Old Testament was a believer in *Yahweh* in the strict monotheism revealed to the patriarchs of the same covenant. The term “Hebrew” is very closely related and was used to identify Israelites from non-Israelites (for example, Joseph identifies himself this way to both Potiphar and Pharaoh) (2004: 11). As an Israelite/Hebrew held to the promise of the Seed (Messiah) that would crush the head of the serpent, they are easily seen to be the spiritual forefathers of those that confess Jesus as the Christ (Rom. 4:12, 16) (2004: 11).

The terms “Jew” and “Israeli,” however, are another matter. There is of course the religious connotation to “Jew,” but there is also the racial one to the extent that to belong to

“Judaism” does not necessarily mean professed allegiance to the Old Testament (just as “Christian” no longer ensures allegiance to the Bible). “Israeli” moreover easily includes “secular” Jews (2004: 11). *Left Behind*, however, presupposes that the people of the Old Testament have remained intact over millennia in the flesh and that they must also be the same people in the religious sense as well. The actual unique terms, however, do not allow this assumption:

In view of these four definitions, it is accurate to speak of certain people who are alive today as Jews and Israelis. But it is inaccurate to say that there are any Israelites or Hebrews living today. Yet this inaccuracy pervades the theology of *Left Behind*, and by failing to make this distinction the authors identify modern-day Jews and Israelis as the Old Testament recipients of God’s promises. Yet the Bible teaches that the promises made to Israelites and Hebrews in the Old Testament find their fulfillment not with Jews and Israelis, but rather with Christ and his church (CTCR, 2004: 11).

This is not to say that a more traditional Christianity does not see the value of her connection to the Old Testament. In fact, it has been a basic principle of biblical hermeneutics “that the Old Testament and the New Testament constitute one essential unity (Surburg, no date: 477).” While progressive revelation is acknowledged, both covenants reveal Messiah/Christ and both explicate the same moral and religious practices. This is consistent of course with the testimony of Christ himself who said that the Old Testament testified to him (John 5:39) (no date: 477).

This is why so many traditional views of this unity describe the Church in terms of being “catholic.” Thus “Thomas Aquinas and Luther both trace the church back to Abel, they stand on common patristic ground. In this sense catholicity is but the oneness of the church throughout time and space. The church triumphant in heaven and the church militant on earth are one festal throng...(Marquart, 1990: 26-27).” Marquart also cites A. Dulles: “The second-century *Shepherd of Hermas* portrays the Church as a very old woman, created before all

things; and Greek Fathers of the next few centuries, such as Origen, Athanasius, Eusebius, Gregory Nazianzen, and John Chrysostom, regularly allude to the pre-existence of the Church as being, next to Christ, the first-born of all creation. Ambrose speaks of Abel as a type of the Church, and Augustine, particularly in his controversial works against the Manichaeans, develops the theme of the Church having existed from the time of Abel.” (1985: 88-89). Dispensationalism, however, dilutes the unity between testaments so that the Church may not speak of her origins occurring anytime before the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

What is missing from the millennial understanding of the Church is that the Old Testament prophecies do indeed refer to the Church, and this is lost precisely because of the limitation in hermeneutical principles as well as the aforementioned commitment to a novel eschatology. From a traditional standpoint, however, when the Old Testament passages prophesy of the abundance of spiritual knowledge in Zion (for example, Isaiah 11:9 and Joel 2:28ff.), there is a fulfillment seen through Peter’s explication of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:16ff.). Where Amos 9:11ff. and Joel 2:18ff. put forth the raising up of the tabernacle of David and of the fruitfulness of the land of Canaan so that seedtime and harvest occur simultaneously, the mountains drop sweet wine, and all the hills flow with milk, James at the Jerusalem Council declares that these have been fulfilled by the entry of Gentiles into the Christian Church (Acts 15:13ff.) (Pieper, 1953: 522).

Further millenarian limitation is seen in the words of Romans 11:26a which says, “And in this all Israel will be saved.” First of all, it would seem from the text that there is absolutely no limitation at all. “All Israel” actually means there is no limit to Israel. It is not “for the most part,” or “very many,” or “enough of them to represent the race,” but the text itself stands in contrast to “in part.” Thus if one holds that all physical, national Israel must be

converted, it must be understood to include all individual Israelis, even those previously deceased Jews, but this translation is impossible (1953: 527-528). Instead, the text of Romans 11:26a serves rather well the interpretation of all spiritual Israel for the following reasons (1953: 528-534):

1. First of all, the phrase “All Israel” parallels the phrase “the fullness of the Gentiles.” It is clear that the latter phrase does not mean all Gentiles in the flesh, but the whole number of the elect Gentiles.
2. Secondly, “Spiritual Israel” must be meant here because St. Paul goes on to explain how all Israel is to be saved. In doing so, St. Paul defends against the notion that all Israel is hardened and rejected by God, but -- as shown earlier in the same chapter -- a *remnant* of Israel is preserved.
3. Lastly, Romans 9:6b states, “For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.” That is, “all Israel” in chapter 11 includes only in part those “descended from Israel.” The balance of “all Israel” includes Gentiles. The description must be in reference to spiritual Israel.

The biblical teaching on spiritual Israel was not lost on Terry. He expounded on the interpretation that may be referred to as “figurative or symbolico-typical (1999: 344).” This Israel is not the Jewish people converted to Christ, but the Israel of God, the people converted to Messiah gathered from both Jew and Gentile. Not only does this view understand the prediction of the inclusion of Gentiles, but it is consistent with the universality of the Gospel. Terry says, “The modern chiliastic notion of a future return of the Jews to Palestine, and a revival of the Old Testament sacrificial worship, is opposed to the entire genius and spirit of the Gospel dispensation (1999: 345).” A more hermeneutical view, Terry explains, is that the glory of the latter house of which Haggai 2:7,9 speaks was attained when the Lord Christ came to earth the first time and on account of this coming the Church was established (1999: 380). Furthermore:

This glorious Church is manifestly the same as the Bride, the wife of the Lamb, the holy city, New Jerusalem. It was necessary that the Old Testament visible Church should be shaken and fall and pass away, for its glory had departed; but in its place comes forth “the whole assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” (Heb. xii, 23) (1999: 380).

In simple terms, Terry explains that the “New Jerusalem” *is* the New Testament Church and Kingdom of God; and the millenarian error occurs in making the New Jerusalem yet future. Both Terry and Ramm argue that the neat hermeneutical package of the dispensationalist is too limited. Ramm explains: “If it be granted that the literal interpretation is the point of departure for prophetic interpretation the question to be asked is: *does the Old Testament prophetic Scripture admit of any additional principle besides the strict, literal principle* (1987: 258)?”

The answer seems clear in that when one goes to the New Testament itself, we see the tradition of interpretation come out: the Scripture bears witness to its own hermeneutic. Ramm explains that sometimes the New Testament cites the Old Testament to prove a point or doctrine (John 6:45, Matt. 22:32, 43-44); sometimes the citation is given to explain a point (Hebrews 12:20); sometimes the citation is present to illustrate a New Testament truth (Rom. 10:18); and sometimes the New cites the Old to show that something has been literally fulfilled (Matt. 2:5-6) (1987: 262). Still, there is another reason for citation within the New of the Old: sometimes the New Testament cites the Old Testament *in an expanded typological sense* (1987: 262). There are actually many examples of this which include the New Testament containing typological interpretations of the Old Testament in regards to moral and spiritual teachings, as well as the interpretation of theological elements. In reference to Israel and the Church, Ramm presents a typological perspective in respect to “Israel of God”:

[St. Paul writes in Gal 6:16] “and upon the Israel of God.” If this expression meant the Jewish people, or even Jewish Christians he would be directly contradicting himself. The true people of God are not the Judaizers who wish to circumcise their converts, but those who glory in the cross and are new creations in Christ. Further, the peace and mercy invoked in this passage *on the basis of this rule* is invoked upon those who walk according to it (and as the parallel Greek construction demands) upon the Israel of God. It is inescapable that the *Israel of God* means the true people of God (in contrast to the Judaizers) who glory in the cross and count the new birth as that saving act of God and not circumcision (1987: 263-264).

Moreover, there is no question that the writer to the Hebrews is fully aware of the new covenant made with the house of Israel and Judah (Hebrews 8:8). If this new covenant is *not* in application to the Church, however, then several problems arise: 1) the author to Hebrews must be contradicting himself when he presents the position that the new covenant is already present in the Church as Christ is presently our Moses, Aaron and Sacrifice (Hebrews 8-10); 2) In Hebrews 10:15-17 the writer to the Hebrews must mistakenly apply the new covenant to present Christian experience; and 3) There must be a multiplication of new covenants made by the author of Hebrews if he does not equate the Eucharist – which Christ said was the new covenant – with the new covenant of Hebrews 8 (Ramm, 1987: 264). The problems are solved, however, when the unity of Israel and the Church is maintained. The old covenants are distinct to the new only in the respect that they find their fulfilment in the same.

The Basic Difference between the Two Hermeneutics

Recall that LaHaye follows Cooper:

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, but take every word at its primary, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 5).

This rule of the dispensationalist, however, must be clearly contrasted to what Ramm offers in light of what we have considered in respect to the figurative, symbolico-typical interpretive method:

Interpret prophecy literally unless the implicit or explicit teaching of the New Testament suggests typological interpretation (1987: 266).

Such an approach is also the approach of a leading American Evangelical work on Hermeneutics, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, by Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard Jr. In their explanation, it is clear that they hold a similar view to both Terry and Ramm. They call their position “literal/spiritual fulfillment” and describe it in these terms (1993: 308):

While some interpreters tend to agree with us, they argue that prophecies like Amos 9 and Jer 31 still have a future *literal* fulfillment involving the nation of Israel. Though Rom 11 admits some future place for Israel in God’s plan, we do not believe the Bible supports this literal view. First, we contend that the NT assumes that such prophecies have already achieved literal fulfillment through Christ and the Church. It leaves no reason to anticipate a second, later fulfillment. Second, to expect the latter implies that God has two separate peoples, Israel and the Church, each serving a different historical purpose and each having separate dealings with God. But in our view, the Bible teaches that God’s plan was to create one people composed of Jews and Gentiles (cf. Isa 19:19-25; Eph 2). He chose the OT nation of Israel as the means to reach and eventually incorporate believers from all nations into his people. The NT clearly teaches that Christ’s coming fulfilled Israel’s national destiny. In addition, 1 Pet 2:9-10 assumes that the Church in this messianic era now constitutes *the people of God* (cf. Gal 6:16; Rom 2:28-29). According to Rom 11, God will graft future Israel, presently a discarded branch, back into his olive tree, presently the Church. In sum, we see no persuasive biblical reason to expect a future literal fulfillment of what the NT says has already occurred, though with an additional spiritual dimension (1993: 308).

As I have said, what has just been presented is “another view” and reveals a fundamental difference to LaHaye’s approach towards Israel and the Church. This alternative approach is not the only alternative, but it demonstrates that LaHaye appears misleading when he gives the impression that his is the only interpretation consistent with Scripture. This

alternative view, however, also proposes that the consideration of these hermeneutical ideas does not necessitate the promotion of apocalyptic anxiety.

The spiritual Israel is not called “to eye a clock,” but rather it is called to live in faith. That is, fear is supplanted by the confession that Christ does not merely come a “second” time, but continually through Word and Sacrament. In fact, it is this perpetual coming of Christ which in and of itself prepares one for the end. In the interim, while every generation is unique, ours is not necessarily special or singled out.

Sasse reminds us that it has been “the last time” ever since Christ was raised. He wrote, “Only an utterly unbiblical way of looking at history could suppose that the Last Things belong altogether to the future, whether near or distant. As surely as the Church never ceases to pray, ‘Thy kingdom come,’ and ‘Amen. Come, Lord Jesus,’ so surely it believes what the Lord says: ‘The hour is coming, and now is (John 5:25),’ and also the warning of His apostle: ‘Children, it is the last hour (1 John 2:18)’ (1986: 112).” We have argued that, for the pretribulationist, such Scriptures as John 5:25 contribute to apocalyptic anxiety in light of the hermeneutic outlined above.

The question, however, is whether LaHaye’s readers actually experience apocalyptic anxiety, or is this simply the unsubstantiated claim of those who disagree with him. The readers of LaHaye’s modern apocalyptic had to be consulted.

This is a vital next step. Thus far we have seen through a deductive approach to the history of millennialism, LaHaye’s exegesis, and LaHaye’s hermeneutic that there is ample cause for apocalyptic anxiety amongst the faithful of this tradition. The millenarian outlook breeds an anxiety of expectation, especially in their handling of future dates, perceived threats within current culture, and the view that Israel itself guarantees our end-time status. A further

step towards apocalyptic anxiety is known through the Scriptures – which American Evangelicals treat as authoritative, inspired and inerrant – when they are treated in such a way as to place the apocalyptic texts into our current time frame. Finally, the pretribulational hermeneutic ostensibly makes itself impervious to outside interference since it is portrayed as the faithful and “literal” approach to Scripture with its self-assured, irrefutable characteristic of keeping the Church and Israel separated.

What all of these facets have in common, however, is they give reason to be convinced that this is the generation to see apocalyptic fulfilment. As LaHaye is fond of pointing out, no generation has been closer to the end. This is of course an obvious statement of logic, but LaHaye does not use the idea that way. His meaning is that people *should* be anxious. The question, however, is: “*Are they?*” This is why the next chapter is necessary.

CHAPTER 4: SURVEY AND INTERVIEW

Methodological Approach

Because LaHaye has been such a prolific writer and because of the theological tradition he represents, there is a considerable amount of available literature to analyze. Consequently, there has been much done in the way of deductive critique. Furthermore, the qualitative research by Frykholm is both recent and thorough. In addition in spite of the fair number of works about LaHaye and the considerable number on pretribulationism, what has been lacking has been quantitative research on LaHaye and American pretribulationism expressed in the contemporary apocalyptic literature.

Brannen points out that quantitative research allows for isolating and defining variables and variable categories (1992: 4). Such valuable information may be compared later to information about the subject-matter already available in literature. Then, the data can be tested (to a degree) in relation to other known facts. For example, my quantitative research (as will be demonstrated below) shows that American Evangelicals are anxious about the potential changes in the current culture. This finding appears to go some way towards explaining why they are also so heavily involved in American politics. This is why Brannen says that “variables [from quantitative research] are the vehicles or means of the analysis (1992: 4).”

While qualitative research makes the researcher the primary observer, I had the advantage of an abundance of literature not only about the author Tim LaHaye, but about the people connected to evangelicalism and pretribulationism. In this sense, much of the work of observation had been done for me (though I still had to conduct the research of course).

What has been lacking, however, was the quantitative testing of variables that might possibly provide explanations for what has been observed. For example, the likelihood of apocalyptic anxiety is chronicled in the abundant literature describing the tradition of millenarian movements, but quantitative research is necessary to accomplish what Brannen describes as “infer[ring] a characteristic or a relationship between variables to a parent population (1992: 5).” At the same time, even if hypotheses drawn from quantitative research is not necessarily tested, it’s inherent “goal is often descriptive (1992: 8).” And giving intelligent description to what is happening in America has indeed been my goal.

In conducting such quantitative research, questionnaires may be used to good effect in exploring a theory (1992: 10). The inherent challenge is how any findings may be generalized to a parent population. As a post-graduate student this state of affairs offered a rich opportunity, but it also led me to be confronted by significant limitations. Kalton explains that the economics involved in data collection process has “a considerable influence on the choice of sample design (1983: 6).” He states a well-known fact, because quantitative research can be very expensive and I was simply not in a position to conduct a large-scale study. I had the advantage, however, of a clearly defined target population (namely the readers of *Left Behind*).

Working with a gigantic target population (probably 8-10 million as I explain below) while personally having very limited resources, however, is a significant disadvantage. The ideal sampling is always a probability sample in which “each element [in this case, reader] has a known, nonzero chance of being included in the sample (1983: 7).” The moment a survey (like my own) enters into the realm of “convenience” sampling (that uses volunteers) the survey is no longer a probability sample, but a nonprobability sample. This means that a weakness in my survey is the resultant element of subjective evaluation (1983: 7).

My particular survey on this particular subject matter, however, continues to retain some advantages. It is a well-known fact that even nonprobability samples have worked well in the past (1983: 90). I also have good reason to believe that my own has worked well. There are several reasons for this:

1. My survey made contact with readers of *Left Behind* in strong, already-verified heterogeneous strata such as the Midwest and South, and heterogeneous strata contributes to better results (Kalton, 1983: 21).
2. In working with a gigantic population, its widespread nature increased my probability of finding a respectable sample.
3. In many cases my survey results were consistent with and somewhat verified by large-scale surveys conducted by such sources as *Newsweek*.
4. Since I realized my limitations, I made the most of two professional contacts to help ensure that my work would be the highest, possible quality (one of these helped me without financial cost).
5. The survey results show very definite variable patterns and these results appear to provide logical explanations in such a way as to not only complement the existing theory about apocalyptic anxiety, but also while providing special insight as to how modern-day American Evangelicals are unique.

The Survey Source

In order to gain a better understanding of *Left Behind*'s readership and to examine the reason for its success in America, a quantitative survey entitled "Left Behind Doctoral Survey" was created. The survey was made available on the website of a traditional Christian congregation in the southern United States of America in the area of Houston, Texas (Living Word Lutheran Church, The Woodlands, Texas). Most people aware of Christian denominational distinctions would probably categorize this congregation as conservative evangelical or possibly even fundamentalist. This is the case because of the congregation's affiliation with The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) which is a conservative

Lutheran denomination in America subscribing to “the inspiration of Scripture (CTCR, 1995b).” Marsden considers the LCMS as fundamentalist (2006: 194-195).

It is well known, however, that evangelicalism in America is “surprisingly broad and diverse (Zoba, 2005: xvii).” At the same time in all of its varieties those denominations considered evangelical, practice “reading the Bible literally (Strozier, 1994: 6).” Tim LaHaye admits that those who hold to Scripture this way represent his intended audience which would seem to suggest that *Left Behind* is intended for a pre-established subculture. LaHaye said, “Those millions that I’m trying to reach take the Bible literally (Gates, 2004: 48).” This suggests that *Left Behind* was indeed written for American evangelicals.

At the same time the various evangelical traditions understand taking the Bible “literally” in different ways, as discussed in the hermeneutic section. One practical result of these different hermeneutical approaches is the impact on how apocalyptic literature is approached and understood. The diversity is also reflected in doctrinal positions on eschatology. This is why, for example, the LCMS repudiates LaHaye (Gates, 2004: 47). Nevertheless, many of the survey participants by accessing this particular website were in fact a self-selected audience interacting with a conservative evangelical website. One of the advantages of such a site for conducting this survey was that it would increase the probability of making contact with conservative evangelical readers at least partially associated with the Christian tradition *Left Behind* seeks to address. The disadvantage of course lies in the lesser likelihood of making contact with non-conservative evangelical readers.

Furthermore, the survey was also offered in hard copy to the members of the local congregation hosting the website. Members were invited to share copies of the survey with friends and family who would be willing to participate. Most of the eligible surveys, however,

came through the website. All of the surveys (beyond simple invitation) were non-solicited. Nothing was gained by the eligible participant who gave their time to complete a six-page survey outside of the satisfaction of knowing they assisted in a research project. Appendix 3 presents the original survey comprised of a brief introduction explaining the purpose of the survey and then lists a total of 58 questions.

Description of Survey

The first group of questions (1-27) was designed to facilitate an understanding of the readership and to help answer one of the overarching questions, “Who is reading *Left Behind*?” The second group of questions (28-47) was designed to determine the readership’s sense of anxiety in the U.S. (where *Left Behind* is so popular) with respect to the various cultural and political issues raised by contemporary conservative evangelicalism (the tradition which LaHaye’s writings represent). The reason for this line of inquiry was to test the leading theory that apocalyptic is produced and read in the context of people in crisis, great tribulation, impending overthrow, persecution, catastrophism and disaster-prone environments (as mentioned above in the hermeneutic section). While many of these aspects are clearly *not* the case in the United States of America, it was thought that the survey might uncover other sources of anxiety relating to other kinds of crises (e.g. emotional, economical, political, etc.). Besides testing the current theory about apocalyptic literature, this second line of inquiry seeks to answer another main question: “Do *Left Behind* readers perceive an immediate cause in the U.S. for anxiety?”

The final group of questions (48-58) was designed to understand the readership’s impressions about Jesus Christ as presented in *Left Behind*. This line of inquiry was given to understand *Left Behind*’s impact on Christian faith itself. The overarching question here is,

“What impact does *Left Behind* have on the Christian faith of the readership?” In considering this question, it is understood that we may only consider outward signs of something very subjective (i.e. faith). Faith does not lend itself to easy measurement, but we may consider what someone says *about* their faith and how they might describe their faith being inspired, enhanced or helped by *Left Behind*.

Construction and Limitations of Survey

In writing the survey, a professional in designing survey questions was consulted. Professor Emeritus at Texas Christian University, Richard Fenker, who is a Global Product Architect at Experian and Partner at DataGenesis, Inc. helped to ensure that the questions themselves would illicit the information sought and to help determine whether any questions proposed during the design stage of the survey were leading or biased. Furthermore, another professional was consulted for the other end of the process. For tabulation and scoring, this project received the services of Kenneth Carter who is a statistical analyst for Chart Energy & Chemicals. He has a degree in Applied Mathematical Sciences from Texas A & M University. Mr. Carter conducted analyses of variance and of the mean on all questions in order to reflect the U.S. population as a whole.

An important aspect to note, however, is that reliable information about the population of the readership is simply unavailable with respect to establishing the confidence interval (though I provide a deductive estimate for distribution size below). It is commonly known in evangelical scholarship, however, that the number of evangelicals is given very wide range. No one really knows how many there are, no doubt in part because the definition of who is an evangelical is imprecise. What *is* known is that the population size is very large (between several million to several tens of millions). This survey was calculated with a 95% certainty

because the survey was genuinely unsolicited (thereby significantly random) and because professional general population survey results are often conducted at this confidence level. However, given the relatively small sample size of this survey, it is likely that the confidence interval is greater than the $\pm 5\%$ used in the results. To counter this potential problem, the results are compared with other available statistical information related to this study. After conducting this analysis, the survey results appear to receive considerable external validity.

The survey was launched on March 1st, 2006 and surveys were collected through the end of April, 2007. Through the process of collection that extended over a year, there were 111 surveys collected before going on to the next stage of statistical analysis. Though the collection was slow, the non-solicitous approach beyond initial invitation provided the increased likelihood of collecting quality responses. Furthermore, the very first question served as the screening device: “Have you read at least one of the *Left Behind* novels mentioned above?” The list of all the novels in the series at the time of the launch of the survey in 2006 was provided in the survey’s introduction to ensure that the participant knew exactly which books qualified the participant as eligible. Those who answered the screening question “no,” but continued to answer the rest of the survey were eliminated from consideration and were not included in the 111 surveys tabulated and scored.

At the time of the launch of the survey on the website, 12 *Left Behind* novels were available to the public, and two more (in the form of prequels *after* the narrative of the 12 main novels) were announced as upcoming releases. By this time *Newsweek* had already reported in mid-2004 that *Left Behind* had sold more than 62 million copies (Gates, 2004: 46). The series, however, continued to be so immensely popular that there were in fact three prequels released. The third prequel entitled *The Rapture* established a total of 15 novels which were available for the duration of the survey. Furthermore after the survey had run its

course on the website, a 16th novel (the *sequel* to the entire series) was released entitled *Kingdom Come*. Since the 16th novel (the sequel) was released after the completion of the survey, the survey does not mention it.

Identifying the Readership of *Left Behind*

Who are the readers of *Left Behind*? As the various answers to the survey are considered, it will be plainly seen that the readers do not necessarily find the novels especially strong or appealing in certain areas. However, regardless of how the readers answered various questions on appeal, they confirm the popularity of the novels. These books are worthy of the classification “novel,” as they range from about 350-450 pages long. The readers of *Left Behind* have read on average between 5.3 and 7.8 novels. This represents a considerable amount of time given to follow these novels. The average reader had to be willing to read about 2,400 pages of *Left Behind*. In addition, the survey shows that these readers are likely to purchase recent and upcoming editions of the series (the average survey response was 3.75, with 1 being “not likely” and 5 being “very likely”). The average reader obviously found *something* very appealing about the novels.

All survey results are based on a total distribution that is considerably smaller than some popular sources have suggested. One such source is a *Newsweek* estimate that reported the *Left Behind* readership is 1 in 8 Americans (Gates, 2004: 47). The estimate, however, appears to be an exaggeration. First of all, there were approximately 293,000,000 Americans at the time of the *Newsweek* article (U.S. Census Bureau). The *Newsweek* ratio therefore suggests a readership of over 36 million. This number is untenable. Even when subtracting all children in the U.S. Census Bureau categories of “under 5,” “5 to 9,” and “10 to 14,” a 1 in 8 ratio would still amount to over 29 million readers.

One factor that *Newsweek* does not seem to cover is the fact that a considerable number of dedicated evangelicals have purchased multiple copies of the novels. In fact, *Left Behind* publisher Tyndale House released a newsletter in the middle of the novel series thanking *Left Behind* readers for “sharing *Left Behind* with [their] friends (Frykholm, 2004: 164).” Frykholm has observed that “[t]he expectation of the rapture provides a particular kind of urgency and justification for sharing faith, a reason to press faith on others (2004: 155). This sharing of faith often comes in the form of giving the novels to others as gifts. As a result, many evangelical readers give books away to the “unsaved” and in one instance an evangelical family purchased twenty copies to “send them out to everyone (2004: 155).” While considering this gift-giving dynamic, there is no way to determine how many of these gift-novels are actually read by those who receive them.

More importantly, the *Newsweek* estimate appears to by-pass the fact that the novels are designed to be collected as a series and it is most likely the case that collected novels are kept by evangelicals even while giving other copies away. I have personally observed the practice of several Christians who collect the novels, which when put side-by-side, make for a colourful and decorative display. Taking this collection dynamic into consideration (which includes the above-mentioned gift-giving dynamic of these same collectors) it seems reasonable to take the high end of the above average number of novels read (which is eight) in order to approach a more realistic total readership. As a result, in respect to the approximately 70 million novels sold (Bates, 2007: 319), the total distribution would be approximately 8 to 9 million readers. Here is how this total number breaks down according to age group:

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>% Respondents</u>
13-19	20.37%
20-34	25.93%
35-42	11.11%
43-54	24.07%
55-62	14.81%
63 and over	3.70%
<i>Grand Total</i>	100.00%

In addition, 58.9% of the respondents were female and 41.1% of the respondents were male. Among these survey participants more of them were married compared to those readers who were single by about 60% to 40%. Next, geographical distribution was considered:

<u>Region</u>	<u>% Respondents</u>
West Coast	8.41%
North	1.87%
Midwest	19.63%
South	44.86%
East Coast	10.28%
Southwest	14.95%
<i>Grand Total</i>	100.00%

While it should be remembered that the survey was sponsored by a Christian congregation in the South, the main readership is clearly consistent with conservative regions of the United States. Even with the recent presidential election that proved the “blue” shift of

the United States as a whole (more progressive, less conservative), evangelicalism's strongest regions correspond to the survey results. For example, Phillips states that The Southern Baptist Convention "is regarded by some as more or less the unofficial state church in Dixie [the southern region of the United States] (Phillips, 2006: 213)." One writer charting the conservative Christian movement in America puts the pervasiveness of the SBC in perspective: "The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest non-Catholic Christian group in the United States (Shiflett, 2005: 112)." LaHaye was also a conservative Baptist for most of his life. The creator and readers of *Left Behind* significantly mirror each other. The more liberal regions of the population, however, were less impressed with *Left Behind*. The results of this survey thus far seem to point to an evangelical subgroup representing the primary readership of the *Left Behind* novels.

In addition, it was also revealed that the average reader of the *Left Behind* series at the time of the survey lived in a small city with a population less than 100,000 people. The distribution appeared this way:

<u>Population Density</u>	<u>% Respondents</u>
Rural	6.54%
Town (under 50,000)	15.89%
Small City (to 100,000)	29.91%
Large City (100,000+)	34.58%
Megalopolis (NY, LA)	13.08%
<i>Grand Total</i>	100.00%

Emerging Evidence of an Evangelical Subculture

Again, this result is supportive of the hypothesis that the evangelical subculture is the primary readership. Not only are conservative evangelicals disproportionately located in the southern region, but they show the tendency to prefer the suburbs. Much of the evangelical constituency form the US middle-class society and tends to be (as Bates points out) “atomized (2007: 23).” These communities have “lives revolving around the shopping mall and the church, with contact only with similar families and individuals and access only to others who think the same way as they do (2007: 23).” A doctor in one of these communities was interviewed by Bates and said, “The growth of the evangelical movement is not just a growth of the spiritual message but of social and economic events. In a city like this [Montgomery, Alabama] you have middle class flight into the suburbs, creating their own communities and tax base (2007: 23).”

The survey also considered annual income of the readership. In respect to the observations cited above about evangelicalism and the middle class we recognize that “middle class” is often difficult to define. According to one source, the Congressional Resource Service issued a report in 2007 stating that annual middle income in the US ranges between \$19,000 to \$91,000 (Vigeland, 2008: online). Perhaps a more practical and helpful approach for defining “middles class,” however, is to establish “middle income.” Recent analysis reveals that the median income level in the US was approximately \$48,201.00 for all households in 2007 (Prante, 2007: online). In this respect, it was discovered that *Left Behind* readers are very much at this level of income, more accurately above the median if one excludes students who are not yet earning:

<u>Income</u>	<u>% Respondents</u>
Student	34.91%
Up to 30K	5.66%
30K – 65K	18.87%
65K – 100K	24.53%
Over 100K	16.04%
<i>Grand Total</i>	100.00%

These results show that the average income of the average *Left Behind* reader is between \$30,000 and \$65,000 annually. That is the *Left Behind* readership corresponds to the middle class which is another characteristic of American evangelicals as well.

In addition, those moving to the suburbs are mostly White, non-Hispanic. The survey shows again that the readership supports these trends. 92.59% of the readership responding to the survey is White, non-Hispanic. In the community of the Christian congregation sponsoring the survey, The Woodlands, Texas, we see a good model of what appears to be typical in terms of American evangelicalism. It is estimated that the population of this suburban community reached 84,418 in 2006 with a racial makeup of over 90% white, non-Hispanic (Wikipedia, 2008: online). In this community, the largest congregation is Fellowship of The Woodlands/Woodlands Church. The congregation is evangelical and averages over 16,000 worshippers per Sunday (Shook, 2008: online). It appears that just as most of the readers are White, non-Hispanic, the same kind of group is in the suburbs where evangelicalism is strong. This is yet another connection that suggests evangelical readership.

What about education level? These are the results of the survey:

<u>Education</u>	<u>% Respondents</u>
Did not complete high school	0.93%
Currently in high school	10.28%
Completed high school	22.43%
Currently in college	23.36%
BA/BS	29.91%
Master's Degree	10.28%
Doctorate	2.80%
<i>Grand Total</i>	100.00%

What is most revealing about the results here is that educational levels are well-balanced. While Boyer includes advocates of dispensational premillennialism (conservative evangelicals like Tim LaHaye) to represent “prophecy belief” in America, he says, “Prophecy belief pervades all educational and income levels, including Ph.D.’s in computer science and multimillionaire Texas oilmen (1992: 14).”

In summary, the average *Left Behind* reader is from the South (or other strong conservative region like the Midwest), they are most typically middle income, married, more likely to be female than male, living in a suburb, about 35-42 years of age and White, non-Hispanic. These categories also correspond to the current state of conservative evangelicalism in America. The findings are also consistent with other reports. *Newsweek* said that “[t]he ‘core buyer’ is a 44-year old born-again Christian woman, married with kids, living in the South (Gates, 2004: 46).” *FTmagazine* cited previous research revealing that the core buyer was “a married evangelical woman with a college degree, who attends church weekly (Steinberg, 2004: 27).” In addition, the current survey goes on to show that an evangelical readership is almost certain.

In narrowing the identification of the readership, the survey participants identified themselves as Christian by 93.52%. This group, however, is no ordinary group of Christians. Their church attendance is exceptional: 71.70% attend every week. Furthermore, Pew Forum shows a connection between high church attendance and the Republican Party (specifically in respect to the 2004 presidential election) (Bates, 2007: 15). The reason this is significant is because in examining LaHaye's relationship to the culture and politics in America, it is shown that American evangelicals have strongly aligned themselves with the Republican Party. The readers of *Left Behind* more often than not attend church weekly. Evangelicals are known for this same outstanding dedication to church attendance. As a result, it once again appears that the *Left Behind* readership consists of evangelicals in America.

There are, however, even stronger indications that the primary readership consists of evangelicals as a subculture in America. As discussed above, *the* indicator of conservative evangelicalism is their view of Scripture in which the Bible is considered to be both inspired and inerrant. These categories are practically shibboleths of conservative evangelicalism and fundamentalism. The survey indicates remarkable results in this regard. Here is the exact question presented to the survey participants: "On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being 'do not believe,' 5 being 'strongly believe'), how much do you believe the Bible to be the inspired, inerrant Word of God?" The survey average response was 4.62 which was the *highest* average response for any question in the survey with a scale of 1 to 5. The readers of *Left Behind* share the mark of the American evangelical: they believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God and accept as a corollary that the Bible is also inerrant. For all intents and purposes, this confirms what the other indicators listed above suggest: the readers of *Left Behind* are evangelical. It appears that LaHaye is reaching a particular subculture in American society.

Answering Challenges to an Evangelical Subculture

Some may challenge the idea that *Left Behind* is especially serving conservative evangelicals as a US subculture and/or that evangelicals even comprise a substantial subculture. *TIME* reported in 2002 that only about half of the readers of *Left Behind* are evangelical (Gibbs, 2002: 42). This seeming disparity with the survey results, however, can easily be explained by virtue of returning to the question of defining “evangelical.” Surveys that try to number evangelicals are inherently challenged. For example, Unger cites that a 2007 study showed that there are as many as 84 million adult evangelicals in the US, about 38% of the population (2007: 19). At the same time, when a strict nine-point filter was attached to the same question to determine whether or not the respondent was “really” an evangelical, the numbers dropped dramatically: only 18 million could be called “evangelical” or only 8% of the US population (2007: 19).

Moreover, Frykholm presents a compelling argument for the unstable nature of the designation “evangelical” in America. She explains that dispensationalism “has seeped into American popular culture and become a part of belief systems through conscious and unconscious means (2004: 22).” The practical result of this is that while the readers of *Left Behind* may regard themselves as evangelical, the label itself has little meaning for them (2004: 22). They are not connected to any particular denomination, nor are they cultural separatists as their fundamentalist predecessors were. Frykholm explains, “Readers come to *Left Behind* from various social and religious positions (2004: 23).” On the other hand, Frykholm admits that it is evangelicalism itself – apart from its actual membership, with its traditions of dispensationalism, rapture, etc. – that has fused with the popular American culture (2004: 25). Frykholm therefore brings out common evangelical elements that make contemporary evangelicals identifiable and most certainly linked to *Left Behind*.

It must be remembered that premillennial dispensationalists like LaHaye have their most distinctive theological characteristic (next to biblical authority) in the realm of eschatology. These evangelicals, regardless of various survey filters designed to identify them, are known for their preponderant interest in the end. When these primary indicators are taken into consideration, it is easy to see the consistency between higher numbers of evangelicals corresponding to those evangelicals who hold to both biblical authority and the emphasis on end time events. Interestingly enough, *Left Behind* readers seem to share significant similarities with the authors of *Left Behind*. One may confidently conclude that LaHaye was successful in his goal of reaching his like-minded target audience of those who take the Bible literally (Gates, 2004: 48).

The survey for this dissertation clearly confirms this correlation. The respondents were asked, “On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being ‘not likely,’ 5 being ‘strongly likely’), how likely is it that Christ will return in your lifetime to conduct a universal judgment of all people?” The average response was 3.8, thus the population as a whole would average between 3.55 and 4.05. This is a very high indicator of the consistency between those who consider the Bible as authoritative (recall the result of 4.62 above) and those who view the end as imminent. There is a name for such believers: either “conservative evangelicals” or “fundamentalists”; followers or at least strong admirers of Tim LaHaye.

Other studies confirm these findings. *TIME* also found that 36% of Americans believe the Bible is the word of God and is to be taken literally (Gibbs, 2002: 43). At the same time, 59% of the same set of *TIME* respondents believe the prophecies of the *Book of Revelation* will come true (2002: 43). Such polls are not rare. *Newsweek* also reported that 55% of Americans believe that the faithful will be taken up to heaven in the Rapture (Gates, 2004: 48). This last finding is truly remarkable in that while it has already been said that

evangelicals similar to LaHaye emphasize imminent eschatology, the rapture is *the* most distinctive element of LaHaye's eschatology. It is inconceivable that this evangelical subculture could be treated as anything other than substantial. Unger elaborates that these signs actually point to a very distinct subculture in America:

At times it was as if the United States consisted of parallel universes that overlapped, but often didn't talk to each other, inhabited by two distinctly different peoples with different values, cultures, myths, heroes and villains, and history, one of which sent men to the moon and unraveled the human genome, the other which believes that the universe started six thousand years ago and will come to an end at any moment (Unger, 2007: 32).

These words explain why Unger is bold to assert that there is in fact a "fully developed evangelical counterculture [in America] (2007: 87)." His further elaboration of this "counterculture" is important:

Megachurches – those with more than two thousand parishioners – had proliferated across the country, growing from just fifty churches in 1980 to nearly nine hundred a generation later – one of which, Saddleback Church in southern California, boasted eighty thousand [80,000] members on its rolls....Likewise, evangelicals used the latest Madison Avenue marketing techniques. There were cowboy churches for ranchers, country music churches for the C&W market, gospel and rhythm and blues churches for black evangelicals, motorcycle churches for bikers, and sandals and electric guitars for the long-haired Birkenstock crowd. There was Christian miniature golf, a Christian Wrestling Federation, and ministries for evangelical skateboarders, NASCAR drivers, and Harley-Davidson motorcycle owners. In parts of the Bible Belt, no force dominated life as much as the evangelical church. Greenville, South Carolina, had more than 700 churches for its 56,000 inhabitants. Christian rock far outsold jazz and classical music combined. By 2000, there were at least fifteen annual Christian rock festivals, including the Cornerstone Festival; the Sonshine Festival; Spirit West Coast; Rock the Desert, at Universal Studios Florida; and Night of Joy at Walt Disney World. As Ted Haggard put it, "Cool kids like to go to church if church is cool." Whereas secularists had Macy's and Bloomingdales, evangelicals had LifeWay Christian Stores, a division of the Southern Baptist Convention that expanded throughout the South, becoming a chain of more than 120 stores offering Christian books, music, and apparel. There were Christian pencils, pro-life T-shirts...and greeting cards and bookmarks with Bible verses. There was Christian furniture...Christian trailer parks, Christian cutlery, and Christian spatulas. If your car broke down, there were Christian auto repair shops, and if

you needed to refinance your home, there were Christian mortgages. For vacation, there were Christian Caribbean cruises....Moreover, as the millennium approached, the apocalyptic themes in Christianity fueled the movement. No one benefited more than Tim LaHaye (2007: 150-152).

A Personal Interview with Tim LaHaye

Ironically, however, Tim LaHaye is reluctant to face the defined nature of his readership. This was verified in a personal interview with Tim LaHaye I conducted on August 14, 2008. I met Dr. LaHaye for the first time at a conference on the end times at Grace Community Church in Houston, Texas on Sunday, April 13, 2008. At that conference I had the opportunity to introduce myself and my daughter Elizabeth to him, inform him about my doctoral dissertation and then request an interview. I followed up by returning to a next-day event for ordained ministers on April 14, 2008 at the same church. After that meeting, I introduced him to my wife Traci. I followed up again by sending him an email explaining why I desired an interview and telling him more about myself and the dissertation.

Sometime later, Dr. LaHaye replied to my email agreeing to the interview. He required, however, that I send him the interview questions ahead of time. I was happy to do so and forwarded 21 questions that covered the gamut of his teaching and activism. I viewed the 21 questions as symbolic of the 21 judgments in the book of Revelation which Dr. LaHaye is very fond of expounding on. He was generous during the interview, answered all of my questions and allowed me to ask a few more. The actual interview occurred on August 14, 2008 (four months after our first meeting) and lasted for approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes. I phoned him at 4 pm Central Time from a hotel in San Antonio, Texas to his home in Rancho Mirage, California where it was 2 pm Pacific Time. While Dr. LaHaye did not allow me to record the interview, he was aware of the fact that I was dictating the interview

on my computer as we spoke. I was able to follow Dr. LaHaye fairly easily and was able to take dictation with about 90% accuracy. Because the interview results are not 100%, however, my quotations of Dr. LaHaye from this interview must be treated as paraphrases. The substance of each answer, however, is not in doubt. Appendix 4 presents my record of LaHaye's dictation to me during the interview.

I asked LaHaye, "How would you describe the core group of readers or the more or less typical reader of *Left Behind*?" LaHaye answered, "The readers run the gamut: from dedicated Christians, to back-slidden Christians, to atheists and to people who just like fiction. I have heard remarkable stories of atheists who came to faith through *Left Behind*. In one case, the atheist who was converted gave the book back to the person who gave it to him so that that person would also be converted!" In another question, "Why did you write *Left Behind* with Jerry Jenkins and what were you hoping to achieve?" LaHaye stated, "I wanted to confront people with the prophetic hand of God in the Word of God so that they could be prepared to meet God. Tens of thousands have come to Christ [as a result of this work]." He finished his answer by emphasizing conversions occurring on account of *Left Behind*.

These answers can easily give the wrong impression. LaHaye's responses, however, should not be understood as meaning that there has been anything close to a balanced distribution of readers. It is simply not the case that his work has effectively reached all quarters, going beyond the main evangelical readership described above. LaHaye, however, appears to desire the perpetuation of the misconception. In 2003, and at the height of their sales success, both Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins (with Norman B. Rohrer) released a non-fiction book entitled *These Will Not Be Left Behind: True Stories of Changed Lives*. The book is dedicated "To the new believers." The work is filled with the testimonies of those who have

come to faith through *Left Behind* (LaHaye, Jenkins and Rohrer, 2003). Not even this book with its testimonies, however, can actually skew the predominance of *Left Behind's* main readership: already-converted evangelicals.

Even Frykholm who makes the case for the ambiguity of “evangelicalism,” elaborates on the evidence that challenges the notion that *Left Behind* effectively reaches the unconverted. She explains that while *Left Behind's* publisher Tyndale House has claimed that the novels have brought thousands or millions of people into the Christian faith, her research results in no way substantiate this claim. Frykholm reports, “As I conducted my research, I searched in vain for a person who could testify to a life changed through the reading of *Left Behind* (2004: 164).” She actually requested that Tyndale House send some of their letters reporting salvation through the novels. She received a packet of seven letters, but four were only second-hand reports of the conversions of others and only three told their own stories. After studying such letters Frykholm concluded: “The stories that readers tell about their own lives, however, involve processes of conversion so intricate and extending over so many months and even years that it calls into question the direct relationship that producers assert (2004: 165-169).”

This dissertation's survey results are consistent with Frykholm's findings. While LaHaye desires to present his work as a vehicle for evangelism (outreach to the unconverted), it is quite significant to note that when the respondents were asked how likely it was that they would recommend the novel(s) to a friend, they answered with an average response of only 2.8. While there are probably exceptions to the rule, the readers are not nearly as interested in sharing the novels as they are about using the novels. Evangelical/conversion ineffectiveness, however, strongly came out in question number 57 of the survey. The question asks, “On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being ‘no inspiration,’ 5 being ‘strong inspiration’), how much did the

presentation of Jesus Christ in the novel(s) inspire you to either become a Christian or remain a Christian?” The respondents averaged a response of only 2.3. These do not seem to be novels that spiritually inspire. They seem to serve a different purpose.

Another survey result that depicts the insulated nature of *Left Behind* readership was generated through the question, “While the Left Behind series is fictional, the Biblical teaching within it is supposed to be real and accurate. While you read the novel(s), were you aware that the authors present what they actually believe the Bible teaches?” A remarkable 85% of the readers knew that these “fictional” novels present a non-fictional theological system. This calls for knowledge from within the tradition that represents *Left Behind*, namely evangelicals who are already familiar with this kind of biblical theology. The novels are doing something for evangelicals, but what?

Does the Readership Perceive a Cause for Anxiety?

There is little doubt that *Left Behind* is for Bible-believing, end-time anticipating evangelicals who also fit into conservative cultural categories as represented in the southern region of the United States (such as the Republican Party). This leads us to the next question, “Do *Left Behind* readers perceive an immediate cause in the U.S. for anxiety?” Once again, this is the question that tests the common theory of apocalyptic literature that depicts the receivers of apocalyptic to be a people in crisis, great tribulation, impending overthrow, persecution, catastrophism and disaster-prone environments (as mentioned above in the history section, pp. 25-26). While many of these aspects are clearly *not* the case in the United States of America, it is possible that evangelicals as a subculture in America experience a form of anxiety or identity crisis to which the non-evangelical cannot otherwise relate.

The survey therefore asked a basic question, “Why did you read the novel(s)? (check as many as apply).” Unlike the majority of other questions in the survey, this question (along with question 58) requested three selections be made from a list of choices. Any respondent who provided more than three selections had their survey response eliminated from the analysis. Therefore, only a table of the percentages of each choice is provided for each question. These were the results:

<u>Response</u>	<u>% of Respondents</u>
Entertainment	21.14%
Curiosity	19.87%
Recommended by a friend	13.88%
Inspirational	8.83%
Personal Growth	8.52%
Learn about how Biblical prophecy plays out	7.89%
Learn about possible future	4.73%
To get closer to God	3.79%
To prepare for the end times	3.79%
Learn more about Christianity	3.47%
Recommended by church/pastor	2.21%
To avoid being left behind	1.89%
Grand Total:	100.00%

Interpreting “Entertainment” as the Top Reason for Reading

The top answer “entertainment” is consistent with Frykholm’s qualitative interview results. She says, “For the most part, readers engage with *Left Behind* for two primary and intertwined purposes – entertainment and edification (2004: 102).” The dissertation survey

also matches Frykholm's listed motive "edification" as the dissertation survey lists both "inspirational" and "personal growth" very high. That is, this sort of "entertainment" was complemented by the motive to derive some kind of help from the novels. For evangelicals, *Left Behind* "entertainment" is not meaningless, but meaningful.

Entertainment, however, would seem to be the furthest thing from any indication of the traditional motives for the reception of apocalyptic literature. It is a motive however, that does not necessarily contradict apocalyptic mentalities. Shuck offers a theory related to *Schadenfreude*. Shuck explains:

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. Readers, for example, can discover in graphic detail [by reading *Left Behind*] just what will happen to those obstinate neighbors....Those accursed of marginalizing evangelicals receive satisfying comeuppances in the *Left Behind* novels (2005: 17).

Shuck's theory, however, seems extreme. Evangelicals, after all, sincerely emphasize their passion for others to know God's love and mercy. It is perhaps better to say that the "entertainment" relates more to the evangelicals themselves. The apocalyptic story vindicates their faithfulness in spite of whatever hardships they may face. It is "entertaining" to know that one is right and that one will be affirmed in their faith.

But why suspect that "entertainment" would not simply refer to less complicated interpretations? The answer relates to the rest of the survey. Survey respondents did not simply indicate that they read *Left Behind* for entertainment, but also for a combination of apocalyptic concerns: (1) Learn about how Biblical prophecy plays out (7.89%); (2) Learn about possible future (4.73%); (3) To prepare for the end times (3.79%); (4) To avoid being left behind (1.89%). While standing alone, individual answers are not substantial, but the

combined response (18.3%) makes the category of apocalyptic among the highest reasons for reading *Left Behind*. When this fact is combined with the more general answer of “curiosity” at 19.87%, it becomes clear that the overall motive could very well be addressing a type of anxiety.

This is to say that this form of “entertainment” is not typical. Recall for example that these readers (85% of them) knew that they were reading actual end-time theology. That is, they were being entertained by reading about disasters, horrible suffering and catastrophism presented as an *actual* future for the planet with millions of people dying. What is more, it should be recalled that the readers match the view of the authors of *Left Behind*: the narrative of these novels describe the divine fulfilment of prophetic prediction (only names, places, and other minor details are fictional). Recall that these same readers represent an answer as high as 4.05 in American society on a scale of 1-5 (5 being “strongly likely”) that Christ will return in their lifetime.

This is the strange world of this kind of evangelicalism. In the personal interview with Tim LaHaye, I was struck by the combination of excitement with sober prediction. The paradox finds a home with *Left Behind* evangelicalism. In answering question 8 of the personal interview, LaHaye essentially confirmed his estimate that the rapture will occur by the end of the first quarter of this century (the year 2025). The end of this current dispensation brings with it extreme negative images, but evangelicals view this as the realistic consequence of the current situation.

In question 11 of the interview LaHaye evaded my question about why he and Jenkins present Jews as continually bringing sacrifices to Jesus during the millennium. That is to say, *Left Behind* perpetuates an image of judgment and required penance from the Jew for 1000

years because the Jews did not recognize Jesus as Messiah. In question 12 LaHaye admits that the tribulation judgments will fall upon some people who are the “incorrigibles” that will never change. They are essentially condemned, but allowed to suffer indescribably during the tribulation. In question 13 LaHaye says that it would take a miracle to turn back secular humanism in current American society; in question 20 LaHaye warns that atheists cannot be trusted; and finally in question 22 LaHaye warns against the threat of evolutionists. All of these answers are rife with terrible images of judgment, threats (current and future) and most importantly the approaching end.

This is the kind of state the *Left Behind* evangelical must live with, but the entertainment factor persists. After conducting this incredibly sombre interview about present and future ills of the human race, I learned about LaHaye’s current major project: he and Jerry Jenkins were in the process of collaborating on what to propose as a title for a major Hollywood blockbuster movie about *Left Behind*. LaHaye shared with me that part of their discussion was to consider the example of the Hollywood movies about the “Incredible Hulk,” a comic book superhero. The transition in topics during this interview created an uncomfortable dissonance. We were speaking of the coming disasters upon the earth and in the next moment of a Hollywood blockbuster movie.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the predictions and expectations of a changing present and future are real in the mind of the *Left Behind* evangelical. “Entertainment” seems to provide a kind of coping mechanism from the apocalyptic images that may very well relate to a kind of apocalyptic anxiety. For this hypothesis to be valid, however, it must be shown that the survey participants are actually living in a state of anxiety.

Rhetorical Persuasion and the Possibility of Evoking Anxiety

Such a condition (if it can be shown) would make the readership of *Left Behind* consistent with historical recipients of apocalyptic literature in the sense that they at least *perceive* some kind of cause for being anxious. O’Leary attributes this perceived anxiety (when it occurs) to the fact that the readership is subjected to rhetorical persuasion through the apocalyptic literature itself (1994: 11). In explaining the situation, O’Leary refers to Hal Lindsey who was the most famous prophecy teacher in America before Tim LaHaye. Lindsey experienced a similar level of success in the decade of the 1970’s and early 80’s as LaHaye has experienced especially from the mid-90’s until now. The only difference is that LaHaye has surpassed Lindsey in terms of total book publications and sales. O’Leary’s point, however, applies to LaHaye as much as it does to Lindsey:

If the largely middle-class group of fundamentalist Christians in the United States who today form the core of Hal Lindsey’s readership believes itself to be similarly persecuted, this is surely a rhetorically induced perception; for there is an obvious difference between being torn apart by lions in front of cheering crowds and being forced to endure media onslaughts of sex, violence, and secular humanism. As one critic puts it, “the crucial element is not so much whether one is actually oppressed as whether one feels oppressed, (1994: 11)”

If O’Leary is correct, however, his hypothesis would (ostensibly) require that the readers of *Left Behind* indicate feeling anxious *while reading the novels*. At the same time (even as such evidence is sought), it is not assumed that evangelical apocalyptic rhetorical influence would be limited to the *Left Behind* novels. Certainly evangelicals are exposed to several other sources of Christian media (including their own churches) that might perpetuate the apocalyptic rhetorical impact. No other sources, however, have been as widespread and successful as *Left Behind*, especially while considering the fact that the 70-million selling novels are complemented by a *Left Behind* 40-book series for kids, comic books, DVD

movies, theological books dedicated to supporting *Left Behind* doctrine, and even a very controversial video game that presents the Christian protagonists in the novels engaging in physical combat to the extent that one critic quoted in an article observes, “[t]he way to win is to convert or kill (Greene, 2006: online). If anything therefore would be a significant contributor to a possible apocalyptic rhetorical influence, the *Left Behind* novels would seem to be prime sources.

Future Narrative as Present Condition

In addition, if it can be demonstrated that *Left Behind* is connected to apocalyptic rhetorical influence to the extent of causing anxiety, it does so in spite of the fact that the main storyline occurs during the tribulation (when all genuine evangelicals should already be in heaven). This would be achieved, however, because the cultural descriptions in the novels mirror the current culture. After the rapture occurs, multitudes come to saving faith and (almost instantaneously) the cultural divide between true believers and unbelievers is re-established. In this respect, it is as if the rapture never occurred.

Interestingly enough, however, LaHaye intensely resists the perception that the tribulation simply represents a return to current conditions. He goes to great lengths to emphasize that after the rapture the Church is completely removed from the earth. According to LaHaye, this removal of the Church from earth is the reason the book of Revelation simply stops mentioning the Church in chapters 4-18 (as these chapters in LaHaye’s teaching describe the tribulation after the rapture). The apparent problem, however, is that for all intents and purposes the protagonists who live in LaHaye’s tribulation period have all the characteristics, beliefs and practices (both in terms of private spirituality and corporate worship) that Christians possess prior to the rapture. The protagonists in any other instance

would be recognized as, and would represent the Christian Church. The dilemma (both logically and theologically) therefore is that LaHaye says the Church is removed, but the Church appears very much present during the tribulation.

I sought to gain a better understanding of LaHaye's teaching (and solution to the apparent dilemma) in the personal interview. I asked this question: "The Church is raptured and is not present during the tribulation. At the same time, people come to saving faith, are filled with the Spirit and fellowship in the Word of God and prayer during the tribulation. Is it therefore appropriate to say that even though the Church is not initially present, that the Church (part of it) is *eventually* present on earth during the tribulation?" LaHaye answered: "This is an important question. The Church is made up of all the born-again (John 3) and when Jesus shouts from heaven, the Church will be taken up. However, people are also saved during the tribulation. For example, the 144,000, but they are never called 'Christians.' They are called 'saints.' They enter into a different relationship. We [the Christians who will be raptured] will be the bride of Christ, but they [those who are converted during the tribulation] will have a different relationship. One reason for this difference is because if a post-tribulation rapture were true [LaHaye's position is pre-tribulational], then there would not be anyone left to populate the Millennium."

This answer seems inadequate and feels as though LaHaye did not really answer the question. In his interview answer he wants to draw a distinction between Christians and "saints" in terms of functionality. For example, "saints" will have the function of producing progeny for the Millennium. In this way "saints" have a different "relationship." Since when, however, are Christians defined in terms of function and relationship to anything other than Christ and their neighbour? Both Christians and saints are saved and supposedly possess such

status by virtue of their relationship to Christ. The differences (if any) are certainly not substantial.

In the meantime, his theory is inconsistent with Scripture itself. Throughout Scripture “saints” also refer to Christians and vice versa. For example, St. Paul writes to the “saints” in Ephesus (Eph 1:1). The letter to the Ephesians goes on to richly elaborate that these “saints” are in Christ, derive spiritual blessings from Christ and follow Christ. They are like those in Antioch (Acts 11) called “Christians.” That is to say, LaHaye’s distinction is superficial to the extent that when readers of *Left Behind* read about “saints” they have every reason to think they are reading about Christians.

In addition, the first 12 volumes of *Left Behind* were complemented by three prequels dedicated to telling the *Left Behind* story leading up to the rapture. The forces between good and evil are as much evident in the prequels as they are in the other novels. This further reinforces the fact that the evangelicals may easily see themselves and their American culture in the *Left Behind* novels.

Shuck points out that reading *Left Behind* as applicable to the present as much as it is to the future (if not more so) is consistent with LaHaye’s non-fiction writing (2005: 69-70). LaHaye champions the view that contemporary evangelicalism must wage war against secular humanism, especially by entering into the political arena. The conflict that exists in today’s culture experienced by every true believer is something LaHaye has actually referred to as the “pretribulation tribulation (LaHaye, 1980: 217-218).” While such terminology is rather nonsensical, it does have a kind of logic for those who hold to *Left Behind* theology.

Shuck explains that although an Antichrist will eventually arise that “evangelicals maintain a responsibility to defend their values and identities as long as possible, while also

providing wholesome witness to the unsaved (2005: 54).” Such rhetorical dynamics explain why *Left Behind* is also rated “inspirational”: the novels serve the practical function of reinforcing evangelical values and raising awareness of the cultural influences associated with evil (that both threaten and reinforce evangelical identity). These evil forces in the culture represent a lesser tribulation before *the* tribulation. The lesser tribulation, however, still poses a serious threat to evangelicals. In this way, *Left Behind* is already addressing an audience that perceives the possibility that both their life style and faith may cease to exist in American culture.

Left Behind therefore appears to be a modern example of what Shuck refers to as “effective apocalyptic narrative” (in this quotation Shuck includes the *Left Behind* narrative):

An effective apocalyptic narrative helps explain why evil happens, along with how and when God will render judgment, and what, if anything, believers can do in the meantime. The texts persuade by providing urgent, relevant answers to those in dire need of a firm foundation upon which to base their lives. Successful apocalyptic rhetoric addresses the experiences of its readers and promotes the expectation of imminent change, sometimes even encouraging the faithful to play vital roles in bringing forth a world more pleasing to God (2005: 55-56).

What Threatens Evangelicals and the Cause for Anxiety

It is impossible, however, to say that the novels are providing help for a people in “dire need” if in fact anxiety is only a figment of the imagination. The survey for this study, however, shows that the anxiety is actually felt by the readership. Prospective causes for the anxiety are once again immediate and not far-off; they impact the evangelical way of life; and they most certainly reinforce that which the evangelical Christian views as being against God. The apocalyptic threat is that which might rob evangelicals of a very high level of happiness and lead American Christianity and culture into steep decline.

If the survey results actually reveal a perceived anxiety then those results would be consistent with whatever LaHaye has treated as a matter of fact during his decades-long career in writing, teaching and political activism. His career in effect has been dedicated to raising the level of evangelical anxiety in order to inspire action against the onslaughts of secular humanism. For example, in the second question of the personal interview, I asked LaHaye about how the various features of his career (i.e. “prophecy,” political activism against secular humanism and temperaments) are interrelated. In answering the question, LaHaye described his rationale for addressing America’s ills: “Then, in the 1970’s, secularizers were destroying the educational system, our government and Christianity. In the meantime, the Church was sound asleep.” LaHaye’s words clearly describe the grounds on which evangelicals might be anxious: the highest and most important institutions in America (including Christianity itself) were being destroyed.

This prospect is the cause for anxiety: Americans (once again) may be about to lose their way of life and for the evangelical this includes the stability of the evangelical Church itself. The question is whether or not the survey indicated the existence of such perceived anxiety while considering the prospect of a deteriorating American culture. The survey for this study proves to be very helpful in providing further insight.

Current Conditions, Near-Future Change and the End

First of all, general *current* conditions are perceived as good. This explains a great deal. It explains why apocalyptic theorists are so baffled by the acceptance of the literature in a culture that seems so far from a condition of extreme hardship. Anxiety does not spring from present conditions, but as will be shown on what is perceived by evangelicals as a likely future. For example, while secular humanism is said to be present in American culture today,

it is nevertheless countered by a strong evangelical resistance. This is to say that evangelical identity is currently strong.

In examining attitudes about the present, the readers were asked: “On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being ‘not happy,’ 5 being ‘very happy’), how happy were you with your occupation (job, school or main daytime activity) at the time of reading the novel(s)?” The average response was between 3.6 and 4.0. Similarly, the respondents gave an answer between 3.7 and 4.1 in describing their happiness “with [their] life in general while reading the novel(s).” Furthermore, the readers leaned towards feeling “very stable” as opposed to “not stable” in respect to financial stability by answering again in the high “3’s” and low “4’s”. Family relationships at the time of reading the novel(s) were also strong and went as high as 4.1 towards those relationships being “very strong.” In fact, life as a whole was viewed as being toward “very stable” and as high as 4.3.

These results show that evangelicals themselves acknowledge that current conditions of their life in America are not and seemingly cannot be the cause for apocalyptic anxiety. They report to current conditions described in terms of perceived high happiness, strength and stability. This does not necessarily contradict the prevailing theory about apocalyptic literature, but simply modifies the timing of the perceived crisis. Apocalyptic crisis may not at all be occurring “now” for the apocalyptic audience, but the literature may indeed create anxiety about the crisis that is to come.

Future perceptions, however, are also qualified. Among the readers there is a definite distinction between more immediate changes in current lifestyle and more eschatological changes associated with the end of the world, the Last Day, etc. This makes sense. Those who invest in the theology of *Left Behind* know that they have ample reason not to be left behind.

They are children of the rapture and the worst aspects of the end are not for the *Left Behind* faithful, but for others who do not believe. The eschatological future therefore is not nearly the concern as the future that impacts the current way of life which produces such high levels of happiness, strength and stability. That is, there seems to be anxiety about what may be lost in the near future in terms of the American lifestyle that even evangelicals most definitely enjoy.

The distinction about the distant future compared to the closer future is clear while studying the survey results. Distant future issues seem to be believed in, but they are not strong causes for anxiety. Question 29 asked: “On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being ‘very little,’ 5 being ‘very much’), how much anticipation do you think there is in America about the possibility that the world might end very soon (within the current or next generation)?” The average response was only 2.6. Question 35 was very similar: “On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being ‘no anxiety,’ 5 being ‘high anxiety’), how much anxiety do you think exists due to our living in the 21st century since there are so many predictions that the world will end in 2012 or 2030, etc.?” The response here was even lower than the response for question 29: only 2.2. Finally, question 42 was even more personal and asked about the reader’s anxiety over and above their perception of cultural anxiety: “On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being ‘not anxious,’ 5 being ‘very anxious’), how anxious are you about the end of the world?” The response is even lower than the previous two eschatological questions: only 1.77. The readers of *Left Behind* do not appear worried by a future distress which will not include them.

The Actual Source of Evangelical Anxiety

The future that *does* include them, however, is another matter. Despite the general state of happiness and the fact that the tribulation will not touch the faithful (thus alleviating

anxiety about the future that will by-pass true believers), the survey shows that anxiety nevertheless exists. Shuck agrees that anxiety does indeed exist in the subculture. He theorizes as to the reason why:

As the authors sense their traditional worldviews threatened by pervasive yet elusive economic, political, and cultural forces, they articulate their anxieties in the familiar language of apocalypse, creating protagonists who give voice to their deepest concerns. The texts feature, on one level, a desperate attempt to find the face of Antichrist under every suspect cultural development. When one takes a closer look, however, the *Left Behind* novels indicate that LaHaye and Jenkins play more than an unwieldy and uninformed game of “pin the tail on the Antichrist.” They ultimately take issue with the network culture and its perceived allies: New Age spiritualities and secular humanist philosophies that allegedly make humans and the natural world, rather than a wholly transcendent God, the measure of all things (2005: 2).

Shuck’s theory therefore suggests that the main reason for evangelical anxiety revealed by *Left Behind* is the perceived threat of the secular culture to evangelical identity. They feel threatened by the current culture (even though it strongly accommodates evangelicalism) in which they live. In identifying the manifestations of evil during the tribulation, *Left Behind* acts as what Shuck calls a “cultural thermostat” for evangelicals to keep a right relationship with American culture and the rest of the world. Anxiety enters into the situation as “[p]rophecy writers specialize in articulating and defending evangelical identity by ferreting out hidden sources of evil in their midst, encouraging readers to construct their identities by determining what they are not (2005: 3).”

In the process, prophecy writers like Lindsey and LaHaye also demonize the enemies of the Christian faith. O’Leary writes that Lindsey presented to his readers both “foreign adversaries and domestic ills (1994: 154).” This, of course, is exactly what LaHaye has done. Every evangelical should consider themselves threatened by Russians, Muslims, Atheists, Secular Humanists and for that matter the Democratic Party. The demons are ubiquitous and

the immediate future of every evangelical is therefore in jeopardy. Question 21 in the interview with LaHaye asked him, “Do you believe that conservative evangelical Christianity has become over-identified with the Republican Party? Why or why not?” He did not hesitate to answer why it has been so identified and in no way denied the close relationship. LaHaye explained: “The Democratic party has pulled away from any moral standard.”

The immediate threats against evangelicalism, therefore, are both foreign and domestic. Given the proliferation of such threats, this readily explains evangelical anxiety. *Left Behind*, however, also warns the readers. They are informed about the enemy and are offered a strategy for coping with this anxious and uncertain future. They are encouraged to hold to their traditional values and provided examples of protagonist heroes, who are willing to fight for those values. These protagonists reflect LaHaye who (as will be seen below in the culture section) often describes evangelical political confrontations in militaristic terms. As a resource for informing the readers of the threat, *Left Behind* holds the paradoxical distinction of both generating anxiety and providing a certain comfort at the same time. In identifying cultural evils, anxiety is generated. In prescribing strategies for resistance, comfort may be derived at the same time. But this is precisely the history of apocalyptic: It describes crisis, but offers hope. It will be demonstrated, however, that LaHaye’s version of hope is less effective than his ability to generate anxiety.

The main concern of our survey at this juncture, however, is whether anxiety actually exists. The survey shows that it does. Question 28: “On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being ‘no anxiety,’ 5 being ‘much anxiety’), how much anxiety do you think exists in America about the world we live in?” The respondents gave an average response of 4.1. As the respondents read the novels, they perceived an actual anxiety in American culture. There are practical reasons for this anxiety. The readers were asked about their perception of the stress level in America (a

“5” representing “high stress”) in respect to threats to our national security. The respondents answered with an average of 4.0. Even the economic climate contributes to the stress level with a range of anxiety in the culture as high as 3.7. It is important to note that much of evangelical doctrine maintains that God will bless America as long as she is faithful, but if the status of “Christian nation” is compromised then security and economy may be expected to decline.

Are the anxieties that are revealed also related to specific evangelical cultural values? The answer is in the affirmative. The readers believe that the disintegration of the traditional family (a major reason for evangelical political activism) definitely serves as a cause for America’s distress and anxiety. The average response was 4.0 towards the disintegration of the traditional family as the “likely cause” for cultural distress. The readers also identified the “culture wars,” which LaHaye is famous for attributing to the secular humanists, as a significant cause for American anxiety as readers indicated an average of 3.7.

The anxiety about the threat of cultural decline is also made evident because the respondents were likely to stand up for evangelical cultural motifs that are not only controversial within American society today, but which may be losing ground in popularity and prominence. Question 44: “On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being ‘should not incorporate,’ 5 ‘should incorporate’), how much do you think America should incorporate the civil and moral laws (e.g. The Ten Commandments) described in the Bible?” The readers of *Left Behind* answered with a range that reaches as high as 4.1 towards “should incorporate.” In addition, evolution versus creation debates have been extremely representative of the culture wars, so the survey presented question 46: “On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being ‘not important,’ 5 being ‘very important’), how important do you think it is to teach other theories on the origin of the earth (besides evolution) in the public schools?” The readers came back with an average answer of

4.0. Finally, when the readers were asked how important it was to them that America continue to be thought of as a “Christian Nation” the respondents gave an answer with a range as high as 4.1 (towards “very important”).

The readers of *Left Behind* report that anxiety already exists, but especially in light of potential decline in American culture. The areas of potential decline do not only touch on indicators of God’s favour upon society as a whole (like security and the economy), but also in respect to specific symbols of evangelicalism in America (e.g. the traditional family and the recognition of the culture wars). In addition, while stating such anxiety, the readers are especially concerned about evangelical cultural agenda items: holding onto Biblical civil and moral law, teaching creation in the classroom and defending America’s identity as a Christian nation.

Taking these results as a whole, we see that while there is a high level of happiness and contentment in the present time among evangelicals, that this positive state of life is tempered with a nagging anxiety. The anxiety is not caused by the images of the end of the world, but by the descriptions of cultural decline in *Left Behind* that serve as a warning to the great potential of such decline in the current culture. Short-term change that threatens evangelical values are viewed as destructive not only for evangelical identity, but for America (the Christian nation) as a whole. The anxiety is high in respect to what could be lost. The “American dream” could vanish unless the evangelical (like the protagonists in *Left Behind* consistent with the rallying (political) cry of the originator of *Left Behind*) decides to join the resistance against that which is evil. The novels do not so much provide a commentary about a far off future for sinners who were left behind as much as they provide a realistic commentary of what current evangelicals could experience if evil reigns before the rapture and while evangelicals are still here.

As it will be shown in the political chapter, the resultant anxiety produced by *Left Behind* appears to serve the actual political agenda of LaHaye. In the political sphere, the evangelical finds a coping mechanism for their apocalyptic anxiety. As a result, LaHaye has employed an ingenious platform for generating political activism. LaHaye provided this insight in the personal interview: “If Christians would wake up and only elect to office those who share their faith or candidates that best reflect their faith on moral issues, then our country would return to moral sanity.” *Left Behind* is intended to inspire just the right amount of apocalyptic anxiety in order to “wake up” Christians and get them involved in defending the evangelical way while there is still opportunity. The readers have gone along with this programme and admit to having the anxiety that *Left Behind* is intended to produce.

Left Behind's Impact upon The Christian Faith

In the personal interview, however, LaHaye states that he wants to be remembered for his “absolute commitment to the Word of God in everything [he] did.” Furthermore, when discussing his latest project he made his underlying goal very clear. He said, “I have asked God for over 100 million people to come to Christ through this project [what he hopes will be a Hollywood blockbuster movie].” This is to say that LaHaye more than anything else desires to present Jesus Christ to the world, and it appears that he and Jerry Jenkins have made every effort to incorporate their presentation of the gospel of Christ within the novels. The last question to be considered therefore is this: “What impact does *Left Behind* have upon the Christian faith of the readership?”

The overall answer to this question is dismal in respect to increasing faith. Question 49 asked that as a result of reading the novel(s), how much better the reader knew about Christ. The average response was 1.8 towards “no change.” The next question was very similar but

strove to consider spiritual impact as opposed to intellectual impact as depicted in the previous question. The readers were asked how much more Christ was known in a personal (spiritual) way. Once again, the average answer was 1.8 towards “no change.” Question 51 asked how much more appealing Christ was as a result of reading the novel(s). The average response was 2.2 towards “no change or possibly less appealing.” Furthermore, when asked how much the novel(s) increased the reader’s desire to be closer to Jesus Christ, the respondents gave an average response of 2.6 towards “no increase.”

What was also very revealing were two questions designed to be opposite. One question asked, “On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being “no association,” 5 being “strong association”), how much do you think the image of Christ is associated with such concepts as judgment, war, conflict, battle, fear and anxiety in the novel(s)?” The response was an average answer of 3.5. The opposite question asking about whether they saw Christ associated with positive concepts received an average answer of 3.1. The difference is negligible and it appears that the readers of *Left Behind* retain something positive about the presentation of Christ in the novels. The reader’s leanings clearly indicating an overall negative image of Christ, however, came out in the ensuing (and final) question of the survey.

The last question asked the readers to select three words that best describe how Jesus Christ was presented in the novel(s). Here are the results:

<u>Response</u>	<u>% of Respondents</u>
Judge	21.84%
Saviour	12.64%
Victor	10.34%
Lord	6.90%
Terrifying	6.90%
Loving	5.75%
Compassionate	4.60%
Confusing	4.60%
God	4.60%
Just	4.60%
Unpredictable	4.60%
Merciful	3.45%
Intimidating	2.30%
Attractive	1.15%
Cruel	1.15%
Legalist	1.15%
Redeemer	1.15%
Repulsive	1.15%
Unfair	1.15%
<i>Grand Total:</i>	100.00%

The results are quite significant towards making the survey show an overall negative view of how the Christian faith is presented, especially in respect to its Lord. It has been shown that *Left Behind* produces anxiety. This is further verified by the single most prominent image of Jesus Christ. He is seen as “Judge” by 21.84% and even while “Saviour” (12.64%) is

in second place, even this is countered by the fact that he is also “terrifying” (6.9%), “confusing” (4.6%) and “unpredictable” (4.6%). It is small wonder that the readers of *Left Behind* report that the novels have (at best) a marginal positive impact on their faith.

We have now shown a correspondence between the deductive analyses of millenarian tradition, LaHaye’s exegesis, and LaHaye’s hermeneutic on the one hand, and the inductive quantitative survey results on the other. Both the deductive and inductive evidence points to a real apocalyptic anxiety amongst those evangelicals that hold to pretribulational millenarianism. The readers of *Left Behind* show themselves as aligning with the characteristics of their historical millennial predecessors; and they have latched onto the vision that they are a special people living in a special time. That time, however, is fraught with the expectation that their American-Evangelical way-of-life is about to change. Major, observable signs confirm it: America is less the “Christian nation” it once was and who can deny the “super-sign” of the nation of Israel?

As Christians, however, Evangelicals do not believe that God is calling them to retreat from the culture. They believe they have a calling to be light to the world and salt to the earth. It is a calling that includes stemming the tide of that which is evil in the land many first-generation American Christians viewed as the “New Jerusalem.” The Evangelical response to the situation is also ingenious whilst addressing apocalyptic anxiety. Any anxiety or fear they have in respect to their country finds a powerful and constructive expression through their attempt to counter the deterioration in America. As a result, their allegiance to God is expressed while also coping with their anxiety through both political action (chapter 5) and through a radical approach to Christian sanctification (chapter 6). It is to this external and internal dynamic of trying to constructively live with their apocalyptic anxiety that we now turn.

CHAPTER 5: LAHAYE AND POLITICS

As we have seen from the previous chapter, apocalyptic anxiety is real in the subculture of conservative evangelicalism in America. Tim LaHaye, however, seems most concerned to use this alarm to impact American culture, especially in terms of politics. How does LaHaye envision the importance of his message? According to LaHaye, if his warnings are not properly addressed, “our culture will be destroyed (LaHaye, 1980: 26).”

LaHaye’s overarching goal seems to be to inspire political activism. Such an agenda could appear scandalous to his particular audience since fundamentalists are often viewed as cultural separatists. LaHaye, however, has helped the Evangelical subculture retain a connection to America’s political system and this is the arena in which LaHaye thrives. His apocalyptic literature has only reinforced his agenda to make an impact on a culture confronted by the end times. Fundamentalism’s evolution towards compromise with the culture can be tracked.

Evangelicalism’s Political Activism: Its Tradition and Rationale

The emerging fundamentalism of Dwight L. Moody saw a robust interaction with American society by the end of the 19th-century. This provided impetus to the tradition’s first “wave” of activism in the 1920’s against alcohol, Catholicism and evolution. This activism, however, would not last. The movement experienced a “Great Reversal,” a cultural retreat from modernity (Lienesch, 1993: 4). Fundamentalists could not retain the relevance of the message of eternal salvation with an emerging and growing liberal Social Gospel after 1900, especially after World War I (Marsden, 2006: 91). The 1925 “Monkey Trial” (Scopes trial) against the teaching of evolution was only an exacerbation that saw fundamentalism retreat

from culture after its embarrassing prosecution revealed its inability to answer Darwin's theory. After this time, Marsden says that fundamentalists showed "strong sectarian or separatist tendencies (2006: 7)." Marsden, however, also thinks the years from 1925 to 1940 represent "dislocation, relocation and resurgence (2006: 184)." The resurgence was especially evident against international communism in the 1950's.

The resurgence further transformed into an influential political activism, especially since the late-20th century. Tim LaHaye was perhaps the most important instigator and sustainer of this resurgence. LaHaye co-founded the Moral Majority -- a hugely successful political movement of fundamentalism in America that officially came into being in 1979 characterized as "pro-life, pro-family, pro-moral, pro-American and pro-Israel (Martin, 1996: 200-201)" -- and which relied upon the late Francis Schaeffer's concept of "co-belligerency." Indicating his reliance upon Schaeffer's cultural theology, LaHaye in 1980 dedicated one of his most popular non-fiction books *The Battle for the Mind* to him (1980: 5).

In his book *The Church at the End of the 20th Century*, Francis Schaeffer explains his concept of co-belligerency which Tim LaHaye completely adapted for his own theological-cultural and political practice:

Let me suggest...implications of what a true revolution will mean in the light of where we are. First, Christians must realize that there is a difference between being a cobelligerent and an ally. At times you will seem to be saying exactly the same thing as the New Left elite or the Establishment elite. If there is social injustice, say there is social injustice. If we need order, say we need order. In these cases, and at these specific points, we would be cobelligerents....So if I seem to be saying the same thing at some one point, understand that I am a cobelligerent at this particular place, but I am not an ally (1970: 36-37).

Recall, however, that LaHaye has committed himself to the prediction that Christ's second coming (specifically the first stage/rapture) will take place by 2025. Furthermore,

LaHaye's theology insists upon further cultural deterioration leading up to that time. The natural question is therefore why re-new a culture destined to deterioration and finally destruction when the tribulation arrives? LaHaye addresses this seeming contradiction:

Most knowledgeable Christians are looking for the Second Coming of Christ and the tribulation period that He predicted would come before the end of the age. Because present world conditions are so similar to those the Bible prophesies for the last days...they conclude that a takeover of our culture by the forces of evil is inevitable; so they do nothing to resist it. This is unscriptural! We are commanded to resist the devil...(1980: 217)

Furthermore, LaHaye reveals his motivation for his political and cultural zeal. Based on his missionary travels, he believes that America is responsible for most "of the world's missionaries, technology for preaching the Gospel, and money for world missions" and therefore must not be overrun by atheistic and amoral forces that would cut-off America's ability to facilitate the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (1980: 222).

But are these his only motives? Conservative Evangelicalism in America -- together with conservative Protestants and Catholics -- forms the Christian Right that has taken on an aggressive activism within American politics. Much of the motivation of this movement aligns almost exactly with LaHaye's religious concerns. However, perpetuating such churchly activism in politics raises new challenges. Wolfhart Pannenberg says "[c]orrectons to the secularism of modern Western culture and society cannot and should not start from the churches. Any attempt in this direction would immediately be interpreted as producing the danger of a desire for clerical control (1988: 43)."

While Pannenberg is by no means saying that churches should not oppose important moral maladies affecting the culture (he cites the 1973 American legalization of abortion for example), he is however warning against the church taking upon itself responsibility to

change secular culture. Contrary to Pannenberg's warning, LaHaye's approach is for his cultural theology to not only become a regular political fixture, but to eventually establish itself as the most important influence on American politics. LaHaye explains his fuller motivation in terms of an "ideological battle":

This ideological battle between religious and secular citizens is currently tearing our country apart, just as the Civil War did. One question is at the center of this conflict: Is America a secular nation that has no room for God and His moral absolutes in its public policy? Or is it a religious nation based on biblical principles (1986: 111)?

LaHaye adopts this terminology, because in his view the very foundations of America are Christian. His movement is not merely to bring America into a better state, but to *return* America to her *original* (supposedly pristine) state. Here, accusations of revisionist American history have and will continue to be raised against LaHaye's position, but LaHaye has much to draw from in making his case.

Combining of Church and State for a "Christian" America over Secular Humanism

In his book *The Kingdom of God in America* H. Richard Niebuhr provides some evidence that America was viewed in terms of having a biblical foundation. As an early 19th-century preacher-reformer, Lyman Beecher understood the law of the United States with roots in the law of New England Puritanism and this Puritan law of course came directly from the Bible. In describing the United States of America, Beecher declared, "Our own republic in its Constitution and laws, is of heavenly origin. It was not borrowed from Greece or Rome, but from the Bible (Niebuhr, 1988: 174)." Noll describes how some of the colonists viewed their young nation: "During the War for Independence, a vibrant Christian republicanism from New England, compounded of remnant Puritan messianism and Real Whig political analysis,

persuaded other colonists to think that the new nation in its entirety might be specially elect of God like a new ancient Israel (2002: 32f.).”

It is easy to see that such a perspective could naturally evolve towards aiming for an American theocracy. LaHaye denies that this is his goal. In fact, he says that he does not claim that America was founded as a Christian nation. However, he clearly advocates returning America to his understanding of her former status which – as he points out – was characterized by Francis Schaeffer as possessing “a Christian consensus (LaHaye, 1990: 33).” From the perspective of the non-Christian this could easily be construed as playing with semantics. When one considers the full implications of LaHaye’s goals, one may wonder what the difference is between theocracy and this “consensus.”

This is not to say that Christians should not be active in government, but LaHaye’s political vision goes too far by demonizing the opposition. While cultural pluralism in America certainly challenges conservative evangelicalism (as well as other citizens), leading them to say that the American government and culture is trying to subvert the Christian faith is not the statement of a responsible evaluation. At the same time, this does not deny the existence of a legitimate cultural division taking place that has to do with a basic difference in moral understanding.

In this “culture war” – if this is an appropriate designation – the opposition is characterized by LaHaye as representing a “satanic” enemy. To follow LaHaye is to accept his diagnosis of America as having fallen prey to what he refers to as “secular humanism.” For LaHaye, secular humanism is in essence one of the “repackaged versions of the ancient satanic doctrine that ruined Eden (1980: 36).” The battle against this satanic doctrine “is a

cosmic struggle between worldviews (1980: 225).” When the struggle is characterised as both *satanic* and *cosmic* it is easy to see why LaHaye’s position is a form of extremism.

LaHaye, however, not only demonizes much of contemporary culture, but in attacking it, presents Christianity to the world as a form of legalism. In fact, LaHaye’s emphasis upon legalism may in fact represent the most misleading part of his teaching vis-à-vis a Christian faith that views the church as being commissioned to share God’s unconditional love. His law-emphasis only succeeds in creating a cultural animosity in which Christians take on a pharisaic attitude that leads them to replace a love of one’s neighbour with bigotry and hatred. This legalism compromises the freedom of Christians in America [and such an emphasis is viewed as a threatening extremism by other free people in the same culture]. It is a theology that breeds deep division and aggravates conflict, increasing the possibility of war, prompted by LaHaye’s predictions of war in the end times.

LaHaye’s political activism therefore is not simply *misguided*, but *dangerous*. The conservative evangelicals whom LaHaye strives to inspire are the foundation of America’s Christian Right and they have become the self-appointed Christian voice in the culture. The Christian Right has become so powerful that it is easy for American citizens to view it as representing Christianity in general. Thus culture (for example in the form of the Republican Party which has appropriated the Christian Right for the last three decades) has begun to indentify the Christian Church in America exclusively with the Christian Right due to its dominance on the political stage. LaHaye’s desire for the church to change government (beyond addressing particular propositions, bills or laws), led to the church becoming so closely identified with government that the convergence has begun to change the church in America.

Charles Colson saw that “[b]oth liberals and conservatives have made this mistake of aligning their spiritual goals with a particular political agenda (CTCR, 1995a, 60).” When this happens, the gospel itself is compromised. Colson elaborates:

Because it tempts one to water down the truth of the gospel, ideological alignment, whether on the left or the right, accelerates the church’s secularization. When the church aligns itself politically, it gives priority to the compromises and temporal successes of the political world rather than its Christian confession of eternal truth (CTCR, 1995a: 60).

The first step in excessive political involvement is the presupposition that it is the duty of the church (substantially) to change the government. This has been LaHaye’s mission for many years. His emotive approach to alter government, however, is based on another presupposition, namely that another “religion” – one that is diametrically opposed to Christianity – has sought to change and take-over the government and has already been largely successful in doing so.

That “religion” is what we referred to above as “secular humanism.” LaHaye understands his political activism to be a *reaction to a religious* invasion of the United States government. Thus he views his political involvement as representing the church to be completely justified. In fact, he considers his work as doing a service to the church (in order to maintain her ability to proclaim the gospel to the world), and to the culture (so that it is not completely taken over by a destructive, false religion).

LaHaye understands American history as having undergone a battle for racial rights in the 1960s, another battle for sexual rights in the 1970s, but beginning in the 1980s, the cultural battle has been about religious rights (1980: 9-10). In generating both churchly and civic support for his cause he wrote, “I believe there is yet time for us to defeat the humanists and reverse the moral decline in our country that has us on a collision course with Sodom and

Gomorra[h] *[sic]* (1980: 10).” His political agenda, however, does not simply address what he contends is the negative trend of moral decline within the government, but it also envisions a new and more constructive influence upon the nation. It must be said therefore that his intentions move beyond correcting a perceived problem, but that he sees an opportunity of influencing government to adopt a philosophy of collaboration with a particular religious movement. He said, “I believe God will yet bless this nation and give us another great revival, which I call Great Awakening II,” this will be achieved when Christians and other pro-moral citizens “remove all humanists from public office and replace them with pro-moral political leaders (1980: 10).”

LaHaye, however, departs from some traditional Christian political practice. There are two major ways that he has done this. First, he has sought political change primarily on theological – as opposed to a reason-based – grounds. Second, he has allowed his cause to be almost completely identified with a particular political party. In the former he has compromised the church’s proclamation of spiritual truth and suggested that certain portions of her proclamation are not theological at all. In the latter he has hurt the position of the church in the world by associating her too closely with the Republican Party in the United States and while there may be many things that honour God within that party, God Himself is not Republican. In time, however, some people in America may start to believe that this is what LaHaye and those who think as he does appear to be implying, namely to be Christian one must be Republican.

In addition, once political success is tasted, a movement can begin to take on an anarchic spirit by pitting one segment of society against another. If enough success in the political realm is experienced, it will not take much for religious activists to begin imagining the possibilities of a kind of theocracy. In time, the church will begin to be too closely

identified with culture and no longer capable of criticizing it. Herbert Schlossberg provides a sobering commentary on what the church can lose when it gets too close to the state:

Meanwhile, we are left with a church that to a large extent has chosen to befriend the powers that dominate the world instead of judging them. We should be reminded that the crucifixion of Christ was a joint production, instigated by religious authorities and then carried out by the state. When the state joins forces with [cultural idols] in forging the great brutalities of the future, we should not be surprised to find the representatives of the establishment churches, fuglemen for the idolatries, earnestly assuring us that God's will is being done (1990: 259).

LaHaye's Entrance into the Political Arena

LaHaye started developing his taste for power politics with a California state proposition that sought to give California school boards the authority to fire homosexual teachers. The proposition did not gain public support. Deeply concerned, LaHaye decided to take action working with many other California pastors. LaHaye was instrumental in forming an association that by 1980 anticipated having 1,100 pastor members and 100,000 "moral activists (1980: 199-200)."

This concept of a pastor-led political organization took root. The example of the California experiment would be applied to the national level. LaHaye started working with Jerry Falwell and they spoke of their vision to reach "the 110,000 Bible-believing pastors in the country, in order to awaken the millions of sleeping moralists who are interested but uncommitted (1980: 201)." This group, especially consisting of fundamentalist and evangelical Christians, was considered "the greatest tract of virgin timber on the political landscape (Martin, 1996: 191)." LaHaye and Falwell's vision went on to establish the Moral Majority that was directly involved in the decline of President Carter and the ascendancy of President Reagan, a transfer of power that coincided with the Christian Right becoming

identified with the Republican Party. During this time, LaHaye was not simply gathering voting registrations, but was interacting with American presidents.

William Martin tells the story which accurately summarizes the public accounts given by Tim LaHaye of the historic January 22, 1980 meeting between fundamentalist religious leaders and President Jimmy Carter:

Carter's inability to hold on to the evangelical constituency that had helped elect him in 1976 was pointedly illustrated in a breakfast he held for a small group of prominent conservative ministers that included Jerry Falwell, Oral Roberts, Rex Humbard, Jim Bakker, D. James Kennedy, Charles Stanley, and Tim LaHaye. The day before, he had made a highly successful address to four thousand members of the National Religious Broadcasters and had hoped to use this occasion to mend some key fences, but he misfired from the start. When someone pointed out that thousands of people were gathering across the street for the annual March for Life, held on the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision, Carter made a statement on abortion that they considered vague. When asked about the lack of evangelicals in his administration, he hedged again. Finally, Tim LaHaye asked "why he as a Christian and a pro-family man, as he protested to be, was in favor of the Equal Rights Amendment in view of the fact that it would be so harmful to the family, and he gave some off-the-wall answer that the Equal Rights Amendment was good for the family. Well, I knew when he said that he was out to lunch. We had a man in the White House who professed to be a Christian, but didn't understand how un-Christian his administration was." Afterward, LaHaye recalled, while waiting outside for a limo to take him back to his hotel, "I stood there and I prayed this prayer: 'God, we have got to get this man out of the White House and get someone in here who will be aggressive about bringing back traditional moral values.' And little did I know that several others prayed essentially the same prayer. We got into this limousine, and here were some of the leading ministers of America, and they were stone silent. It was just like depression had settled on all of us. We all had made a commitment to God that day that, for the first time in our lives, we were going to get involved in the political process...(1996: 189)

LaHaye recounts that the Christian Right began to merge with the "New Right" (a term first used in America in the 1960s describing the minority politically conservative movement in the nation) in 1979 and 1980. It was during this time that the New Right received an unprecedented infusion of support through the Christian Right. A few years later,

LaHaye resigned his pastoral ministry. After having formed his 1978 Californians for Biblical Morality, he commenced his work with Falwell in 1979 that led to the Moral Majority affecting all 50 states, an organization that grew to about 4 million members (LaHaye, 1986: 102).

After becoming available for full-time political activism, LaHaye invited most of the nation's leading media evangelists to form the American Coalition for Traditional Values (ACTV) which again evoked LaHaye's strategy of putting aside theological differences so as to focus on mutual moral concerns for the nation (1986: 102-103). LaHaye cites a CBS-*New York Times* exit poll during the 1984 election that found 12 million voters classified themselves as "born again" (a term relating to Christian Right ideology), and 80 percent of them voted for Republican conservative Ronald Reagan (LaHaye, 1986: 103). Afterwards the Christian Right became firmly entrenched in the Republican Party; 87 percent of frequent church-attending white religious right voters chose George W. Bush in 2000 (Phillips, 2006: 191). The Christian Right and the Republican Party had for all intents and purposes merged.

Gathering voters, however, would not be enough for LaHaye because as mentioned before he developed even greater political ambitions. He sought to influence the political nominations as he co-founded in 1981 the Council for National Policy which in a 2002 report ABC News called, "the most powerful conservative group you've never heard of (2006: 244-245)." This was a group of the wealthy and politically powerful that President George W. Bush met with at the start of his 1999 presidential campaign in order to seek support for his first election in 2000 (Dreyfuss, 2004: online).

By this time, LaHaye had become enveloped in politics. His adaptation of Shaeffer's concept of co-belligerency helped him to look for common-ground between believers – in all

their theological diversity – with unbelievers. LaHaye chose the issue: morality. However, in choosing this issue he secularized a key feature of Christian life. But LaHaye had to find a means to support his political agenda and his actions effectively linked the church to a specific political party.

His decision to use morality as a unification issue is fraught with contradiction and theological difficulties. First of all, LaHaye's endeavour to show that the arch-enemy of Christianity – secular humanism – is a religion that has (inappropriately) entered into politics jeopardizes the reputation of Christianity as LaHaye strives to lead Christianity into politics. The result of such activism is a religion (Christianity) entering politics in order to remove another religion (secular humanism) from politics on the assumption that it is inappropriate for a religion to be so involved. This is a clear contradiction in logic. Based on LaHaye's general position that religion should continue to influence government, then secular humanism (if it is in fact a religion) ought to continue to have that privilege as much as Christianity does. LaHaye maintains, however, that "[t]he battle against humanism, however, is not theological; it is moral (1980: 187)." This was the very same rationale he used to unite California pastors for political action (1980: 200).

In his terms the distinction, however, is bogus. In the book *The Battle for the Mind* he says "morals are the church's business (1980: 208)." What business has the church if it is not theological? If the church has an ethic it is always theologically conceived. Its morals are related to the law of God (e.g. "Thou shalt not steal."). Such Scriptural imperatives are both moral *and* theological as they are taken to be Divine commands. Conservative evangelicals are often the first to emphasize this point. Fundamentalists are renowned for their position that the Bible and its content are God-given. Their moral absolutes derive directly from the Bible. Their ethic is therefore totally theological.

This is not to claim that morals and religion are simply synonymous. Of course they are not. LaHaye, however, is promoting a very specific morality as part of his political agenda. In his book *Mind Siege* LaHaye is clear: “If we fail, the last great experiment in free government will perish from the earth. It is either a Bible-based moral order – the pro-moral position – or it is chaos and despair – the amoral position (LaHaye and Noebel, 2000: 254).” LaHaye’s appeal to the moral is not to Lewis’ “Law of Human Nature (universal morality)” (Lewis, 2001: 4), but to a form of “biblical” morality, notably that of the absolutist perspective of Christian fundamentalism.

LaHaye’s achievement is that he has thoroughly entrenched his version of Christian and biblical morality into the political arena via the Republican Party. *Christian* morality is what is now characterized as that which opposes another religious system, namely secular humanism and in more popular cultural parlance, the “liberals” and even “Democrats.” Political conflicts are presented as specifically religious conflicts. Christianity is now depicted as being against anything in culture that isn’t consistent with his “Christian” morality. A consequence is that Christianity is identified with a certain form of secularized culture and competing with another form of secular culture. Christianity is no longer “above” culture (Niebuhr, 1951: 116f.), but is thoroughly confused with it; and it is now vulnerable because culture can and does change. If the political movement with which it has been associated fails, then Christianity may also be perceived to have failed. This is the monumental predicament of popular Christianity in America to which LaHaye’s popular success has led: non-Christians now have reason to reject Christianity if they reject the Republican Party.

LaHaye, however, believes he is doing what God has called him to do. He also believes that this political approach is completely consistent with what is Christian and theologically correct. But is LaHaye’s political activism essentially about morals? It appears

that he wants to see a political transformation in American politics and culture. In truth, he wants to see a Christian America.

In having made the decision to compromise both the church and the culture as shown above, there is also a trajectory established for the future, the product of LaHaye's confusion of church and state. He has gone on record many times to say that theocracy is not his goal, but there are many more indications that at the very least LaHaye will not settle for anything less than a Christian nation. Glenn W. Shuck believes that LaHaye indeed has a greater agenda:

[I]t does not matter beyond questions of trivia whether President Bush has actually read Left Behind or any of its sequels. What matters is that Tim LaHaye is in a unique position to provide theological justification for many otherwise secular policy determinations – a far more problematic development. Finally...[in] Tim LaHaye's published writings, the End is not now. Indeed, the term "apocalypse" refers to major change, not annihilation. Tim LaHaye may be seeking to usher in a new order, so to speak...he is not a prophet of the End of all things, just the End of a political and cultural climate disagreeable to conservative Protestants (2005: 222-223).

LaHaye's Discourse of Conflict

In the very last volume of the full sixteen novel *Left Behind* series, the climactic *Kingdom Come: The Final Victory*, LaHaye graphically portrays his concept of adversity between the church and culture. Notions of the coming of God's Kingdom bring all sorts of images of holiness, blessedness, victory, deliverance, relief, the power of God over the power of the world, but LaHaye seems wholly caught up in the discourse of conflict. His presentation of the Kingdom of God seems reduced to an earthly conflict. The reader is once again taken into the future for the sake of the battle that exists today and they should be on

God's side for a battle that will make America more like the Christian nation he thinks she should be.

In fact, the "kingdom" in *Kingdom Come* is closer to an imperfect theocracy than it is to heaven. It certainly appears to have problems. Those who survived and became Christians during the tribulation as well as those who are born during the millennial kingdom are capable of falling in love and going through the normal processes of life. For those who have experienced heaven and are now brought back to the earthly kingdom, however, they are fully aware that they no longer have a supposedly problematic sexual desire while also rejoining former (and original if they were married more than once) spouses. One protagonist says to another: "It's bizarre, I still love and admire and respect you and want to be near you, but it's as if I've been prescribed some medicine that has cured me of any other distracting feelings (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2007a: 3)." It is never made fully clear if this sexual condition is a curse or a blessing.

Most importantly, the return to current cultural divisions is made all too vivid. What is probably the most bizarre aspect of the last novel of the series to traditional Christianity is its presentation of Jesus Christ always present in the kingdom, but always confined to the latest temple in Zion. He is there apparently so that the Old Testament sacrifices would be re-enacted by the Jews who once rejected him. The *Left Behind* novel presents Jesus supplying a rationale: "*My chosen ones [the Jews] must continue to present memorial sacrifices to Me in remembrance of My sacrifice and because they rejected Me for so long* (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2007a: 23)." In this way Jesus is depicted as remembering the failure and sin of the people of Israel for 1000 years and he will ensure that those who make it to the millennial kingdom will remember their failure and sin as well.

Problems and conflict still exist in the millennial kingdom, so “multitudes” of counsellors are required (2007a: 28). Moreover, there will be a “countless number” of rebels choosing to follow Satan who will reappear at the end of the 1000-year “reign” of Christ (2007a: 33). Alas, our culture is reproduced: “And from all over the world came reports that citizens were determined to rebuild mass communications methods, airplanes, and computers, restoring all the modern conveniences (2007a: 40).” The rest of the book is a virtual re-enactment of our time, but the storyline is not really for the future but for the present: we too are to join the side of the faithful and its growing influence in the culture. Each reader is led to ask, “Don’t you want to be on God’s side?”

The Political Agenda

If the reader joins LaHaye then perhaps evangelicals can “return moral sanity to our land” and replace humanist leaders with “traditional, pro-moral leaders (1980: 58, 79).” LaHaye maintains that it could happen if Christians fully realize their position of power in the country. At the beginning of the new millennium LaHaye reported that 86% of the U.S. population is Christian or at least has a “Christian orientation” (though the latest *pew forum* report conducted in 2007 reveals that only 71% of the total population says that they are “absolutely certain” in their belief in God or universal spirit [Karkabi, 2008: A12]), that there are over a quarter-million bible-believing churches, and that the Christian home-school movement is growing at an astounding rate (LaHaye and Noebel, 2000: 215-218). He encourages specifically “Christians” vote out of office “every devotee of humanism and every politician naïve enough to vote for humanist programs (1980: 137).” Note that the public servant doesn’t even have to be an actual humanist to be targeted; all they have to do is disagree with “pro-moral” Christianity.

In all of this LaHaye is extremely enthusiastic about the growing success of Christianity throughout the land that has seen millions of “Christian” books sold, scores of para-church ministries established, hundreds of “Christian” radio stations, “Christian” broadcasters, and cable and satellite TV ministries reaching millions in the country. “Without a doubt,” LaHaye exclaims, “Christianity is on the rise in America (1980: 186).” But are these really relevant signs of true faith?

LaHaye does treat them as signs of political ascendancy and furthermore desires to pattern himself after Charles Wesley and George Whitfield who provided Christian leadership for the colonists in the early eighteenth century, bringing about the Great Awakening (1980: 190). In saying this, LaHaye has betrayed any claim to a general approach to “morality” within his cultural theology because during the Great Awakening in America the colonies had their religious roots in Christian Puritanism and Calvinism. Furthermore, the worldview of these traditions is well-known to say nothing of their ties to American evangelicalism. Marsden summarizes the history:

From the time of the Puritans until about the middle of the nineteenth century, American evangelicalism was dominated by a Calvinistic vision of a Christian culture. Old Testament Israel, a nation committed to God’s law, was the model for political institutions. Hence the Christian ideal was to introduce God’s kingdom – a New Israel – not only in the lives of the regenerate elect, but also by means of civil laws that would both restrain evil and comprehensively transform culture according to God’s will (2006: 86).

LaHaye’s agreement with this vision is self-evident. In his book *The Hidden Censors* LaHaye discusses the media control exercised by secularists and presents the strategy as he sees it: “The game plan is really very simple. He who controls the media will ultimately control the government, the schools, and eventually the people (LaHaye, 1984b: 16).” In addition, he recommends instituting “media review boards” operating at the local, state and

national level in America. He clarifies that he is not saying that these should have the force of law, but that they would offer a “seal of approval” to media outlets -- newspapers, radio, TV stations, and magazines -- demonstrating “truth and fairness (1984b: 109-110).” In *The Battle for the Family* LaHaye also proposes a “decency-in-literature” amendment that would not violate the First Amendment on free speech – though he offers no way of avoiding the apparent contradiction -- but would nevertheless “protect our families from...vile scourge (1982: 182).”

In another place, LaHaye even proposes a Christian political agenda for the government. It includes fundamentalist positions against abortion, homosexuality, pornography, prostitution, gambling, infanticide and euthanasia, the usurping of parent’s rights, drugs and of course, religious humanism (1980: 194). In the third of LaHaye’s “battle” books, *The Battle for the Public Schools*, he makes a threat against national educators that if they do not return to his vision of moral education, then the Christian-school- movement will more than ever take-over the teaching of the nation’s youth (1983b: 187). However, later in the same book LaHaye reveals that he isn’t waiting for a response, because he actually says this to all Christian parents: “as a Christian parent you must first take your child out of the public school and send him to a Christian school (1983b: 252).”

Educational reform is just the beginning: “We must have a moral-spiritual revival like those that shook the American society to its very foundations, maintaining an impact on the nation for decades (1986: 132).” He goes on to review the major *Christian* revivals – continuing to contradict his religious-neutral “pro-moral” claims – and then says in respect to the great Christian revivals of American history, “This was the atmosphere in which America was born. The people – and their schools and churches and government – were changed (1986: 134).”

There is little doubt that LaHaye is aiming for a kind of theocracy in America. Michael Lienesch cites evidence of revivalist patterns. First, there is privatization, followed by politicization and finally particularism (1993: 19). While the first two elements are often construed as opposing trends, the idea is that a strong, insulated base is first developed under privatization. When the base matures as it has in evangelicalism, it ventures out and engages the political realm. If there is success in the political venture, then the goal is to become pervasive (what is meant by “particularism”). That is, the culture would be predominated by a particular world view.

LaHaye serves as a microcosm of this pattern. After devoting over 25 years of professional ministry to the fundamentalist sub-culture, LaHaye entered into the politicization stage in the late 1970s. But on a careful reading of his agenda, one would be naïve to miss the signs of particularism that have already accompanied his political success. Related to this, Lienesch brings out that Christian conversion in this tradition is a process in which religious rebirth is brought about not only through total transformation of oneself, but also one’s society (1993: 33). LaHaye demonstrates Lienesch’s analysis at the point where he explains that “revival” is insufficient if merely viewed in terms of “personal Christianity,” because a personal Spirit-filled life will include politics (1993: 50).

The Christian Right Already Powerful

Most people are surprised to learn how influential the Christian right has become. Goldberg points out that while about 40 percent of Americans claim to be born-again Christians, only 7 percent are true evangelicals (2006: 9). However, their mobilization is impressive and their influence upon the Republican Party is significant. The Christian Coalition – another arm of the Christian Right movement associated with Pat Robertson (one

of LaHaye's pro-moral colleagues) – in 2004 gave 42 out of 100 senators a grade of 100% for supporting every significant moral and political issue recommended by their organization (2006: 10).

How did such a relatively small group become so powerful? Lindsay says that the real key has been the popular appeal of evangelicalism's vision for a "cohesive vision...grounded in religious commitment (2007: 3)." Evangelical leaders in other words view themselves as having a higher purpose in whatever their vocations are while being agents of change and even sharing faith with others. "What is unique to the current moment is the number of high-ranking leaders who have experienced that change themselves, either before they rose to power or while in public leadership (2007: 3)." Lindsay reports that these leaders are "remarkably united in their campaign to interject moral convictions into American public life (2007: 5)." Lindsay marks the evangelical ascendancy in the last three decades in the form of society's political, corporate and cultural leaders (2007: 11). This outcome matches the time-scale of LaHaye's efforts to achieve his political objectives.

Although no one person can be identified as *the* cause for this phenomenon, there is little doubt that LaHaye has contributed significantly. President Reagan actually publically drew on the discourse of apocalypse in a form of premillennial dispensationalism when he said in 1980, "We may be the generation that sees Armageddon (Smith, 2006: 328-334). The use of this discourse was not a political accident. The Reagan-Bush re-election committee used LaHaye as their point-man in registering evangelical Christian voters in 1984 (Diamond, 1989: 66).

Currently no intelligent surveyor of American culture will discount the words of the leaders of the Christian Right. They had targeted America for radical change. Commenting on

their strategy of building a grassroots political structure, Ralph Reed, a strategist for the Christian Coalition at the time, expressed their ambition: “If we execute this...we will be the most powerful force in American politics (Unger, 2007: 97).” The late D. James Kennedy, a hugely successful writer, apologist, and pastor, in league with LaHaye, spoke for the movement saying, “Not just equal time. It is dominion we are after. World conquest. That’s what Christ has commissioned us to accomplish. And we must never settle for anything less (2007: 97).” Paul Weyrich – whom LaHaye considers “an invaluable teacher” of pro-moral politics (1986: 102) – stated, “We are radicals, working to overturn the present power structure of the country (Diamond, 1989: 54).”

At one time these comments would have been dismissed as having come from religious extremists only dreaming dreams and seeing visions, but now their success is recognized. The former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay – while still in office – in 2003 could publically state, “Only Christianity offers a comprehensive worldview that covers all areas of life and thought, every aspect of creation. Only Christianity offers a way to live in response to the realities that we find in this world. Only Christianity (Goldberg, 2006: 40).” The 2004 platform of the Texas Republican party reaffirmed the status of the United States as “a Christian nation,” and regretted “the myth of the separation of church and state.” It called for abstinence instead of sex education and reflected other evangelical convictions (Phillips, 2006: 233).

The Evangelical Dilemma

The Christian Right movement that LaHaye represents, however, finds itself in a dilemma of sorts. Justin Watson diagnosed the tension in the Christian Coalition: they want *both* restoration *and* recognition. Their position, however, is “fundamentally

incompatible...to the pluralistic reality of contemporary America,” because restoration implies rejection of diversity and pluralist ethos, but recognition requires it (Watson, 1997: 175-176). LaHaye, however, is determined to bring about restoration.

Smith in *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* reveals a pattern in America’s political life. Historically it is apparent that any concept of the separation of church and state has simply never meant the separation of religion and politics in America. At the same time, however, he acknowledges the existence of conflictual views relating to the primary influence on the founding of the USA: Christian and Secular ideologies (2006: v). Unger presents the case for the influence of a secular ideology. He says that the “Founding Fathers were the rationalist men of the Enlightenment...who envisioned a Republic that was very different from that imagined by the Puritans (Unger, 2007: 24).” Smith’s evidence on the presidents, however, counters this.

In 1984 President Reagan said, “The truth is, politics and morality are inseparable. And as morality’s foundation is religion, religion and politics are necessarily related. We need religion as a guide. We need it because we are imperfect, and our government needs the church because only those humble enough to admit they’re sinners can bring to democracy the tolerance it requires in order to survive (Smith, 2006: 4).” Reagan was not being novel. During the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower, national prayer breakfasts commenced, the words “under God” were added to the Pledge of Allegiance, Congress made the phrase “In God We Trust” the national motto, and in 1955 the president said, “Application of Christianity to everyday affairs is the only practical hope of the world (Smith, 2006: 221-222).” Smith goes on to show that every inaugural address, except for Washington’s very brief second one, “acknowledged God and invoked his blessing on the nation (2006: 5).”

The question, however, must also be asked, “Are the presidents speaking for Christianity *specifically* even in those cases when they use the term?” It is quite possible that setting up a Christian vs. Secular dichotomy commits an either-or fallacy. History in America shows an evolutionary change within its religious population. Smith also shows that whilst America was once predominantly Protestant, a “disestablishment” of Protestantism occurred between 1900 and World War II and the combination of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism furnished the foundation of national life (2006: 13). America’s current religious development, however, is probably not even adequately described using this combination.

Smith also cites sociologist Robert Bellah who said in 1967 that religion in the U.S. had evolved into a “civil religion” which “mixes piety with patriotism and traditional religion with national life until it is impossible to distinguish between them (2006: 15).” LaHaye relies on this confusing dynamic so that his form of evangelicalism continues to merge with national identity. In the final analysis, however, Bellah is probably correct in saying that while civil religion shares “much in common with Christianity,” it is not in “any specific sense Christian (2006: 15).” LaHaye insists on a place for his Christianity within politics, but both avoid any Christian specificity.

At the same time, since 1947, there have been a series of Supreme Court decisions that significantly reduced the place of organized religion in the public square. This trend has also reflected a growing religious pluralism and secularization of American society (2006: 13). But no one should take this to mean that religion is on the decline in the USA, it may simply mean that a more universal religion is in the ascendancy. Christians like LaHaye, however, do not rely on any current sociological analysis to make their case for treating the USA as if it were a Christian nation. They go instead to a specific reading of its past.

Evangelicalism's Appeal to America's Past

The reading of the past, however, is controversial to say the least. It appears that neither the Declaration of Independence nor the Constitution affirm *specific* Christian convictions (Smith, 2006:12). The separation of church and state leads to heated debate, because even though it may be argued that nothing in the Declaration is specifically Christian, it is countered that *the cultural context* at the time of writing dictated that the general religious statements must be taken in a Christian way. However, the church and state question becomes most intense in the interpretation of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." Unfortunately, it appears that the amendment on its own cannot resolve the issue of how organized religion and the government should interact (2006: 13).

Thus a reference to history -- again regardless of sociological charting of evolutionary change -- is extremely important in trying to arrive at an understanding of what the relationship of church and state should be legally. Smith offers evidence that strongly supports a Christian ideology. During the nation's first century, Protestant Christianity was its "semiofficial faith." Even over one hundred years into the nation's history, in a unanimous 1892 decision *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*, the Supreme Court said, "Our laws and institutions are based upon and embody the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind...[I]n this sense and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian...[T]his is a Christian nation (Smith, 2006: 13)." Smith concludes that as late as 1925, "few challenged the notion that the United States was a Christian country (2006: 13)."

LaHaye's political ambitions are opportunistic in trying to promote a Christian America in the 21st century with a call to return to its roots. LaHaye says that "the overwhelming majority of the Founding Fathers of this nation were raised in and believed in the Christian faith (LaHaye, 1990: xi)." He claims that America's religious history has been ignored in the nation's texts and that "[u]nless we return to traditional respect for the teaching of religion and morality," (note how the two concepts are regularly linked by LaHaye) "which was advocated by our Founding Fathers and which is essential to maintaining moral sanity in democracy, this country will ultimately destroy itself from within (1990: 1, 10)."

LaHaye's perception is that the Founding Fathers were already aware of the dangers of secularism, so they established the nation on the premise that all men were created equal so that all men should be able to worship God as they please (1990: 22). In putting these concepts side-by-side LaHaye appears to produce an exception to the rule of freedom of religion. *In other words, LaHaye is suggesting that freedom of religion (especially to influence government) should be maintained, but that secular humanism (which is a religion) must be eliminated from America.* LaHaye is perpetuating a serious contradiction since he treats secular humanism as a religion, but also implies that the original intent of the Founding Fathers was to somehow qualify their expressions of equality for all men to exclude secularists. Furthermore, he baldly states: "Our Founding Fathers beat back the attempts of the secularizers 200 years ago. If they were living today, I know whose side they would champion (1990: 29)."

But even with this, LaHaye is not claiming that America was actually founded as a Christian nation. However, he does say that the nation was "so predominantly Christian that the culture evidenced what Schaeffer called 'a Christian consensus' (1990: 33)." Thus, "America is often labeled 'a Christian nation' not because it was founded as such, but because

its Founding Fathers were either Christians or had been influenced throughout their entire lives by the Christian consensus that surrounded them (LaHaye, 1990: 68).”

Thus LaHaye offers a kind of solace to anyone concerned about a hidden political agenda that aims to establish a theocracy. He is not aiming for a theocracy, but “a Christian consensus.” It is difficult to say what the difference would be. Part of his version of the original “Christian consensus” for example was that “many of the states...had constitutional requirements that a man must be a Christian in order to hold public office. In some cases these laws were never repealed, they were merely superseded by the adoption of the new Constitution (1990: 33-34).”

In addition, LaHaye points out that “[n]o constitutional restriction was placed on the church. Instead, all limitations were imposed on the role of government (1990: 61).” He explains Jefferson intended his “wall of separation” to keep the government out of the church, but not the other way around (1990: 61-62). LaHaye seems to suggest that there is simply no other way to interpret the position of the Founding Father. The reason for this is that the very nature of law, which they so clearly advocated, required biblical revelation. LaHaye cites attorney John Whitehead:

The bottom line is that man’s law must have its origin in God’s revelation. Any law that contradicts biblical revelation is illegitimate. Illegitimate law, as the colonists protested to King George, was “of none effect.” After all, it is the Creator who endows man with rights, which the law is to protect. Succinctly put, there is a law, a system of absolutes, derived from biblical principles that transcend man and his institutions. It existed before man and will exist after him (1990: 81).

This philosophy is LaHaye’s reason for believing his political position is derived directly from God. What is more, any government that does not recognize biblical foundations are “of none effect.” For this reason, according to LaHaye, the Founding Fathers unashamedly

favoured Christianity. “Evidently, they didn’t see this act as imposing a religion on people but as a necessary ingredient to make all citizens of the same basic moral commitment (LaHaye, 1990: 96).” Any worries about theocracy is in his view beside the point, it appears that the *true order* is a Christian one, call it what you will.

Alexis de Tocqueville in 1831 describes the America that LaHaye envisions:

There are an innumerable multitude of sects in the United States. All differ in the worship one must render to the Creator, but all agree on the duties of men toward one another. Each sect therefore adores God in its manner, but all sects preach the same morality in the name of God. If it serves man very much as an individual that his religion be true, this is not so for society. Society has nothing to fear nor to hope from the other life; and what is most important to it is not so much that all citizens profess the true religion but that they profess a religion. Besides, all the sects in the United States are within the great Christian unity, and the morality of Christianity is everywhere the same (2000: 278).

America’s Undeniable Evolution

The problem is that this America – to which LaHaye likes to hearken back to and which Tocqueville described, no longer exists. It is certainly possible to continue to speak of “innumerable sects,” but it is no longer possible to say that “all the sects in the United States are within the great Christian unity.” This age has passed.

An actual separation of church and state in America has indeed occurred. LaHaye would certainly acknowledge this, but only to the extent that Christians especially have allowed this to happen. The current state, however, is viewed by LaHaye as a perversion of America’s true identity and is something that can and *should* be corrected. But should it be?

Professor of Law Phillip Hamburger in his book *Separation of Church and State* says that “it is misleading to understand either eighteenth-century religious liberty or the First

Amendment in terms of separation of church and state (2002: 9).” Hamburger also cites historian E.R. Norman who protested that “[t]he separation of church and state in the federal constitution of the United States was not originally intended to disconnect Christianity and public life; it was a device to prevent the supremacy of one sect over another (2002: 9).” Furthermore, as a result of mistaken interpretations of the First Amendment, limits on religious freedom have occurred in ways “never imagined by the late eighteenth-century dissenters who demanded constitutional guarantees of religious liberty (2002: 13).” All this accords with LaHaye’s position.

The important move that Hamburger makes and LaHaye does not, however, is that he acknowledges that “constitutions, for better or for worse, can evolve (2002: 10).” Whilst separation of church and state was clearly supported by secularists and the nonreligious, the movement for separation was additionally supported by Protestant Christians who distrusted claims of authority made by churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church which was growing in influence (2002: 15). The concern was rooted in the fear that certain churches might gain the ascendancy within American government.

American Protestants took themselves out of politics, but eventually desired to get back in. In this regards, Hamburger accurately describes what took place: “The very parties and groups that in the nineteenth century most vigorously condemned church participation in politics simultaneously encouraged a much more direct and individualized pursuit of religious yearnings in this secular arena and, in this way, rechanneled profoundly religious passions and aspirations from Christian churches to egalitarian politics (2002: 16).” LaHaye’s agenda reflects this process. He is retreating on his own tradition’s (Baptist) original position that separated church and state and now advocates re-engagement as religious individuals.

Marsden also chronicles the stance of early conservative Baptists who were patriotic, but who “almost all held dogmatically to the ideal of ‘separation of church and state (2006: 135).” “So long as their cultural dominance was secure,” Marsden explains, “they could afford to be champions of separation of church and state and of ‘the spirituality of the church,’ a popular code phrase for the doctrine, sacred since the days of slavery, that churches should not meddle in political causes (2006: 238).” In fact, LaHaye’s famous co-founder of the Moral Majority, the late Jerry Falwell in his 1965 sermon “Minister and Marchers” proclaimed that the church was simply to “preach the Word” and not to “reform the externals (2006: 238).” Essentially, Falwell and LaHaye changed their minds about church and state, and thus commenced a project that was contrary to their own theological tradition.

Hamburger shows, however, that amidst all the popular perceptions and fears, Americans were the ones who changed their understanding of religious liberty. “Increasingly, Americans conceived their freedom to require an independence from churches...[and to] limit such threats, Americans called for a separation of church and state, and eventually the U.S. Supreme Court gave their new conception of religious liberty the force of law (2002: 17).” That is to say that the most significant reason for the separation was not a conspiratorial movement by secular humanists, but the cultural separation enjoined by Protestant Christians themselves that at times resembled symptoms of paranoia. A form of paranoia is re-emerging, but this time driving these same Christians into the opposite direction, embracing government.

The about-face will not be easy because America has grown accustomed to the current interpretation of their Constitution and the law which backs it. Hamburger says that now “vast numbers of Americans from remarkably diverse backgrounds [perceive] separation to be an ‘American’ constitutional right...[and it has] become established in popular opinion and eventually even in judicial opinions as a fundamental First Amendment freedom (2002: 391).”

For by the middle of the 20th century, “the idea of separation of church and state had become an almost irresistible American dogma (2002: 478).”

Many blame the deist Thomas Jefferson for spoiling the original intent of the Christian framers, but in the spirit of the original interpretation both Jefferson and Madison “argued that the establishment of religion had produced false piety, hypocrisy, self-righteousness, corruption, and tyranny (Smith, 2006: 75).” It may be true that the modern interpretation of separation has gone too far with Justice Hugo L. Black who epitomized it in a landmark Supreme Court case in 1979. Not only did he cite Jefferson, but he added that the “wall must be kept high and impregnable. We could not approach the slightest breach (2006: 78).” But even if these changing interpretations have left something to be desired, Jefferson’s original sense was designed to protect America from religions that claim to speak for all citizens or even those that claim to speak just for all Christians.

LaHaye’s Manichaeism and How *Left Behind* Promotes It

LaHaye, however, enters a Manicheistic world. And while he will never openly admit it, the implication is that in his theology God has dealt insufficiently with evil. It is as if despite the revelation of Christ having accomplished peace, LaHaye must convince Christians that much more needs to be done (not in the sense of Christians doing the will of God, such as, the call to love their neighbour or being faithful in their vocations, but in the sense of providing compensation for what is lacking in a cosmic ordeal). For LaHaye evil has not been defeated in Christ.

Many issues arise from this theology. For one, by assuming a political battle, the implication is that the present government is evil. LaHaye wants to deny this point, but at the

same time, he qualifies it and returns to a dualism where people are either on the side of good or on the side of evil. He says “[g]overnment is not inherently evil; actually it was instituted by God. But government is only as good as the people who comprise it (LaHaye, 1982: 227).” And this is precisely the juncture at which LaHaye’s Manichaeism appears. “Therefore if anti-moral humanists control the government, it will do that which, by traditional moral standards, is evil (1982: 227).” This statement is not an aberration, but typical. LaHaye is clear: “Our generation speaks of humanism versus biblical truth, but it is the same battle between good and evil (LaHaye, 1980: 24).” And – as mentioned above – LaHaye has framed the battle in terms of what is other-worldly: “The battle against Secular Humanism is a cosmic struggle between worldviews (LaHaye and Noebel, 2000: 225).” LaHaye expounds on the cosmic struggle in his *Left Behind* series.

It was never in the original plans of LaHaye’s and Jenkins’ publisher to produce as many *Left Behind* novels as were actually released. The series was going to be only seven books. At the height of their popularity, however, the novels were selling at the rate of 1.5 million copies per *month* (Unger, 2007: 152-153). How could they resist not expanding the series? After the first 12 novels were completed which cover the storylines of the rapture and the seven-year tribulation corresponding to LaHaye’s eschatology, the decision was made to add three “prequels” to the original series: *The Rising* (2005), *The Regime* (2005), and *The Rapture* (2006). These three novels are valuable for knowing LaHaye, because they depict LaHaye’s dualistic Manichean struggle that he claims is already taking place in the contemporary world to which the prequels relate.

The first *prequel* which is the thirteenth novel in the series is -- *The Rising* -- and it is an excellent example of LaHaye’s dualism. It tells the story of the earthly origins of the Antichrist whose name is “Carpathia.” Carpathia’s mother “Marilena” is immediately cast as

the object of both the desire of God and Satan to have her willing discipleship. In the novel, Marilena is exposed to both extremes of belief. She finds herself in the middle of religious rituals of the occult and in another scene receiving the witness of Christian fundamentalism. Even more radically, however, she is presented as having direct contact with both God and Satan. First she is visited by Satan:

“I’m here,” she whispered. Immediately her mind, her soul, her being felt rushed by a spiritual force. She heard no audible voice, but clearly something or someone spoke directly to her heart. The words were cacophonous and dizzying, yet the ones she was meant to hear, she believed, were impressed deeply upon her, and it was as if she knew them instinctively. “I love you with an everlasting love. I have chosen you as a vessel. You will conceive in due time. Your gestation will be easy but troubling, as your child will not move. You shall bear a son, and his name shall be called “victory of the people (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2005b: 105).”

The dualism is heightened by the deliberate similarities to the sacred Annunciation from Gabriel – speaking for God – to the Virgin. The creative license in *Left Behind* is not only disturbing in relating a sacred event to a similar presentation involving the devil, but it fosters the state of affairs of warring opposites in *Left Behind* theology. Later that day – in the middle of the night – the opportunity for God comes:

Marilena had rarely had trouble sleeping, but in the wee hours – her bedside clock projecting 2:15 AM in faint red numerals – her eyes popped open. She felt immediately wide-awake and determined not to disturb Sorin, whose noisy breathing told her he was sound asleep. She carefully removed the covers and swung her feet out, sitting on the edge of the bed. What was this? Was she to pray again? No, this was different. Something or someone was again trying to communicate with her, but she felt a deep impression that it was not the one with whom she had conversed earlier. Marilena rested her elbows on her knees and her head in her hands. But when whoever or whatever this was began to communicate with her spirit, she had to stand. “I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.” ... “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” I’m crazy, Marilena decided. I have totally lost my mind. It’s megalomania. Only someone thoroughly insane would believe God and Lucifer are competing for her soul (2005b: 107-108).

The result of the spiritual encounters bear out in Marilena's interaction with the culture. This is seen especially in her attempt to raise Carpathia. She chooses Luciferianism at first and is fairly successful in teaching her son, but then begins to see the corruptible signs of the dark side. For example, there is an intense scene of the 9-year old future Antichrist displaying raging rebellion and disrespect towards his mother to the point of biting her forearm and drawing blood (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2005b: 224-228). Marilena had become so enraged that she was furious enough to kill her son. As Carpathia continues to grow and becomes 12, he earns the distinct honour of becoming the president of the international *Young Humanists*. For this achievement he is featured in *TIME* magazine (2005b: 337).

The obvious intersection between evil and humanism has already been made, but LaHaye is also targeting specific sources of humanism in U.S. culture. Corresponding to his mentioning *TIME* magazine in his fictional work above, LaHaye warns his readership in his nonfiction work *The Hidden Censors: TIME* magazine he says is among the most liberal/humanist media outlets (LaHaye, 1984: 41). If evangelicals even allow a partial correspondence between these novels and contemporary American culture, they will be that much more adapt to view culture as the arena of a spiritual war. The first *Left Behind* prequel shows Carpathia setting his signs upon political office and in preparation for his lofty goals he enters into a trance-like state in which he experiences a 40-day wilderness encounter with the devil. Once again, in mimicking what is sacred in Holy Scripture, the *Left Behind* authors express their dualism. In this mockery of Christ's wilderness scene, Carpathia *accepts* the temptations and in every case becomes more convinced of his power. His next step is to take this power to the political realm (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2005b: 360, 376-379).

The second prequel and fourteenth novel, *The Regime*, follows suit by showing the ascendancy of the side of good, especially through the depiction of what appears to be an

evangelical congregation (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2005a: 10) and the conversion process of an ostensibly fundamentalist wife seeking a Christian attitude toward her unbelieving husband (2005a: 45). The second prequel, however, takes the analysis to another level as the book incorporates the typical pretribulational view that Islam is the arch-enemy of God's chosen people Israel. The Manichean struggle extends into the world religions. A protagonist converted to Christianity tells her Islamic husband, "Jesus precedes your holy writings...He said Himself that He was the way, the truth, and the life and that no one can come to God except through Him. If you don't believe that, don't say that He is compatible with Islam (2005a: 359)." With that, the personal conflict between Islam and Christianity is expanded through the mentioning of Russia and their implied animosity towards Israel (2005a: 379). The dualism is pervasive.

The last prequel and fifteenth novel in the series, *The Rapture* (not to be confused with LaHaye's 2002 non-fiction book nor Lindsey's book of the same title both referenced above), finally compensates for the seeming superiority of the dark powers over the powers of light. During the first two prequels, the dualism presented the Humanist side as ascendant upon the worldly stage. The Christian side was limited to personal relationships, families and the local church. However, the raptured Christians prevail in this anti-climactic attempt to describe heaven in literalistic fashion. The Christians are assembled so that each one may stand before the heavenly throne to receive their crowns and most of those described are representative of LaHaye's evangelical tradition (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2006: 255-257, 276, 287-288 & 294-296).

It is made clear who the winners of the cosmic battle will be; the inference seems to be that the reader should carefully consider their allegiances. At the end of the book, LaHaye provides a personal message that does not invite personal salvation, but instead reinforces the

threat of Satan and the signs of his work. The conflict in this way transfers from the fictional story into the reader's life. "Jesus called Satan 'a liar' and 'a deceiver,' so we can expect him to '[sow] discord in a family' and confuse those who are seeking the truth (Proverbs 6:19) (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2006: 348)." The very last point, however, is on the coming tribulation (2006: 351). War is coming and while believing he is on the side of God, LaHaye has secured his position of power.

"Prophecy" and the War That Must Occur

After Tim LaHaye started Moral Majority with Falwell in 1979, the national organization that would sway millions of voters was born. Another leader in the movement Paul Weyrich cannot say enough about LaHaye: "Without [LaHaye], what we call the religious right would not have developed the way it did, and as quickly as it did (Dreyfuss, 2004: online)." After helping Falwell, LaHaye moved on to co-found the powerful Council for National Policy in 1981 and forged relationships with right-wing billionaires to support the cause of the fusion of the religious and political conservatives. As Lindsay says groups like CNP "facilitate interaction between evangelical leaders and conservative political leaders who are also evangelical. This is important for building an elite network (2007: 60)." Larry Eskridge of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelic describes LaHaye's importance, "No one individual has played a more central organizing role in the religious right than Tim LaHaye (Dreyfuss, 2004: online)."

After the formation of CNP, he was fully behind the Reagan administration and through his American Coalition for Traditional Values became "a pivotal factor in the 1984 election, registering Christian conservative voters through 'pastor representatives' in all 435 congressional districts (2004: online)." Reagan would serve another four years as president.

Reagan's momentum helped another republican, George H.W. Bush, serve from 1988 to 1992. During Bill Clinton's run as the democratic president, however, LaHaye did not rest. His work helped strengthen a republican congress and after CNP stood against Bill Clinton as a strong supporter of his impeachment, LaHaye would go on to play a significant role in George W. Bush's future presidency.

While the future president Bush was preparing for his campaign he met with a gathering of Christian Right leaders who had formed a group called the Committee to Restore American Values, an ad hoc group under the auspices of the Madison Project that raises money for conservative candidates. It should come as no surprise to learn that LaHaye himself was a chairman of the committee. At the time of the meeting, George W. Bush's status as one worthy to represent Christian conservatives in the White House was still uncertain among evangelicals and that day, LaHaye evidently posed a gamut of questions to the prospective republican leader. "He presented Bush with a lengthy questionnaire on issues such as abortion, judicial appointments, education, religious freedom, gun control and the Middle East. What the preacher thought of Bush's answers would largely determine whether the Christian right would throw its muscle behind the Texas governor. ...When the meeting with Bush ended, LaHaye gave the candidate his seal of approval (Dreyfuss, 2004: online)." Bush told this same group how Jesus came "into his heart" after his 1985 encounter with Bill Graham in Kennebunkport. Two weeks later, Bush travelled to San Antonio, Texas to address LaHaye's Council for National Policy (Unger, 2007: 170-171).

Some have tried to downplay LaHaye's influence. Writing for the *Boston Globe*, Professor Alan Jacobs – who actually teaches at an Evangelical College – says that LaHaye's influence upon the presidency is negligible because the "premillennialists view that human societies will *not* exhibit moral progress (Jacobs, 2004: online)." Jacobs infers that

dispensationalists are politically irrelevant. In offering this assessment, this evangelical professor makes a surprising blunder. Timothy Weber knows better. While the dispensationalists have indeed demonstrated a “strong fatalism about civilization’s decline,” Weber explains, “[they also possess] a fierce resolve to reform it (Weber, 2004: 45-46).” Weber says, “Believing that Jesus could come at any time was not the same as believing that he would arrive on a particular day...dispensationalists learned to live with a new sense of urgency about present tasks (2004: 47).”

As evangelicalism advanced, even Paul Boyer has changed his views and would confirm Weber’s claim. At first, Boyer saw premillennialism’s political influence as “subterranean” and very indirect (Weber, 2004: 203). But moving into the 21st century and continuing to watch conservative evangelicalism’s growing influence, Boyer says, “Without close attention to the prophetic scenario embraced by millions of American citizens, the current political climate in the United States cannot be fully understood (Boyer, 2003: online).” Boyer is not exaggerating when he describes the numbers of American citizens involved: “Abundant evidence makes clear that millions of Americans – upwards of 40 percent, according to some widely publicized national polls – do, indeed, believe that Bible prophecies detail a specific sequence of end-time events (2003: online).” Close attention is also prudent, because (as Weber points out) when Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980, “premillennialists found themselves with unprecedented access to power (2004: 200).” This probably applies more to LaHaye than anyone else.

The results of this rise to power translate into the message of God’s love and mercy being replaced with themes of conflict. As the law accuses and condemns, his outlook, which embraces a law-emphasis, spawns accusation and condemnation. When this basic approach is combined with great power, the results can be disastrous. Marsden notes that early leaders of

American fundamentalism “emerged to build authoritarian empires (2006: 62).” LaHaye has remained consistent with this pattern. And consider this: the ones leading the authoritarian empire possess a disconcerting attitude. By definition – and here Marsden quotes Richard Ostling – a fundamentalist is “an evangelical who is angry about something (2006: 235).” And it is anger -- especially when combined with great power -- that can lead to people being killed.

As the result of LaHaye’s conservative revolution in the name of Christ, some on the other side of the Christian Right feel as though Christianity in America “has become synonymous with right-wing fanaticism, conservative politics” as if to suggest that Jesus is “pro-rich, pro-war, and pro-American (Wakefield, 2006: 1-2).” Wakefield quotes Joseph Hough Jr., former dean and professor of ethics at Vanderbilt University Divinity School: “Public policy is now presented in religious terms. We have the most explosive framing of political discourse in the history of this country – brilliantly done, ruthlessly done – so that suddenly a man’s qualification for office doesn’t have anything to do with his program unless it conforms to the Religious right’s moral issues (2006: 11-12).” And political science professor Kenneth Wald of the University of Florida says, “The Religious Right has been institutionalized within the Republican Party (Wakefield, 2006: 12).” In the midst of this institutionalization, the evangelicals are speaking into the ears of the politicians.

Similarly the *Left Behind* books also serve as a public symbol of approval upon the president’s foreign policy in the Middle East – featuring the invasion of Iraq – and presume that the military action is following biblical prophecy. Thus the president’s policies are part of the divine plan (2006: 17). In this context, LaHaye is consistent with other leading evangelicals such as his late colleague Jerry Falwell who said, “God is Pro-war (2006: 25).”

This attitude infiltrated the battlefield. “Army Lt. General William ‘Jerry’ Boykin made headlines in 2003 when he said he believed America was engaged in a holy war as a ‘Christian nation’ battling Satan. Adversaries can be defeated, he said, ‘only if we come against them in the name of Jesus (Briggs and Williams, 2007: online).’” Boykin went on to become the United States deputy undersecretary of defence (2007: online). During this same time period, the president had intelligence generating mounting concern about the “existential threat to the United States from a nuclear Iran (Blumenthal, 2007: online).”

LaHaye holds a troubling correspondence to these events in the Middle East. Liberal observer Esther Kaplan in analyzing *Left Behind* has said, “Bush’s Middle East policy perfectly aligns with the religious world-view of LaHaye and his millions of readers (Phillips, 2006: 253).” Phillips sees disturbing parallels that includes global tribulation of good versus evil, the falsity of the United Nations, the complicity of the French and the building of the second Babylon in Iraq (2006: 253).

When LaHaye describes the fictional *Left Behind* series he admits that the goal of the work includes helping people realize that the Bible describes actual events. He explained in a CNN interview, “I learned something from the author of ‘Roots’. Years ago, he called his fiction ‘faction’. Well, what we’re doing is we’re putting prophecy in through the vehicle of fiction. And it grabs the minds of people and has driven many people back to the Book of Revelation and other books in the Bible to read, and then they’re surprised: ‘Oh, it really says that (Beck, 2007: online).’”

In this same interview, LaHaye maintains that prophecy is being fulfilled by the military alliance between Russia and Iran. The Ayatollah Khomeini, Iranian Religious Leader, is featured on a video clip during the interview as saying: “If the Russians are at all smart,

they should help us, because they know that the Americans are in a conflict with them, and that the Americans dealt them the most severe blow, which led to the collapse of the USSR (2007: online).” Added to this is the announced claim of the president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who is telling people that he believes the end of the world is imminent and that the Islamic messiah – known as the Twelfth Imam – will destroy Israel the little Satan and the U.S. the great Satan. LaHaye goes on to explain that the prophecies in Ezekiel do indeed implicate Iran as the enemy that will, that must, start the next major war and the final chapter of the end will occur probably in the lifetime of the interviewer (Glenn Beck who was born in 1964) and possibly occur in LaHaye’s lifetime (Tim LaHaye was born in 1926) (2007: online).

In LaHaye’s theological and political system -- characterized by prophetic prediction - war is inevitable. As a result of taking future war for granted, fear is added to his law-emphasis which hides the soteriological confession that Christ took upon Himself our judgment. Christianity is thereby robbed of her message that condemnation has been eliminated through Christ. Judgment is still future and in LaHaye’s system that judgment will be meted out through the wars God has determined must occur. And again, LaHaye is clearly saying that one of these wars is going to happen relatively soon.

In his latest prophetic-political work *Global Warning: Are We on the Brink of World War III?* written with Ed Hindson, LaHaye states that “even a third world war could be right around the corner (2007: 26).” The anticipation is feverish: “It is entirely possible that Israel or the United States will be brought to the place where they must use nuclear capabilities against a rearmed Iraq in the future (2007: 81).” Furthermore, “nuclear war is inevitable (2007: 84).” And this inevitability is tied to the fact that Russia (ancient Magog) and Iran

(ancient Persia) will try to annihilate Israel (2007: 131). Thus “[t]he unstable situation in Iraq, the animosity of Iran, and the general tenor of Islamic extremism all point to the possibility of a major war between Israel and Iran and her allies in the near future (2007: 141).” LaHaye ends his predictions towards the end of the book with the fact that he believes that it is “only a matter of time before our planet will experience the most devastating catastrophes imaginable (2007: 222).”

He tries, however, to couch his predictions in what he sees as the gospel and good news: the terrible judgment is not to convey that God is “some celestial ogre who delights in inflicting catastrophe, but a loving Lord who does everything he can to help us *escape* divine judgment (LaHaye, 2002b: 6).” The coming war is God’s way of waking people up from complacency and to belief in a truly merciful God willing to save. This leads Barbara Rossing to posit that the “ultimate *Left Behind* message” is this: “God so loved the world that He sent World War Three (Phillips, 2006: 254).”

All of this is why fundamentalist authors have the general reputation -- according to Michael Lienesch -- of betraying a “surprising callousness about the loss of life...in a nuclear war (1993: 207).” Religious author Lynne Bundesen worked with many conservative spiritual leaders in the 1990s while managing a major network of religious websites. She said, “I’ve never heard any one of these ministers quote the beatitudes or any of the healing statements of Jesus. Nor to love thy neighbor as thyself. Their belief is violent and drenched with blood. Jesus Christ as a five-star general (Briggs and Williams, 2007: online).” The late Grace Halsell, a distinguished journalist and Green Honors Chair Professor of Journalism at Texas Christian University offered a diagnosis of the situation in her 1999 book *Forcing God’s*

Hand. Bundesen summarizes Halsell's thesis: "The end time Christians are not content to wait for the apocalypse to happen, they want to bring it on (2007: online)."

Weber agrees with this extraordinary understanding. For example, without a restored Israel, none of the other highlights of biblical prophecy may occur (2004: 155). Therefore the Christian Right has occupied itself with ensuring that Israel receives full political support. A 1952 edition of the *King's Business* – a dispensationalist periodical – summarized their position which has not changed but has only been expressed more adamantly: "Next in order for Israel will be the complete jurisdiction over Jerusalem, the destruction of the Mosque of Omar [i.e., the Dome of the Rock], the building of a great temple and the re-establishment of their ancient worship (2004: 174)."

In addition, Boyer adds that the most hard-line and expansionist Israelis have welcomed the Christian Right's support. They know that the dispensationalist give them American opposition against any scaling back of Jewish settlements in the West Bank or Gaza, "since those areas lie well within God's grant to Abraham, recorded in Genesis 15:18, of all of the land from 'the river of Egypt' to the Euphrates (Boyer, 2003: online)." And while the succession of Israeli prime ministers do not accept the end-theology in and of itself, they know that they can utilize them politically and so they do (Briggs and Williams, 2007: online).

In all of this, Weber warns that "dispensationalists are currently supporting some of the most dangerous elements in Israeli society (2004: 249-250)." They do it because in this way they understand that they are faithfully supporting the fruition of biblical prophecy. As a result, evangelicals are willing to aggravate the most sensitive issues between Jews and

Muslims even at the risk of starting a war. After all, it has been prophesied that war is coming (their exegetical basis of which we considered in chapter 2).

To step back, we see three concerning aspects converging: 1) the political conservatives using the religious right for Middle Eastern foreign policy that may be motivated by anything from oil reserves to democratic freedom; 2) the Christian Right using their influence to say that war is inevitable; and 3) the Israeli government essentially encouraging anything and everything coming from the West to help against their Islamic enemies. This is what some political analysts describe as a “perfect storm that has blown neoconservative ideology together with the end-time movement (Briggs and Williams, 2007: online).”

At the same time, when LaHaye’s theology is considered at the popular level and even at the more scholarly level, it is a common mistake to confuse the predictions of war produced by premillennial dispensationalism, especially in its pretribulational form represented by LaHaye. As a result, most people do not realize the kind of foreign policy pressure that is applied by religious conservatives upon their political counterparts not for far-off goals, but for the immediate and delicate situation between the United States and Middle East (which of course affects the rest of the world) today. For example, *New York Times* bestselling author Craig Unger in his book *The Fall of the House of Bush* describes those who agree with LaHaye as viewing the events of Armageddon as “imminent” and this is the only predicted war Unger mentions (2007: 18). Unger appears unaware, however, that a war involving Iran must take place *before* Armageddon in LaHaye’s end-time economy.

There are actually a total of *three* future wars predicted as apocalyptic imagery is turned into LaHaye’s literalistic “prophecy” of historical events. The first future war is the

Gog and Magog massive invasion upon Israel; the second future war is the more-commonly known Armageddon; and the third future war is the Final Revolt. It is the first war, however, that we should be worried about.

War is one of the favourite themes -- among other law themes -- of LaHaye's theology. In April of 2008 Tim LaHaye made a presentation on Biblical eschatology and his theories on "prophecy." He expressed an unscripted comment about the current war in Iraq. He said "[p]ersonally, I believe we [referring to the American military occupation in Iraq] are in *Babylon* right now [emphasis mine] (2008: April 13)." In respect to LaHaye's theology, this was a very significant thing to say.

In his *Left Behind* series the Antichrist -- who becomes known after the rapture and during the tribulation period -- makes his headquarters in the area of modern-day Baghdad the capital city of Iraq called "Babylon." All of this is in accord with what LaHaye considers to be consistent with biblical and prophetic pre-determination.

Consequently, LaHaye was actually stating at the live conference that significant end-time events have been unfolding before our eyes in Iraq and through such a comment was suggesting that the end times are upon us. That is, the ground work for the future epicentre of the coming satanic presence is being prepared by the American occupation in Iraq. Being so close to war and the antichrist would seem alarming to say the least, but in the mind of the premillennial dispensationalist unfolding prophecy is a control mechanism for apocalyptic anxiety. However, the single most startling aspect to all of this is that war itself -- in this case the Iraq War -- is *good* because it represents the fulfilment of God's plan. Such circumstances are dangerous to say the least. LaHaye's outlook is designed to actually form the social

mindset to not only expect war, but to be supportive of God's unfolding prophetic scenario that promotes war.

As we have said, this kind of political influence is represented in the *Left Behind* series now in the hands of millions of Americans. As *TIME* reporter Nancy Gibbs wrote in response to the influence of *Left Behind*, "A TIME/CNN poll finds that more than one-third of Americans say they are paying more attention now to how the news might relate to the end of the world, and have talked about what the Bible has to say on the subject (2002: 42)." The *Left Behind* novels are more than a spiritual guide, but also serve as a political agenda (this Gibbs draws from some personal interviews) (2002: 43). LaHaye has been crystallizing the agenda in his political organizations, his books and innumerable speaking tours: war in Iraq -- both presently and in the future -- is according to God's plan. But how much of this "plan" is really LaHaye's pursuit of what Weber describes as the dispensationalist pursuit of "turning their predictions into self-fulfilling prophecies (2004: 15)."??

We have now seen that LaHaye's tradition is similar to other millenarian movements that anticipated the end and seemed to perpetuate anxiety. A trade-mark of such sub-cultures is to abuse the Bible in such a way as to take the apocalyptic texts to "prove" that theirs is the generation of the end. LaHaye's hermeneutic is also designed to give modern-day pretribulationists assurance that they are being faithful to God by maintaining their high-standard of taking the Bible "literally" and retaining the biblical distinctiveness of Israel. The survey shows that apocalyptic anxiety occurs in the lives of American Evangelicals because they sense a threat to their way of living in a country losing her Christian identity. The resultant apocalyptic anxiety must be expressed and we have seen that it is in political activism that an outlet has been found. This outlet, however, is truly dangerous to the church,

the culture, and the world. Ironically, such activism which ultimately promotes an end-time war probably increases apocalyptic anxiety.

How does the true believer cope with these anxiety-causing revelations? The answer is to find a way of being identified with those who have been chosen and among the elect; those who are among the modern-day apocalyptic people. Such an identity, however, can only come through a unique view of the Christian life. It is to this unique approach to sanctification that we now turn.

CHAPTER 6: LAHAYE AND CHRISTIAN LIFE

The Source of the Christian Life: Revisiting St. Augustine and Pelagius

LaHaye's version of the Christian life is a modern-day manifestation of some old problems confronting historic Christendom, especially as seen in St. Augustine's refutation against Pelagius. In St. Augustine's *On Nature and Grace*, we know that Pelagius wrote, "that before all other things we have to inquire what sin is, -- some substance, or wholly a name without substance, whereby is expressed not a thing, not an existence, not some sort of a body, but the doing of a wrongful deed (Schaff, P. 1995b: 127)." Even though sin is not "substantive," biblical theology teaches that it does, however, permeate our being. Pelagius, therefore, presents an either-or fallacy: sin is either substantive or not substantive. If it is not substantive, then it is reduced to a moral choice.

In this case, and at least from a theoretical perspective, man has the ability to avoid sinning (even though Pelagius says that it is not in our power to avoid sin) (1995b: 140). For Pelagius, however, it is still theoretically possible to avoid sinning. In this context, the Bishop of Hippo cites Scripture, "Then Christ died in vain (1995b: 122)." In other words, the tendency of Pelagius was to grant human will too much spiritual ability and credit.

St. Augustine further attacks the Pelagian position in *A Treatise on the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin*. The reason Pelagius is able to negotiate the human will and the grace of God in the way he does is due to the categories in which he understands human beings. St. Augustine describes the Pelagian system, in which Pelagius "posits and distinguishes three faculties, by which he says God's commandments are fulfilled, -- *capacity*, *volition*, and *action*...(1995b: 218)." In the Pelagian system, however, it is only "capacity"

that is from God and attributed to God's grace, while volition and action St. Augustine explains "he assigns them to us so strictly as to contend that they proceed simply from ourselves. In short...God's grace has nothing to do with assisting those two faculties...(Schaff, P. 1995b: 218)." That is, in regards to volition which Pelagius defines as man's ability to will to be righteous and in regards to action which Pelagius defines as man's ability in which he actually is righteous, man is able to be righteous apart from the grace of God (1995b: 218). St. Augustine seeks to correct Pelagius by citing Philippians 2:13 (ESV): "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." The Bishop of Hippo emphasized the Greek "both to will and to operate (1995b: 219)."

In *On Grace and Free Will* St. Augustine attempts a better explanation in respect to the relationship between free will and grace. St. Augustine writes, "There is, however, always within us free will, -- but it is not always good; for it is either free from righteousness when it serves sin, -- and then it is evil, -- or else it is free from sin when it serves righteousness, -- and then it is good (1995b: 456)." He continues to address the final Pelagian objection: "The Pelagians think that they know something great when they assert that 'God would not command what He knew could not be done by man.'" St. Augustine, however, suggests: "But God commands some things which we cannot do, in order that we may know what we ought to ask of Him (1995b: 457)." Only by God's grace does "ought to" become "can." Finally, St. Augustine writes, "It is certain that it is we that *will* when we will, but it is He who makes us will what is good (1995b: 457)."

The outcome of this exchange is that while Pelagius emphasized human will, St. Augustine emphasized our dependence upon God to do anything good. A thousand years later, Luther demonstrated that the theology of the Reformation sided with St. Augustine not Pelagius with respect to human capacity to act on his own:

So man's will is like a beast standing between two riders. If God rides, it wills and goes where God wills: as the Psalm says, 'I am become as a beast before thee, and I am ever with thee' (Ps. 73:22-3). If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run, or which it will seek; but the riders themselves fight to decide who shall have and hold it (1957: 103-104).

LaHaye Forsakes Christian Tradition and Exemplifies American Trends

LaHaye, however, abandons the early Christian church and Reformation positions and has adapted his theology to certain American trends. These trends have themselves been influenced by particular theologies. For example, while Calvinism was still predominant in American Christianity after the time of Jonathan Edwards [1703-1758], the late 1700's experienced a significant shift into revivalism. This "Second Great Awakening" altered the Calvinistic "emphasis [to one that was] clearly on man's end of the bargain (Senkbeil, 1989: 23)." America experienced a revival of the Remonstrance Movement and the theology of its chief spokesman Jacobus Arminius, whom the Canons of Dort sought to correct in 1619 (1989: 23).

By the late 1700's and early 1800's, emphasis on the human will became increasingly dominant as is demonstrated by the influential work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion*. Synergistic emphases were now commonplace. Schleiermacher wrote, "Man is born with the religious capacity as with every other (1958: 124)." And Schleiermacher made clear to what extent this is true: "It is not the master [Jesus Christ] that makes disciples, but he is their master because of their choice (1958: 123)."

LaHaye is true to this relatively recent revivalist-fundamentalist tradition. Marsden explains that after Jonathan Edwards, "[f]ree will was virtually an American dogma; indeed it was practically an unassailable article of faith for most of Western culture (2006: 99)."

Marsden describes the ongoing development of revivalism into fundamentalism. American fundamentalist B.B. Warfield co-authored a famous 1881 defence of the “inerrancy” of Scripture and also developed the position that reason was necessary to faith as light is to photography. Now, human choice leading to faith was facilitated by reasonableness and rational appeal. As Marsden points out, “[i]n the traditions of Augustine, Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards the Fall was often regarded as having so blinded the human intellect that natural knowledge of God had been suppressed and therefore no one could have true understanding without receiving the eyes of faith (2006: 115).”

Now, through fundamentalism, the doctrine of Christian conversion itself has changed. It is conveniently adapted to an American cultural philosophy which stresses freedom, independence and the other “inalienable” rights. LaHaye exploits the situation by making his version of Christianity conform to American culture. In doing so, it makes his writings more American and certainly more popular.

Conflicting Themes within LaHaye’s Conversion Theology

Still LaHaye’s theology is not without its problems as evidenced by its conflicting themes. The ancient theological controversy is still present, for he writes, “there is no possible way for us to save ourselves or even contribute the tiniest measure of grace to our salvation (LaHaye, 1991: 99).” In the *Power of the Cross* LaHaye clearly opposes synergism to echoes of divine monergism. He says that salvation “is not a matter of Jesus plus my own efforts. It is solely Jesus (1998a: 55)!” LaHaye emphasizes what is evidently consistent with Augustine and the Reformers: “Men and women can do nothing for their salvation. It is all of grace, the gift of God through the finished work of Christ on the cross (1998a: 55).” Furthermore, in his landmark *Left Behind* novel he says plainly, “...we can’t save ourselves (LaHaye and Jenkins,

1995: 200).” In fact, in the seventh novel of *Left Behind* LaHaye makes a theological statement that would seem to make his position clear once and for all as he states that conversion is “always a miracle (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2000a: 258).”

Such comments, however, are qualified when it comes to presenting the rest of his theology on conversion. At the other end of the spectrum in his conversion theology, he clearly presents another view. While giving credit to God alone as the source of our salvation, LaHaye also states that “the major purpose of our conscience in the first place [is] to bring us to God (LaHaye, 1978a: 46).” It becomes clear that he shares the same optimism about human nature as Pelagius did. Notice what preparations are to be made that lead to salvation: “Whenever a person humbles himself, acknowledges his sin to God, and repents of his selfish spirit, he can be *born again, converted, or saved*. These are synonymous terms (LaHaye, 1982: 246).” Conversion takes place after the human conscience brings us to God and only after the proper steps are taken.

LaHaye certainly repeats the modern evangelical shibboleth that emphasizes human will. For example, LaHaye says, “They rejected Him, as He said, because of their *will*. Their problem was not mind, reason, evidence, or facts; it was ‘will.’...In the final analysis, it always comes down to a matter of the will (LaHaye, 1996: 291).” At this point, he is consistent with traditional theology in describing the cause for reprobation, but he does not stop there. For LaHaye, human will is also the cause for salvation. Indeed, LaHaye explains that “[t]he best bargain you can ever make is to give your life to God (LaHaye and Halliday, 2002: 246).” With this incentive, LaHaye describes the ease of salvation: “Salvation is the easiest thing in the world to obtain for those who willingly turn from themselves and say, ‘Oh, God, I need you!’ Yet that’s just the sticking point for some of us (2002: 247).” LaHaye, however, is emphatic about what must be done: “Salvation is always like that; God has given

us the freedom to exercise our wills to believe in God or to reject Him. The choice is always left to us (LaHaye, 1996: 80).”

LaHaye Betrays His Own Warnings against Aquinas and Augustine

A comparison of the sets of statements about salvation -- the ones that say “God’s gift” and the others that say “our choice” -- seems to reveal a basic contradiction, but upon further analysis of LaHaye’s writings the tension appears intentional. In a more recent work in which he depicts a fictional elaboration on Mark’s Gospel, he puts these words into the mouth of his fictional St. Barnabas one of the first leaders of the church, evangelist and co-worker with St. Paul (here St. Barnabas addresses St. Mark):

And yet he [St. Paul] has always been a deep thinker, Mark. Some would question whether those who believe that anything must be added to salvation by faith through grace alone are even true believers. I, for one, am convinced that true believers can honestly disagree on such matters (LaHaye and Jenkins, *The Jesus Chronicles*, 2007b: 158).

Evidently, this fictional Barnabas is closer to the actual Tim LaHaye in tolerating the mutually exclusive positions. There are reasons for this that may be traced through LaHaye’s overall theological system. In his developed theology on Christian conversion, LaHaye appears to contradict his own warnings against two well known positions in his collective writings: his warning against Aquinas and his warning against Augustine.

In the book *Mind Siege*, LaHaye attributes the origins of humanism to the Greek philosophers, but then states that “one of the most important thinkers to lay the foundation for modern humanism was...Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) (LaHaye and Noebel, 2000: 107).” Like his accusations against St. Augustine considered above (chapter 3, p. 89f.), LaHaye similarly attacks Aquinas: “It is an irony of history that a man sainted by his church was the one responsible for reviving an almost dead philosophy, which has become the most

dangerous religion in the world [i.e. secular humanism] (2000:108).” This time we will not examine the substance of the accusation, but rather focus on the fact that LaHaye is adamant in maintaining that heretical theology has moorings to Greek philosophy. For example, he follows Schaeffer’s diagnosis that Aquinas who brought secular humanism into the church relied especially upon Aristotle (LaHaye and Noebel, 2000: 107).

In like fashion, LaHaye warns against St. Augustine. To review, LaHaye claims that Augustine was influenced by a tradition of “dangerous philosophy” and “the Greek emphasis in Platonic philosophy (LaHaye, 1999: 336).” As a result, LaHaye accuses Augustine of “spiritualizing the Scriptures (1999: 336).” Once again, as seen with his critique of Aquinas, the culprit for theological contamination was Greek philosophy. As we shall see, these warnings make LaHaye’s conversion theology all the more remarkable.

LaHaye Joins Hippocrates to Christian Theology

LaHaye contradicts his own warnings against Greek influence in Christendom by intentionally incorporating an ancient Greek paradigm into his theology. His syncretism influences his interpretation of Scripture. As a result, he offers an explanation for human potential that is completely unique even within evangelical circles. LaHaye attempts to justify his version of a Pelagian synergism by connecting his theology to Hippocrates and the Hippocratic idea of temperament or character expressed in the Hippocratic treatises written between 430 and 330 B.C. Consequently, LaHaye appears as his own Aquinas by “reviving an almost dead philosophy” and he appears as his own Augustine with a foreign interpretive lens cast upon Scripture somewhat analogous to Augustine’s so-called “spiritualizing” of the text (though in LaHaye’s case it might be called “psychologising”).

It will be helpful to review some of the basic tenets of Hippocratic thought that so inspired LaHaye. LaHaye credits Hippocrates as having “recognized temperamental differences in people and offered a theory to account for these differences (LaHaye, 1971: 9).” He is of course correct in this. In the Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, Places* physical geographical and climactic factors are said to affect character.

Everything grows much bigger and finer in Asia, and the nature of the land is tamer, while the character of the inhabitants is milder and less passionate. The reason for this is the equable blending of the climate, for it lies in the midst of the sunrise facing the dawn. It is thus removed from extremes of heat and cold (Lloyd, 1950: 159).

Hippocrates (or the author associated with him) states furthermore:

Some men’s characters resemble well-wooded and watered mountains, others a thin and waterless soil, others plain or dry bare earth. Climates differ and cause differences in character; the greater the variations in climate, so much the greater will be differences in character (1950: 161).

In this hypothesis environmental factors impact physique, temperament and disposition (1950: 168). LaHaye writes about personally witnessing this phenomenon while on a missionary tour in Mexico. He was particularly impressed with the Sapotaco Indians and comes to this conclusion: “[Their] skills were learned, but the adaptability and desire to learn them were so universal throughout the tribe that it could only be an inherited trait (LaHaye, 1966b: 7).” While there seems to be little profundity in such a statement, it reveals how impressed LaHaye became with the idea of inherited traits. His theology would never be the same.

In the Hippocratic treatise *Sacred Disease* the idea is further developed. In this elaboration, we see four categories of characters related to heredity:

Like other diseases it is hereditary. If a phlegmatic child is born of a phlegmatic parent, a bilious child of a bilious parent, a consumptive child of a consumptive parent and a splenetic child of a splenetic parent, why should the children of a father or mother who is afflicted with this disease not suffer similarly (Lloyd, 1950: 240-241)?

The Hippocratic hypothesis further evolves in the treatise *On the Nature of Man*. The inherited temperaments are attributed to four “humours” or bodily fluids: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile (Lloyd, 1950: 26). The Hippocratic writer says simply, “The human body contains blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile...Health is primarily that state in which these constituent substances are in the correct proportion to each other...(1950: 262).” While this medical view is ancient, LaHaye believes that his theory for Christian living that incorporates it is novel. He says, “My contribution comes in applying these time-honored classifications so every individual can examine himself, analyze both his strengths and weaknesses, and then seek the Holy Spirit’s cure for those tendencies that keep him from being usable by God (LaHaye, 1971: 8).” It is his *application* of the ancient medicine that is new: “I started to develop the concept that there is a divine strength for every human weakness through the filling of the Holy Spirit (1971: 14).”

LaHaye has therefore conducted an interchange between Hippocratic and biblical terminology. LaHaye presents his unique view that “temperament” is synonymous with the biblical “natural man,” “the flesh,” “the old man,” and “corruptible flesh (LaHaye, 1966b: 5).” Almost twenty years later he states the same thing: “[Your inherited temperament] is what the Bible means when it speaks of ‘the flesh’ or ‘nature’ or ‘natural man (LaHaye, 1984c: 85).” Less than a decade later, however, LaHaye tempered his position by forsaking a one-for-one correspondence and states that temperament is “part” of human nature (LaHaye, 1991: 35). Still, for LaHaye temperament is “the combination of inborn traits” and these traits

are genetic (LaHaye, 1966b: 5-6). What Scripture seems to describe as a spiritual disease or sinful condition through words like “the sinful nature,” LaHaye explains are concepts that can be traced through biology. The biblical concept has been re-defined by a Hippocratic category.

By marrying his view to Hippocrates with respect to temperament, LaHaye acquires a new-found reason for optimism in the natural condition of man before conversion. LaHaye claims that “each of us has at least ten strengths which we inherited at birth (LaHaye, 1984c: 333).” These temperamental strengths are only enhanced when one considers that LaHaye understands the *imago dei* as a basic “God-awareness (LaHaye and Hindson, 2001: 81).” The ability to manage this God-awareness is directly affected by our natural “strengths” streaming from our temperament. In fact, LaHaye teaches that some temperaments make conversion especially difficult or in other cases another temperament is better able “by nature” to respond to the biblical imperative to be joyful (LaHaye, 1966b: 15 & 25).

LaHaye’s Hybrid Establishes a Modern Pelagianism

Through his respect for natural ability and potential, an ancient Greek hypothesis leads LaHaye to repeat the Pelagian argument. Just as Pelagian stated from *On Grace and Free Will*, “God would not command what He knew could not be done by man,” LaHaye states, “God never makes it impossible for us to keep his commandments (LaHaye, 1966b: 63).” He repeats in another book, “God never commands people to do something that is impossible or is not for their good (LaHaye, 2002a: 94).” LaHaye’s confident assertion misses the Augustinian solution which invites humility.

Lloyd’s introduction to the Hippocratic Writings comments on the Hippocratic personality theory: “The doctrine is nothing if not neat and systematic, and one of the

attractions of such theories is that they are so simple and yet so all-embracing (1950: 26).” LaHaye seems to be aware of this attraction. He states, “During the past fifty years many theories of behavior have been proposed (LaHaye, 1984c: 175).” He goes on to show the similarities of his work with seven other major systems used in the realm of business and psychology (1984c: 176-177). What makes LaHaye’s approach unique is that he joins this self-help interest to Christian life. What LaHaye offers is not only a natural way of responding to the spiritual realm, but it is a system that helps with such pragmatic goals as finding a new job (1984c: 156). In other words, LaHaye has successfully found yet another way of marketing his modern form of Christianity. He has merged it with popular personality theory which in itself represents another strand in American culture.

The merger between Christianity and temperament theory also seems to produce a confident view of spiritual potential and ability. The optimism about human ability through Hippocratic conceptions is a recognisable theological position which effectively re-introduces Pelagian influences. The position created by LaHaye practically allows for a kind of faith *before* conversion. While LaHaye’s theology clearly envisages an exertion of the will prior to an actual conversion, LaHaye also claims that there is a “spiritual side of our nature [which] contains our will” even before conversion (LaHaye, 1974: 82). What is more, when this will is enacted, LaHaye describes this act as “an act of your will by faith (LaHaye and Phillips, 1982: 90).” Thus, what is required for a life of faith or conversion is an act of the will by faith. For all intents and purposes, the theology appears nonsensical.

The contradictions, however, are explained if one takes a Pelagian approach. To reiterate: for Pelagius one aspect of our salvation (namely our capacity) is from God, but the other aspects (namely volition and action) are from us. Indeed, LaHaye in Pelagian fashion presents the means of grace within the person: “you must invite Him into your life. *Only by*

this means can you have your past sins forgiven, your soul saved, and your life indwelt by the Holy Spirit [emphasis mine] (LaHaye, 1966b: 114-115)."

For LaHaye, the will flowing from human temperament is a means of salvation. In this, the Pelagian position has been resuscitated, but it is a position that is welcomed in a country such as the United States that prides itself on freedom of choice. The U.S. is also a country that prides itself on the pursuit of promotion, advancement and competition. These themes are apparent in the next facet of LaHaye's Christian life theology.

The Manufacturing of Pride and Delusion through Stages of Christianity

There is little question that traditional Christianity recognizes the idea of progressive sanctification. Sanctification means "to make holy" and "to set apart." This setting apart is especially pertinent to the Christian in relation to sin itself (negatively in respect to what we are set apart *from*; positively in respect to being set apart *to* God and good works). Indeed, the Bible describes the new life of the Christian in terms of being dead to sin/set free from sin, but alive to God in Christ (Rom 6). A formal definition of sanctification is that which "designates the internal spiritual transformation of the believer or the holiness of life which flows upon justification (Brinsmead, 1980: 14)." The word "progressive" simply implies that a Christian may grow in their God-generated sanctification.

Maturing Sanctification, Not Stages of Sanctification

That is, Christians may mature in their faith. For example, in Hebrews 5:12 we see the biblical distinction between those who teach and those who need to be taught; between those receiving "milk" and those receiving "solid food". In 1st John 2:12-14, the Bible presents three designations: 1) children; 2) young men; and 3) fathers. It is only in the most basic way, however, that anyone may legitimately say that Christianity perpetuates classes or categories

of Christians. Traditional Christian theology considers 1st John 2:12-14 as simply teaching about “spiritual maturity (Bruce, 1970: 58).” If this threefold classification is not describing Christian experience, then it is simply marking classifications according to age (Nicoll, 1961c: 177).

Lenski maintains that the text in 1st John 2 is not even speaking of three classes, but two. He explains that τεκνία is John’s regular way of referring to *all* Christians. He speaks to the older members/fathers to make the point that they are aware of what is truly at stake in the present controversy pertaining to the person of Christ. They have lived long enough to be aware of the full danger. As for the youth, even they – like the fathers – have experienced God’s power over the evil one. Lenski says, “We should not spiritualize [the text to] refer the word to immature Christians, whether these are old or young in years...(1966: 418-419).”

In other words, even if categories or classes of Christians *are* taught, it is simply to recognize the opportunity for growing experience and maturation. Even at that, however, the distinctions are not great: even fathers and youth in Christ share a common assurance of victory over evil. If more was to be made of classifications of Christians then occasions for pride would abound and one of the most important virtues of the Christian faith, namely humility, would be compromised.

The Sign of Sanctification: The Internal Conflict

Traditional Christianity has some fascinating things to say about the signs of increasing maturity in the faith and the progress of sanctification. Whereas reason might dictate that those who are more mature would have less need to struggle against sin, there is much in the history of Christendom that suggests just the opposite. For one, there is the testimony of the Bible itself that even leading dispensationalists recognize. One of LaHaye’s

mentors, the late John F. Walvoord, representing the dispensationalist position writes, “In Romans 7:18, however, [flesh] is used as a synonym for the sin nature, or that which remains in a person after he or she becomes a Christian (1987: 207).” He further explains, “the believer still has an old nature – a complex of attributes with an inclination and disposition to sin...(1987: 209).” That is Walvoord verifies that the inclination to sin does not suddenly vanish simply because one is spiritually transformed.

This supposed inclination to sin is considered the reason why for example, it is so important for the Christian to continually pray the Lord’s Prayer. When coming to the petition, “and lead us not into temptation,” Chemnitz explains this petition in the context of a perpetual trial in the life of the Christian:

Now we are not commanded to pray that God would not try us by his temptations. We receive good from God in tribulation, for we know that affliction brings forth patience, and patience trial, and trial hope (Rom. 5:4). “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds” (James 1:2). Neither do we pray that we may completely be freed from the darts of Satan, of the flesh, or of the world. “He that is not tempted, what does he know?” questions the son of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus 34:10). Augustine, concerning the sixtieth Psalm, says, “By temptation comes our increase. For no man knows himself unless he is tempted. No man can be king unless he wins and no man wins unless he fights. Neither can he fight unless he has enemies who challenge him.” In the fourteenth book of *The City of God* he says, “if we have no temptation or troubles at all while we bear the frailty of this life, we do not live properly.” This may be the proper understanding of the prayer of Christ in John 17:15. He says, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from evil (1999: 82-83).”

The above commentary on prayer in the midst of the struggle against sin is the reason for example why perfectionism has normally been viewed as a spurious doctrinal position. Pieper states, “Perfectionism, which teaches that complete sanctification is attainable in this life, cannot dwell in the Christian heart, which daily asks for the forgiveness of sin (1953: 31-32).” Though LaHaye does not confess perfectionism per se, he does teach a position -- which

shall be elaborated upon below -- that practically ties him to perfectionism. Even the inference, however, that the Christian progressively sins less or the implication that the Christian becomes somehow less sinful in a process of growth is untenable within more orthodox Christian theology.

The transformation which occurs in Christian sanctification is not expected to cause the sinful nature to diminish, nor is it supposed to keep the Christian from no longer committing or omitting actual sins – sins of thought, word and deed – on a daily basis. In fact, *on account of the transformation of sanctification*, the Christian is thought to become more aware and disturbed by their sinful nature. Such a realization, however, is used by God to protect and to preserve the Christian: keeping them in the condition of confession, humility and relying upon the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. As this reliance upon Christ increases, the Christian is increasingly sanctified. Furthermore, the reliance upon Christ accounts for the positive work of Christ in and through the Christian. The Christian, however, is perpetually attributing any good as coming from God. This depicts a process -- a sanctification -- diametrically opposed to pride and egotism. In fact, this sanctification is precisely the separation from pride, what Lewis describes as “the great sin” and that which “leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind (2001: 122).”

For many, in contrast, the Christ-centred anchor of sanctification is exchanged for an apparent over-emphasis on experiential religion. Brinsmead says, “One of the most striking things about New Testament sanctification is that it is refreshingly fussless and transparently practical (1980: 19).” Such an approach is antithetical to popular approaches that seem self-conscious about status in comparison to other people. Brinsmead warns against books such as these:

Books which promise to make you an upper-class Christian by providing the “keys,” “secrets” and “steps” to the higher spiritual life. These books often suggest that you have the special knowledge which will usher you into the spiritual elite, while most of the Lord’s people only know Christ as Saviour or Justifier (1980: 19).

Such concerns as aspiring to higher spiritual plains and achieving spiritual elitism miss a crucial element of holiness. Brinsmead cites J.C. Ryle:

A holy man will follow after *humility*. He will desire, in lowliness of mind, to esteem all others better than himself. He will see more evil in his own heart than in any other in the world. He will understand something of Abraham’s feeling, when he says, “I am dust and ashes;” – and Jacob’s, when he says, “I am less than the least of all Thy mercies;” – and Job’s, when he says, “I am vile;” – and Paul’s, when he says, “I am chief of sinners (1980: 26).”

Such realizations are not easy to grasp. Koberle says, “The saint who has sought to gain salvation through his own self-sanctification must perceive how behind his desire to effect it lies concealed the pride of self-esteem, which Luther has called the ‘queen of sins (1936: 27-28).’” To gain the consciousness of being a sinner is to “learn the greatest and most difficult art known on earth (1936: 28).” The *Augsburg Confession, Article XXVII* states, “True Christian perfection is to fear God from the heart, to have great faith, and to trust that for Christ’s sake we have a God who has been reconciled [2 Corinthians 5:18-19] (McCain, 2006: 57).” This is not a moralistic or legalistic perfectionism, but faith which relies on the perfection of God’s grace to the believer in Christ. It seems counter-intuitive that the saints and leaders of the faith would be presented with so many shortcomings:

Samson, David, and many other celebrated men who were full of the Holy Spirit fell into huge sins. Job (3:3ff.) and Jeremiah (20:14) curse the day of their birth; Elijah (1 Kings 19:4) and Jonah (4:8) are tired of life and pray for death. Such errors and sins of the saints are set forth in order that those who are troubled and desperate may find comfort and that those who are proud may be afraid. No man has ever fallen so grievously that he could not have stood up again. On the other hand, no one has such a sure footing that he cannot fall. If

Peter fell, I, too, may fall; if he stood up again, so can I (Pelikan (ed.) quotes Luther, 1963: 109).

And yet, these biblical saints were also sanctified. Koberle helps to make sense of the paradox: “Where sanctification is missing the knowledge of sin is also missing (1936: 248).” Conversely, where sanctification is present, the knowledge of sin is present. Interestingly enough, even the “father of pietism” Philip Jacob Spener wrote in his seventeenth-century work *Pia Desideria*: “for the farther a godly Christian advances, the more he will see that he lacks...(1964: 80).” Similarly, Luther taught, “The more godly the man is, the more doth he feel the battle (Watson, 1950: 168).”

Why LaHaye’s Teaching Diverges from Traditional Standards

This increase of the consciousness of sin and the progressive state of trusting less in one’s own righteousness is fundamentally lacking in LaHaye’s theology of Christian sanctification. LaHaye actually goes in the *exact opposite direction*. There appears to be several reasons for this divergence from the traditional perspective.

First of all, LaHaye believes that happiness is tantamount to blessedness. This is not to deny that blessedness *includes* happiness. Disciples are led to “rejoice in the Lord” for example (Phil 4). In describing sanctification, it has been observed that “[a]s disobedience to God’s law is the sum of all misery, so obedience to His law is the quintessence of all happiness (Brinsmead, 1980: 68).” This, however, does not eliminate the rest of the Christian’s experience. The problem seems to be that LaHaye’s emphasis goes too far in practically asserting a one-to-one correspondence between blessedness and happiness. He gives the impression that to be blessed is *only* happiness. LaHaye commits this hermeneutical exaggeration or at least misleads without further explanation when he translates the Greek

μακάριοι with the English word “happy” (LaHaye and Noebel, 2000: 63). The word first of all means the bestowal of God’s favour or grace. This grace is given so that the believer may also endure trials. At times, they are blessed as they also mourn (Matt 5:4). This is revealing about LaHaye’s Christian life teaching.

Secondly, LaHaye deviates from the traditional teaching on sanctification because he believes that as sanctification progresses, sin occurs less often. He states, “Even after we are saved by faith we occasionally sin (LaHaye, 1996: 237).” He asserts, “Because Spirit-filled Christians are not robots, we still give in to our old sin nature and react in the flesh on occasions (LaHaye and LaHaye, Beverly, 1978: 212).” It is in this final citing, however, that we understand LaHaye treating sin in a quantitative over qualitative fashion: “You and God alone know the amount of your sin (LaHaye, 1974: 86-87).” This quantitative approach to sin seems to explain why he does not stress the battle against sin in the life of advanced Christians. Evidently, the more sanctified the believer is, the less sin is committed quantitatively.

The third reason LaHaye rejects the idea of a growing awareness of sin is because of his retention and emphasis of his temperament theory. Inherent to his worldview is the idea that to know temperament is to be in a position to improve it through Christian principles. Improvement means less duress, distress and anxiety. The traditional view of the internal battle between the two natures of the Christian (as depicted for example in Romans 7) is incongruent with this improving temperament image. To be clear, LaHaye considers a significant source of suffering and weakness connected to natural temperament, but the Holy Spirit may improve our nature, our temperament. Therefore, negative emotions are eliminated through increased sanctification. LaHaye claims, “The Bible shows that power over weaknesses is possible only when one receives Jesus Christ personally as Lord and Savior and

yields one's self completely to his Spirit (LaHaye, 1971: 18)." Such improvement upon the temperament reduces negative struggles against sin.

Fourthly, as mentioned above LaHaye never actually advocates "perfectionism" *per se*, but he practically endorses the doctrine in the following way: "If you are a Christian, finding the will of God for your life involves four factors: (1) The Word of God; (2) absolute obedience to it; (3) time; and (4) the Holy Spirit's guidance (LaHaye, 1974: 161)." The remarkable aspect here of course is the relationship between point number one and two. LaHaye is essentially saying that a Christian may find the will of God in their life by living in "absolute obedience" to the Word of God. For all intents and purposes this is a statement describing the doctrine of perfectionism to say nothing of legalism. Such a position has little use for the ongoing struggle with sin. LaHaye affirms this position as he once described his own spiritual progress in terms of "already doing everything Proverbs had to say (LaHaye, 1983a: 203)." Needless to say, this confident self-evaluation reveals that LaHaye himself believes he has achieved the highest stages of his version of sanctification. The deeper danger in this therefore lies in the fact that *his* spiritual understanding and achievement claims to be identified with the Word of God. In this, his followers are not simply encouraged to be absolutely obedient to the Word of God, but also to *his* teaching and example!

The fifth reason LaHaye is less apt to accept the traditional view of sanctification and the ongoing struggle with sin, is because confession of sin is contrary to positive thinking. In an important admission on his part and as he describes the importance of will over emotion, LaHaye concedes this about his teaching: "You may respond by saying, 'This sounds like the power of positive thinking.' It is! And where do you think the positive-thinking writers got the concept? Do you know that this is a biblical idea (LaHaye and Phillips, 1982: 141)?" This

revelation has important ramifications. To say that “positive thinking” is a biblical concept is misleading at best. Positive thinking is often packaged in terms of “the law of attraction” which in itself is rather alien to Christian theology. Even when Christ speaks of answering the prayers of His people, these promises are qualified in terms of Christians asking according to the name and will of God. Positive thinking approaches the creation of one’s own circumstances and identity *carte blanche*. If this is the case, who is going to willingly seek actual Christian sanctification which includes the perpetual confrontation with the sinful nature? Confession of sin and the power of positive thinking are opposite ideas.

Sixthly, LaHaye’s portrayal of God and Scripture explains his movement away from the traditional view of sanctification. LaHaye states that “God is a God of principle, and He has written these principles in His Word. The more thoroughly we know those principles, the easier it will be to make life’s decisions (LaHaye, 1989: 80).” Through this idea -- which is consistent with evangelical theology in general -- LaHaye reveals that he considers God’s law as being given primarily to make Christians happy. In the case of God’s purpose for His Word, evangelicals like LaHaye do not believe the Word is given to reveal and forgive our sins. Instead, the popular American evangelical view is that God gives His Word as “a source of instruction” (Koester, 1993: 96-97). Thus, every Christian has the potential to apply God’s instruction, discover God’s will for their lives and make the decisions they ought to make in order to be happy. LaHaye exclaims this about his Christian life system: “You will never find a miserable Christian in the center of God’s will [as revealed through His Word of instruction] (LaHaye, 1991: 200)!” According to LaHaye, the overriding function of God’s Word is to safeguard the Christian from misery, this hardly accommodates the Christian struggling against sin.

The seventh reason that LaHaye rejects traditional concepts of sanctification is because he insists that Biblical examples of the spiritual battle with the flesh are simply descriptions of spiritual failure. In his book *How to Win Over Depression*, he uses the story of Moses. LaHaye offers this critique: “Moses, one of the great Old Testament saints, offered probably the poorest example of a prayer to be found in the Bible. Admittedly very displeased with the children of Israel for their griping, he turned his displeasure upon God and prayed...Moses became so depressed that he actually asked God to let him die (LaHaye, 1974: 122-123).” A more obvious reading is that Moses is confessing his distress and weakness (Num 11:11-15). The prayer is fundamentally a request for Divine help. LaHaye is all too ready to sit in judgment in which Moses does not measure up to LaHaye’s standard of Christian sanctification.

LaHaye takes a similar stance to King David: “A perfectionist often feels like David did when he said, ‘My sin is always before me’ (Psalm 51:3). This person is, therefore, much more readily confronted with his failures than those of others. In actuality, he becomes far too obsessed with his own faults.” Similarly, while Scripture refers to David as one after God’s own heart (1 Sa 13:14), LaHaye is able to show that David falls short.

This readiness to sit in judgment of figures in Scripture is of course indicative of LaHaye’s frame of mind of a complacent self-righteousness that denies the possibility of an ongoing battle against a sinful nature which is of the basis for humility. Brinsmead offers this comment on the human situation:

“Through the law we become conscious of sin” (Rom. 3:20). Conversion to Christ does not remove the bitter knowledge of our sin but places us where we may endure its increasing revelation. It is not from immature believers that we hear startling confessions about the corruption of human nature, but from holy prophets, apostles and mature saints. We may be surprised when they cry out of the depth and bitterness of soul anguish, “Woe to me!” “What a wretched

man I am!” Giddy spirits who have soared to heaven in high and mighty experiences (and like to testify to their “victory-life piety”) find these testimonies of prophets and apostles difficult to understand (1980: 120).

LaHaye’s Stages of Christianity

Finally, LaHaye depends on a version of “stages of spiritual growth (LaHaye, 1991: 99).” This position creates distinctions in the Christian’s relationship to sin, the higher the stage, the more “victorious” one is over sin. Marsden shows that American dispensational and Keswick movements (a British holiness movement with conferences in Keswick) coalesced around 1920 (2006: 96). By doing so dispensationalists like LaHaye could adopt holiness concepts, including not only stages such as “carnal Christians” in a lower category than “spiritual Christians,” but also “the victorious Christian life.” In adopting holiness concepts, Wesley’s idea of sin as “a voluntary transgression of a known law of God” found its way into American Christianity (2006: 73). LaHaye has been consistent with this concept, so that the Christian’s goal is to be victorious over (no longer controlled by and able to avoid repeatedly committing) various and specific sinful acts and attitudes. In this system, the more proficient one becomes in this endeavour, the more sanctified that Christian is.

The result of such an approach to sanctification, however, is – invariably – the creation of classes and levels within Christianity. This last aspect demonstrates the extent of LaHaye’s divergence from traditional sanctification and perhaps the most serious one. It is either the cause for a complacent delusion on the side of the “true believer” of the system or the cause of despair on the side of seriously minded Christians convinced that they have failed the standard. That is, this teaching not only conflicts with the traditional goal of sanctification that promotes reliance upon Christ in true humility, but in the judgment of some, spiritually and psychologically dangerous.

Several terms are employed by LaHaye to describe different levels of Christians. For example, he regularly uses a traditional designation coming out of the holiness movement, namely “Carnal Christians.” As is typically the case in holiness theology, this reference is based on 1st Corinthians 3:1: “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ.” (RSV) LaHaye turns this into: “Carnal Christians run their own lives and make their own decisions...(LaHaye, 1974: 209).” The term “carnal” is from the Greek, σαρκίνους or “fleshly.” All people are “of the flesh,” suggests mortality and immaturity (“babes”), a state in which Paul deemed they were not ready to receive more advanced instruction (the “solid food” of Hebrews 5:12) in the Christian faith.

LaHaye imports his own meaning with “Carnal Christians run their own lives and make their own decisions,” but he does, however, assert that these “Carnal Christians” were saved (LaHaye, 1984c: 343). At the same time, LaHaye expands on this very limited biblical text because he also says that these Christians were “factionous, critical, contentious, and had other problems not associated with a truly spiritual person (1984c: 343).” And yet, to be saved according to Scripture is by definition to be “born again” (Jn 3) and a “new creation” (2 Cor 5), in other words, “spiritual.”

The extra-biblical and fanciful elaboration of such terms, however, allows LaHaye to embellish his concept of higher-level classes. If the carnal run their own lives, then the holy obviously do not; if the carnal make their own decisions, then the holy rely on God to make their decisions (raising other concerns); if the carnal are factionous, then the holy are unified, etc. But before going on to describe the upper “stages” of Christian faith there is still another category for LaHaye that *could be* lower than the carnal, because LaHaye says that this other category is “at best” carnal (LaHaye, 1982: 244). To use LaHaye’s terminology there are “degrees” of practicing Christians and an additional “degree” for LaHaye is the “Humanized

Christian (1982: 243).” This category may very well be lower than the carnal, especially when taking into consideration LaHaye’s elaboration that implies non-conversion: “Essentially a humanized Christian does not bring himself under the authority of the Word of God but trusts the philosophy of humanism to produce happiness (1982: 243).” Effectively, “Humanized Christian” is an oxymoron and as LaHaye says elsewhere it is only “at best” that they may even be a “Carnal Christian,” with all their inadequacies. Indeed LaHaye says of the “Humanized Christian”: “only God knows whether he is...a true Christian (1982: 244).”

So the categories begin at the very bottom: first, there is the “Humanized Christian” who may not even be a Christian; then there is the “Carnal Christian” that is converted, but is not truly a spiritual Christian.

What comes next for LaHaye is the difference between the Christian who simply believes in the Gospel, and the Christian who not only believes in the Gospel, but has *also* “asked Jesus Christ into their lives (LaHaye, 2002a: 145).” According to LaHaye the difference amounts to whether a Christian simply knows Jesus as “Saviour,” or as “Saviour *and* Lord.” In this latter category, not only will the Christian know Jesus as their source of salvation, but also as their master whom they follow; the one who controls and leads their life. In other words, in the former category, Jesus is responsible only for justification (the forgiveness of sins), while in the latter category, Jesus is now responsible not only for justification, but also for true sanctification in LaHaye’s definition (i.e. the ability to reduce sinning and increase happiness). LaHaye explains:

[I]t isn’t enough to accept Christ as your Savior to forgive your past mistakes...You also need to accept Christ as your Savior and Lord. You need the Lord to guide your future...As long as we make decisions based on “What I want,” or “What is good for me,” we will be filled with degrees of frustration, fear, confusion, purposelessness, guilt, and many other problems. Now, if you are willing to receive Christ into your life as Lord and Savior, the result will be

different. Christ will come into your life and take over this throne (2002a: 146).

Brinsmead identifies a problem with this religious mentality:

This theology distinguishes between those who only know Christ as Saviour and those who also know Christ as Lord. But the Bible knows nothing of such a separation between justification and sanctification. It is thoroughly mischievous in its results. If it does not lead to spiritual pride among those who imagine they are out of Romans 7 [which describes the continuous acknowledgement of the sinful nature] and into Romans 8, it leads to the Christ-denying notion that a man can be saved from the guilt of sin and yet continue to wallow in its pollution – as if sanctification were optional as far as salvation is concerned. There is a direct relationship between the guilt of sin and the power of sin. If the guilt of sin is removed, the power of sin is broken (1980: 99).

Brinsmead affirms what was mentioned above in respect to the traditional understanding of sanctification or being “set apart”: Christians are set apart *from sin* and *to God*. The internal conflict God allows leads to perpetual humility and the realization that the grace of God is necessary. To be brought to this place of reliance upon God, however, leads to the Gospel itself, God’s solution to sin. This Gospel of forgiveness itself produces the desire to live for God which theologians have traditionally called “the new obedience.” In this way, justification and sanctification are linked. To separate them is thought to lead to theological (and spiritual) problems. For example, Koberle offers this warning: “As soon as we speak only of justification or of sanctification the diabolical ease begins that imagines it possesses all things, whether present or future and that, as a result, forget either prayer and labor, or faith and hope, and consequently, in either case, suffers spiritual shipwreck (1936: 263).”

As we have seen, however, LaHaye separates justification from sanctification with his distinction between the “Carnal Christian” and the “Spirit-Controlled Christian.” Those who have not yet advanced up the rung of his ladder of sanctification and higher levels of

Christianity are characterized as “[existing] for their own satisfaction and glory,” however, “[a] Spirit-controlled Christian will seek to glorify his heavenly Father (LaHaye, 1982: 246).” To fail to reach the greater “Spirit-controlled Christian” status means that a Christian has “not changed” and has “failed to use [God’s] power (LaHaye, 1991: 97).” This is for LaHaye the difference between “radiant Christians” and “defeated Christians (LaHaye, 1978b: 50).”

The “Defeated Christian” seems to be synonymous with the “Carnal Christian.” Such Christians fail to experience the transforming power of God (LaHaye, 1966b: 9). They are the “the majority of Christians” who do not remain “in an ‘abiding’ relationship with Jesus Christ (1966b: 9).” These Christians are not obedient to God nor filled with the Holy Spirit (1966b: 47). It is evident that LaHaye introduces elitist notions. In LaHaye’s system, the elite are the ones who are both justified and sanctified; they become the “Spirit-controlled” or “Radiant” Christians.

“Spirit-Controlled Christian” are those who are “filled with the Holy Spirit.” LaHaye explains: “The best way to clarify the term *Spirit-filled* is to point out that its basic meaning is ‘control.’ A person filled is a person controlled not by themselves but by God (LaHaye and Hindson, 2001: 218).” The condition of being filled, however, is a neglected idea, even though a clear Scriptural imperative (Eph 5:18) exists. LaHaye says, “Although this may be the Bible’s most important command to Christians, it is often the least obeyed (1989: 33).” Obey it the Christian must, however, if higher spiritual ground would be reached.

In approaching the need to be Spirit-controlled and filled, high standards are set. “To be filled with the Holy Spirit, one must make himself completely available to God to do anything the Holy Spirit directs him to do (LaHaye, 1966b: 64).” LaHaye uses other descriptions like “[Christians] must yield [themselves] to [God’s] Spirit” and “man’s actions

must be dominated by and dictated by the Holy Spirit (1966b: 64).” There are enormous risks in this mind set, particularly when people like LaHaye claim to speak on behalf of God.

How do Christians enter into such a relationship with God? As mysterious and spiritual a Spirit-controlled state might seem, the way to get there is actually highly formulaic. LaHaye lists five steps for being Spirit-filled and being Spirit-controlled (LaHaye and Hindson, 2001: 221-230):

- (1) Examine your life.
- (2) Confess all known sin.
- (3) Submit yourself completely to God.
- (4) Ask to be filled with the Spirit.
- (5) Believe you are filled with the Spirit.

LaHaye refers to the above five steps as “five simple rules for the filling of the Holy Spirit (LaHaye, 1978b: 59).” Furthermore, LaHaye assures his followers that it is “not difficult to be filled with the Spirit if you are a Christian (LaHaye and LaHaye, Beverly, 1978: 42).” At the same time, LaHaye reminds his readers: “If you are not a rejoicing Christian, you are not a Spirit-filled Christian (LaHaye, 1971: 88).” This test invites anxiety: “Is one rejoicing *enough*?” What is more, LaHaye teaches that “the major condition to being filled or controlled with the Spirit is *complete surrender to His will. In its simplest form, being filled with the Spirit is a matter of obedience to every decree of God* [emphasis mine] (LaHaye and LaHaye, Beverly, 1978: 42).” LaHaye advocates a form of perfectionism, but it seems incongruous to call this state of being filled with the Spirit “simple” and “not difficult.” There are those who actually believe they live in such a condition. The difficulty is that those like LaHaye who achieve this status, might agree with LaHaye’s assertion: “The Spirit-filled

personality does not have weaknesses (LaHaye and Hindson, 2001: 234),” with all its risks of self-delusion.

After achieving a state without weaknesses, it may seem that there is no room for still another stage in LaHaye’s spiritual pyramid. There is, however, still room for spiritual development. LaHaye explains:

Being filled with the Spirit is just the beginning of Christian victory. We must “walk in the Spirit” to be effective (Gal 5:16). It is one thing to start out in the Spirit-filled life and quite another to walk day by day in the control of the Spirit (1984c: 117).

Once the Christian’s personality and temperament has come to the point of full development, there is still the task of living in this condition day in and day out. In order to do this, the Christian must become aware of two basic disruptions to the Spirit-filled life: (1) the “grieving of the Holy Spirit” and (2) the “quenching of the Holy Spirit.” LaHaye teaches that “[a]nger grieves the Holy Spirit, and fear quenches the Holy Spirit (LaHaye, 1978b: 36).” Both of these disruptions “restrict [the Spirit’s] control of [the Christian’s] body which God would otherwise strengthen and use (1978b: 44).” The programme at this point, therefore, becomes learning how to eliminate anger and fear from one’s life on a daily basis. LaHaye calls this complete Christian a “spiritually mature Christian (LaHaye and Hindson, 2001: 198).”

At this juncture, LaHaye offers his interpretation of 1st John 2:12-14. Despite the traditional interpretations (mentioned above) which limit these verses to basic distinctions in maturity or simple experience, LaHaye goes much further. To LaHaye, the text of 1st John 2 teaches the first stage of a spiritual child “newly born again”; the second stage of a “young man” who abides with God more often than he is overcome by sin; and the stage three

“father” who is not only filled with the Spirit, but walks in the Spirit and “becomes a father of the faith (LaHaye and Hindson, 2001: 199).” It must be noted, however, that because LaHaye identifies the first stage Christian in *this* context as still being “spiritual,” then his definition *cannot* refer to the “Carnal Christian” in LaHaye’s *overall* system. As noted above, LaHaye claims that a “Carnal Christian” is not “truly spiritual.” Therefore, the first stage spiritual child must be referring to the “Spirit-Filled Christian.” It would then follow that the “young man” corresponds to the “Spiritually Mature Christian” evidently regularly walking in the Spirit and avoiding (for the most part) anger and fear. It becomes evident, therefore, that there is still in fact a higher level than the “Spiritually Mature Christian.” That level is in fact the “Spiritual Father.” The question, however, is what characterizes this last category?

LaHaye seems to answer this question by virtue of connecting his version of sanctification to various ways in which Spirit-filled Christians experience the will of God. For this concept LaHaye refers to his interpretation of Romans 12:2 which states: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” LaHaye explains: “Most Bible teachers accept the three words, “good,” “acceptable,” and “perfect” as modifiers of the one will of God. By contrast, I view them as *three levels* of that one will (LaHaye, 1989: 59).” LaHaye’s interpretation contrasts with Nicoll’s, for example, who considers the adjectives to refer to the one will of God that is good in a moral sense, acceptable in the sense of being pleasing to God, and perfect in the sense of being ethically adequate (Nicoll, 1961b: 688).

LaHaye’s “stages of spiritual growth” theology constantly seeks fresh vistas for personal achievement in the spiritual realm. Therefore, LaHaye explains that the “good” will of God is “fair, valuable, and of benefit,” the “acceptable” will of God is “well pleasing,

agreeable,” and the “perfect” will of God is “complete, mature, finished (LaHaye, 1989: 60).”

LaHaye describes this system as it relates to the Christian’s spiritual progress:

Many Christians ultimately carry out God’s good will, others His acceptable will. But all too few fulfill God’s supreme desire, which requires that we start early in our Christian life and walk in consistent obedience to Him *most* of our life to complete His perfect will for our lives. Satisfying God’s perfect will requires almost a lifetime of faithful obedience to Him, or at least that we do not make a major decision when out of His will (1989: 60).

It is evident that the “Spiritual Father” is not only filled with the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, but he is also living in the “perfect” will of God. Describing this state of being, LaHaye explains that this is a discipline that maintains “the perfect will of God attitude (one of complete surrender to Him) when making the major and most of the moderate decisions of life (1989: 71-72).” Finally, it appears that these exceptionally-advanced Christians as presented in the *Left Behind* novels are also familiar with charismatic abilities. The praying Christian for example may anticipate “direct leading” from God (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1996: 243). The Lord speaks directly to the Christian in prayer and creates immediate knowledge from God (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1997: 217-218).

Throughout the *Left Behind* series such examples appear in prolific fashion and they are in fact common-place descriptors for the most spiritually advanced protagonists in the series. The series carries a story line that chronicles the stages of growth of the protagonists. When they reach the ceiling of development, Scripture is no longer the medium of divine revelation. God speaks to them directly. While this theology is alarming in terms of its real danger for those who believe it, one cannot help but also feel that LaHaye may be angling for his own influence on his readers. In the personal interview he accepts the assumption in my question that he is personally a “third-level father (question 15 in appendix 4).” The concern is whether such a person believes they still need either the correction provided by Scripture or

Christian tradition. It would seem not, because the implication of having arrived to such a high level of sanctification is that one receives direct direction from God to guide every “major decision” while keeping the believer in the “perfect” will of God.

These are the stages -- in accord with LaHaye’s explanations of each -- presented in summary fashion from lowest to highest stage:

- (1) Stage One: The Humanized Christian = might be converted, but is probably not since they trust anti-Christian, humanist philosophy. Essentially “Christian” by name only.
- (2) Stage Two: The Carnal Christian/Defeated Christian = run their own lives, make their own decisions apart from God; they consider Jesus as Saviour, but not Lord; they are not spiritual. They are, however, converted to salvation; their sins are forgiven.
- (3) Stage Three: The Spirit-Controlled/Radiant Christian = these are filled with the Holy Spirit; they are both justified and sanctified; they know Jesus as Saviour and as Lord. These have completely surrendered to God and are obedient to His Word. These are the “spiritual children” of 1st John 2 and they know the “good” will of God in Romans 12. They have purged their basic personality of weaknesses.
- (4) Stage Four: The Spiritually Mature Christian = these are not only filled with the Spirit, but they walk in the Spirit on a day-to-day basis; they have mastered avoiding grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit, that is, they avoid the anger and fear of a sinful nature. These are the “young men” of 1st John 2 and they know the “acceptable” will of God in Romans 12. They experience “victory” over sin.
- (5) Stage Five: The Spiritual Father = these are fathers (1st John 2) of the faith (lead others to conversion); they have essentially mastered walking in the Spirit and are therefore according to Romans 12 live in the “perfect” will of God and therefore fulfil “God’s supreme desire.” All significant life decisions come from God Himself consistent with some of the charismatic contours depicted in *Left Behind*.

Humble Repentance

In his book *Baptism & Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*, John Stott suggests that when the Scriptures refer to “the baptism of the Spirit,” they refer to a “once-for-all gift,” while when they speak of “the fullness of the Spirit,” they acknowledge a gift that is “continuously and increasingly appropriated (1975: 47).” Thus more traditional views of

sanctification never deny spiritual development, growth or maturity. Stott also states, however, that “the fullness of the Spirit was the consequence of the baptism of the Spirit (1975: 48).” That is, these gifts are the typical gifts for all Christians and when those Christians do something to “grieve” the Holy Spirit, then they are called to what is their most common and familiar spiritual activity: namely repentance. Repentance, however, is not an exercise in self-glorification, but of humility. The mind is not at first trained into doing better, but earnestly desires (first of all) to be restored and forgiven. After forgiveness, thanksgiving propels people to do better, but even then the Christian is prepared to fall short and the need for humility never ceases. Finally, Stott deems the imperative of Eph 5:18, though a command, to be in the *passive* voice. He implies it is not the work of man through various steps, but the work of God (1975: 60).

LaHaye goes beyond this understanding of “fullness”. Because he divides Christians, he also divides the work of God in them. Categories and stages become inevitable for such a system and the temptation of pride and egotism are a potential consequence. The approach to sanctification subverts the virtue of humility. Koberle expresses his concern:

When God would cast a man down He makes him blind to his own failings. This oft-quoted statement is particularly true of the fate of every work of sanctification that is no more controlled by or permeated with the critical sternness of justification. The language of Christian experience becomes all too loud, all too confident...If there is not a continual return to the humbling word of the Cross there will inevitably be a shallow, precipitate, optimistic confusion of spirits and the Holy Spirit...(1936: 251).

While LaHaye has incorporated Pelagianism, he has also gone considerably beyond it. His thoroughly American-Christian (Arminian and revivalist-fundamentalist) position is to treat free will as what Marsden calls “an unassailable article of faith (2006: 99).” The belief, however, does not inherently require LaHaye’s elaboration on sanctification. It is in the

elaboration that LaHaye has sought to add to the field of Christian sanctification by incorporating the ancient medical theories of Hippocrates. By doing so, he has betrayed his own previously stated concerns about uniting Christian thinking to Greek philosophy.

The resultant approach to Christian living has introduced a form of Christian perfectionism (natural weaknesses are eliminated by spiritual sanctification) to American evangelicalism. The perfectionism is realised through the multiple stages of sanctification LaHaye promotes. By holding to such a view, not only does LaHaye appear to by-pass the more traditional view of sanctification (which includes a constant battle against a sinful nature leading to humility), but his view encourages mechanical self-control. No longer is faith leading the weak child to the strong God, but LaHaye's theory is to make the child eliminate all of their shortcomings.

Not only is the approach misleading, but it is dangerous as it threatens the believer to be blinded by either self-delusion or despair (which occurs through inevitable failure). The great irony involved is that LaHaye's mechanical version of sanctification is intended to promote one's confidence that having arrived to the elite ranks, one may also be confident that they are prepared for the end times. But replacing faith with "spiritual principles" achieves the opposite result: *apocalyptic anxiety is perpetuated*. The reason so many hold to this approach, however, can only mean one thing: not everyone experiences despair; self-delusion is possible.

CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

The Unique Apocalyptic Crisis Represented by *Left Behind*

This thesis was inspired by the question, “Why has *Left Behind* -- an example of contemporary apocalyptic literature -- been so successful in the United States of America?” The question is important because it challenges a leading traditional theory about apocalyptic literature generally. As mentioned in chapter 4, apocalyptic literature is thought to be addressed to, and read by, people living in the context of tribulation. Paul Hanson says that the genre is a “bleak world view” that primarily comes to expression “in periods of crisis (1983: 1).” According to Klaus Koch there is “an urgent expectation of the impending overthrow of all earthly conditions in the immediate future (Hanson, 1983: 25).” D.S. Russell explains that there is some variation in this general idea of “crisis,” but even the variation supports the general thesis:

We shall see presently that the apocalyptic literature had a “mixed parentage” and reflected in its growth a wide variety of historical circumstance....The nature of the protest [expressed in apocalyptic] no doubt varied with changing circumstance, but three “pressure points” can perhaps be identified which closely intermeshed with one another: a “lost” world and a corrupt society, the encroachment of Hellenism whose pervasive influence had seeped into the soul of Judaism and done much to destroy its very life, and the experience of oppression and persecution...(1994: 14).

John J. Collins states that the theory that all apocalyptic is written from situations of actual distress may hold, “if we allow that the distresses may be of various kinds (Collins, 1998: 38).” Collins helps us to appreciate the wide-range of “various kinds”: “We must also reckon with the fact that what is perceived as a crisis by an apocalyptic author may not have been universally so perceived (1998: 38).” *Left Behind* is an example of what Collins is describing; the authors’ perspective (both LaHaye’s and Jenkins’) is one that is shared by a

significant evangelical sub-culture but it is a perspective of which many other Americans, and Westerners in general, may be oblivious.

Nathan O. Hatch explains why the existence of such subcultures within Christianity can be so surprising, especially when viewed from across the Atlantic: “In comparing the United States and other western democracies, particularly England, three features about this country stand out: the vitality of religion among ordinary people, the continuing prominence of populist religious leaders, and the vitality of mass democratic movements that reflect the charisma and organizational skills of these leaders (1989: 211). For all intents and purposes, *Left Behind* and its originator LaHaye (who is indeed a populist religious leader) provide an ideal case study for examining why a millenarian subculture continues not only to persist, but to thrive in American culture. As we have shown especially in chapters 4 and 5, Hatch seems right about the crisis that is perceived only by the Fundamentalist: “The resurgence of Fundamentalism in the last twenty years is a further example of a populist crusade, a revolt of people who feel they are being disenfranchised from the core institutions of American culture (1989: 218).”

The Inherent Danger of *Left Behind*'s Apocalypticism

While investigating this question of what is driving the evangelical subculture's interest in modern apocalyptic in the United States, an important by-product emerged. The movement in America is highly dangerous (literally threatening peoples' lives) not only to the people within the subculture, but to everyone else. Such a statement may sound alarming, but on the basis of the evidence, it is accurate. Russell discusses the inherent danger in “Armageddon Theology”: “It follows from such surmising that disarmament, for example, is contrary to the will of God and that preparation for nuclear war is a duty laid upon us so that

Armageddon may be fought and won, that Satan and his legions may be defeated, and that Christ may come in his second advent to establish his kingdom of peace on earth (1994: 87)!” Russell says simply, “Where faith and fanaticism meet there is often a violent explosion...(1994: 62).”

In addition, the evangelical apocalyptic movement is dangerous in that it is misleading. While it is possible that dispensational leaders like LaHaye are unaware of their considerable inaccuracies, the sheer number of misrepresentations is alarming. Such a state gives rise to a suspicion of the motives involved, especially when one takes into consideration the fact that LaHaye has become very rich through *Left Behind*. This makes the practical dangers even more insidious.

The Three Main Tasks Accomplished in This Thesis

This thesis, therefore, has had to conduct the following tasks: 1) answer the question about the success of *Left Behind* in America; 2) identify whether a cause for apocalyptic anxiety exists (test the traditional theory); and 3) uncover the dangers inherent in the movement. To be in the best possible position to conduct these tasks, LaHaye’s body of work was thoroughly consulted and analyzed. Using LaHaye as a case study of the evangelical and apocalyptic phenomenon is not only justified by his considerable personal success in a larger movement, but in his consistency with the long line of other dispensationalists (like Darby who brought his teaching to America, to Moody who institutionalized parts of it, to Scofield who published the teaching in a popular study Bible, to Lindsey who sold millions of his books in the 1970’s and 80’s). In addition, it is reasonable to predict that just as the evangelical subculture has allowed LaHaye to carry on the tradition through his sales of 70 million novels, there will be another leader in the future who will perpetuate the same kinds of

problems exposed in this thesis, especially since apocalyptic dates such as 2030 and 2033 still loom.

Findings from Chapter One

From chapter one on the history of millennialism, we find that LaHaye is misleading when he presents his pretribulationism as being equivalent to ancient Christian premillennialism. We have shown that the two systems are in no way synonymous. In fact, LaHaye's teaching has more similarities to Montanism which the early church considered heretical. Even Origen warned that those who abandon the "spiritual sense" of interpretation on eschatological matters enter into heresy (Origen, 1995: 355).

In the meantime leading advocates of LaHaye's rapture teachings (such as Grant R. Jeffrey) who try to show early church origins of the rapture mainly do so to bring a sense of legitimacy to LaHaye's pretribulationism. The spurious scholarship of their apologetic, however, is all too evident. We demonstrated that significant portions of their early-church research used texts taken out of context. Furthermore, LaHaye's earliest and most important material used in defence of his rapture theology (i.e. Ephraim Syrus of the fourth century) is in fact shown to *not* support LaHaye's contention.

The most significant link to the development of rapture teaching is a Scottish clergyman named Edward Irving. Irving is probably responsible for bringing the rapture teaching to the Albury Prophecy Conference that influenced Lady Powerscourt. In turn, Lady Powerscourt sponsored her own prophecy conferences that Darby was a regular part of. It might be noted that Irving was excommunicated for subscribing to a heretical Christology. It is curious that both Irving and Darby began their association with the rapture doctrine at approximately the same time (1826/1827).

But what does such a historical connection reveal about LaHaye? Such roots in a widely discredited and esoteric form of Christianity, reinforces the suspicion about his motives. What is clear is that he seems to use his claims about historical Christianity to try to legitimize the most important part of his work which is to raise awareness (through his writing and political activism) of what he perceives to be a crisis within American culture. He creates this awareness through apocalyptic literature and apocalyptic political commentary that depicts our country as being in a “cosmic” battle against evil (LaHaye and Noebel, 2000: 225). LaHaye stated in the personal interview that through his work he wanted “to confront people with the prophetic hand of God” so as to address his great hope that “Christians would wake up and only elect to office those who share their faith or candidates that best reflect their faith on moral issues, then our country would return to moral sanity.”

His agenda is most evident when like Joachim of Fiore before him, LaHaye shows his belief in the book of Revelation to be about the current state of the church (LaHaye, 1999: 36). LaHaye believes that this insight will lead the true people of God to seek to impact contemporary culture with political and moral reform. While any overt external crisis is lacking in America, LaHaye has found a religious audience hungry for spiritual exceptionalism and a political voice. *Left Behind* did not create the audience, because the audience was already there as the result of a long standing American tradition of millenarianism. *Left Behind* has, however, continued to fuel the movement, because its theology carries on one of the most important traditions of millenarianism which relies on a misuse of Scripture to suggest to the millenarian that they are living in the end times. That is, from this first chapter, *Left Behind* is popular in America because of an audience that accepts its presuppositions about end time themes. This is seen especially by their willingness to understand apocalyptic texts as LaHaye presents them.

Findings from Chapter Two

From chapter two on LaHaye's exegesis, his approach to the apocalyptic texts demonstrates that he adopts a literalism that discounts the symbolic nature of these texts. Ezekiel 37 is subjected to the random association that TNT and dynamite could produce what is described in the text as "rattling and shaking (LaHaye, 1984s: 64)." Such a connection tries to legitimize Ezekiel 37 describing events in the 20th century since the TNT was widely employed during World War I. Against all common sense LaHaye's view could only have merit if he were able to prove that modern-day Russia is in fact represented in Ezekiel 38-39, but it has been shown that this association is based on accidental assonantal similarities with no etymological relationship.

What is more revealing about LaHaye's exegesis is that it fails to see the universal significance of the Gog unit. As mentioned, Russia cannot represent the universal assaults against the people of God. Consequently, LaHaye also underestimates the universal hope communicated by Ezekiel.

LaHaye's interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27 misses the nature of apocalyptic numerology. The 70 weeks are a chronography as opposed to a chronology. They are never identified as years in the text and seem to provide a time frame that is rather providential while assuring Daniel that God's plan will unfold despite the crisis the people of God may face. LaHaye, however, binds the text to mathematical calculation while injecting extra details into the text without exegetical justification.

LaHaye's exegesis, applied to Matthew 24:34, supports the view that "this generation" is the current generation, but it fails to recognize more traditional exegetical research that

identifies the referent as the original disciples. LaHaye insists that such an interpretation is impossible, because the coming of Christ described in the text has never occurred in history. By taking this position, LaHaye once again reveals his inability (or unwillingness) to see such apocalyptic qualities as “cosmic distress” that is sometimes used to describe other “comings” and “days of the Lord”. The A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem easily accounts for such a “coming”.

The preferred exegesis of 1st Thessalonians 4:15-17 leads LaHaye to propose a two-stage second coming. The text, however, is strained with such an interpretation, especially when it is realized that those typically “left behind” in Scripture are those pardoned as opposed to those taken prisoner (Matt. 24 & Lk. 17). McGuire details the appearance that the entire premise of LaHaye’s *Left Behind* goes against the regular usage of this terminology in Scripture (2001: 6-7).

In the last exegetical example, LaHaye seems to miss the Biblical witness that Satan has in many ways already been bound through the triumphant Christ. With his literalistic mindset he insists that the binding of the evil one cannot take place until the future millennium comes. In the meantime, his exegesis is again limited in that he overlooks the apocalyptic nature of Revelation 20 and treats “a thousand years” in a wooden and literalistic fashion.

With these many weaknesses inherent in his position, one wonders why LaHaye would invest so heavily in them. One possible answer is that he is attempting to instil a sense of apocalyptic anxiety that will drive people to live out the dispensational cultural and political agenda. In this way, they will also (according to LaHaye) live as Christians ought to live. Russell points out that if Christianity is isolated from politics it will become its own

“rarefied religious atmosphere;” but faith is supposed to be lived out among people in society (1994: 90). Such living out in the world, however, carries the risks of misapplication and misinterpretation. This is why “it really does matter how we interpret scripture, particularly prophetic and apocalyptic passages (Russell, 1994: 91).”

Findings from Chapter Three

To treat the apocalyptic passages as the dispensational evangelicals do, however, says much about their self-image. As mentioned in chapter three, Nineham expressed concern about “the scandal of particularity (1976: 198).” True to their apocalyptic contours, they view themselves as exceptional in terms of being in possession of the truth about the end. In this worldview, the most substantial problem does not fall on the “true believer,” but on the ones “left behind.” In other words, the “true believer” may hasten the fulfilment of prophecy (self-fulfilled or otherwise) while anticipating personal reward. To hold such a fatalistic view of the apocalyptic Scriptures is acceptable, because evangelical identity is bolstered.

There are reasons for such confidence that their view of Scripture is correct and these reasons help explain the success of *Left Behind*. LaHaye represents a modern-day millenarianism that emphasizes “prophecy” to the extent that the Bible records “history written in advance (LaHaye and Ice, 2001: 11).” With such a clear futurism, LaHaye espouses an extreme form of verbal inspiration tantamount to Biblicism. He explains that the two most important keys for understanding his approach to Scripture are: 1) taking Scripture “literally,” and 2) recognizing the distinction between Israel and the Church.

LaHaye himself, however, admits that there is such a thing as allowing theological presuppositions determine hermeneutics. Ramm explains that no one is a strict literalist or

complete spiritualist (1987: 244). At the end of the hermeneutical endeavour, the theologian must decide what they will do with the symbols and tropes in a given passage. Ramm shows that it is the millennial views that are the *crux interpretum* of prophetic interpretation (1987: 244-245).

LaHaye defends his millennial position by accusing the most important figure of the alternative view – St. Augustine – of introducing “Christianized paganism” into the Church that LaHaye says advocates the spiritualizing and allegorizing of Scripture. He maligns the church father, especially by inferring that he allowed philosophy and theology to supplant the Scriptures for one only has to look at his writings to see just how much the Scriptures permeate them. So we find that his criticism of St. Augustine is misinformed and this raises questions about LaHaye’s dispensational agenda. At the same time, St. Augustine is an example that one does not have to have LaHaye’s view to maintain the hallmarks of the Christian faith. A key difference between the two men seems to be that one advocates living in anxiety about the end and the other advocates living in faith about the end.

LaHaye’s “literal” approach, however, serves his second key principle for understanding Scripture: the Israel-Church distinction. While LaHaye upholds the atonement of Christ as cancelling animal sacrifices, he insists that this truth is only applicable to Christians. After the Church is raptured, the tribulation is a return to the old dispensation of Mosaic Law which must be completed (recall Daniel’s 70 weeks). The Jews will have to re-establish the temple in Jerusalem and the accompanying sacrifices.

From LaHaye’s perspective and from that of those who agree with his eschatology, the great sign that the dispensational prophetic system is accurate is the observable and empirical fact of the re-gathering of Israel. That is, the faithful believer of this tradition is convinced

that prophecy has been miraculously fulfilled through the political events in the 20th century. 1917 (Balfour Agreement); 1948 (War of Independence); and 1967 (Six-Days War) simply proves the fulfilment of prophecy for the advocate of *Left Behind*. This “fulfilment” is considered irrefutable evidence and justification for believing in the theology. In his view, LaHaye now has every reason to alert believers to prepare for the end. He sees himself as possessing both Biblical and political evidence for promoting apocalyptic anxiety. In this light, he is doing people a favour in doing so whilst being obedient to the call of God.

There is no Biblical warrant, however, for LaHaye’s idea of a radical Israel-Church dichotomy. The Church has always interpreted the Old Testament as anticipating Israel’s fulfilment in the Church, and the New Testament is perceived to posit the same continuity. There may be a call for watchfulness in the New Testament, but there is no cause for fear.

Findings from Chapter Four

It is demonstrated in chapter four, however, that dispensational believers do in fact live in a kind of apocalyptic anxiety. Thus, they are apt to call attention to the “entertainment” factor of the novels while believing that these fictional writings also present an actual worldview consistent with prophetic prediction. That is, they find the elaboration of what they consider to be a real future tribulation of unbelievers to be “entertaining;” this reveals a great need of having to cope somehow with their own anxiety to which they admit in the survey. The novels, of course, also provide comfort in the fact that the faithful will be victorious in the end. The dynamic of anxiety and comfort alone account for much of *Left Behind*’s evangelical appeal.

The novels serve apocalyptic anxiety both by reinforcing it and soothing it at the same time. The key benefit for the readers, however, is the assurance that those who also believe are shown to be on God's side. What makes *Left Behind* special is that the authors and their publisher Tyndale House found a way to achieve these things whilst combining them with the previously mentioned attribute of "entertainment" to say nothing of the extensive marketing campaign that took the novels "out of the Christian bookstores [alone] and into the malls, megamarts, and even the more respectable mainstream booksellers (Shuck, 2005: 10)."

The survey also establishes that the readership described above belongs to a large, pre-existing evangelical subculture in the United States. Survey results indicate that the vast majority of readers are members of conservative evangelicalism. This tradition of course has been developing in the United States since the formation of the nation. Noll reminds us of the outlook of those original American Christians who saw themselves as the "specially elect of God like a new ancient Israel (2002: 32f.)." American evangelicals have continued to hold onto this core belief and view America as a "Christian nation."

Evangelical readership is a dedicated readership. When these individuals purchase *Left Behind*, they read on average of 2,400 pages of the fictional novels. Based on their affirmation of the core values represented in the novels, the novels serve to reinforce their evangelical identity in terms of their Biblical, moral, political, and end time beliefs. In addition, they are loyal readers (the average reader has purchased about 6-8 novels in the series); and not only do they collect the novels for themselves, but also purchase them as gifts while viewing the novels as a means of witnessing to friends and family.

The Reasons for *Left Behind*'s Success

What is most important about the survey findings, however, relates to the actual cause of the apocalyptic anxiety. It has been shown that the future narrative of *Left Behind* is accepted not so much as describing the future as the present state of affairs. This is reinforced not only by the fact that part of the series is a three-novel prequel that describes conditions before the rapture, but also by LaHaye's claim that upon the rapture, the Church is removed from the earth. However, the Church (at least part of it) is almost immediately re-established on earth during the tribulation. The story-line of *Left Behind* then focuses on the ensuing battle between the Church and the evil culture led by the Antichrist, but inconsistently in LaHaye's thinking the "cosmic" struggle is already upon us.

The survey (with supporting evidence), therefore, provides important data as to the reasons for *Left Behind*'s success. *Left Behind* has been successful because:

1. It is not serving a broad readership, but a pre-existing evangelical subculture that has its roots in U.S. religious foundations (the individual members of this subculture actually collect several novels on average).
2. The subculture has responded to it on account of its ability to be "entertaining" while also presenting what is considered to be a faithful rendition of the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy.
3. The subculture has responded to it because it represents and reinforces the subculture's Biblical, moral, political, and end time beliefs.
4. The subculture has responded to it because it serves its apocalyptic anxiety by reinforcing it and soothing it at the same time.
5. The subculture has responded to it because the novels facilitate both a collection dynamic and gift-giving (witnessing) dynamic.
6. The subculture has responded to it because its narrative about the future describes present conditions through which the subculture may cope with what it perceives to be an approaching conflict that threatens its status.

The Source of Apocalyptic Anxiety

To reinforce the last point, the survey reveals that the source of anxiety for the readers of *Left Behind* is *not* anxiety about the end. This important point demonstrates millenarian logic, because the faithful will not be present for the worst parts of the end. According to dispensational theology, the rapture will spare true believers from ever having to face the horrific consequences of rejecting Jesus Christ. Instead, the survey reveals that the source of apocalyptic anxiety is the current short-term threat the evangelicals face to their way of life in America, their freedom as evangelical Christians, and their stability while living in what is a noticeably declining “Christian nation.” As said before, every evangelical should therefore consider themselves threatened by Russians, Muslims, Atheists, Secular Humanists and for that matter, the Democratic Party. The demons are ubiquitous and the immediate future of every evangelical is therefore in jeopardy.

These results also show that *Left Behind* reinforces the traditional theory about apocalyptic literature, but with a significant caveat that Collins seems to have anticipated (at least to a certain extent): apocalyptic literature is written for and received by people in crisis, but *sometimes the crisis is of “various kinds (1998: 38),” and in this case it is a perceived crisis in respect to how the short-term future of a people is threatened.* Furthermore, this goes along with Russell’s explanation of apocalyptic amongst the Jews. They were faced with a “corrupt society” and had to deal with the “encroachment of [a] pervasive influence” that was associated with moral and theological compromise (1994: 14).

Chapter Five: Apocalyptic Anxiety and Evangelical Political Activism

LaHaye has seemingly achieved his goal. He has sought to “wake-up” the faithful Church to do something about the apparent moral decline in America. It is worth repeating his statement here:

Most knowledgeable Christians are looking for the Second Coming of Christ and the tribulation period that He predicted would come before the end of the age. Because present world conditions are so similar to those the Bible prophesies for the last days...they conclude that a takeover of our culture by the forces of evil is inevitable; so they do nothing to resist it. This is unscriptural! We are commanded to resist the devil...(1980: 217).

LaHaye’s programme, therefore, is in having created the sense of urgency and alarm through his apocalyptic work, he provides an agenda for how the apocalyptic people should live. There is a programme both for the public (political) aspect and the personal (spiritual) aspect. Here the threat of this modern American evangelical movement is revealed.

The political and spiritual programmes of LaHaye’s apocalypticism serve to reinforce a powerful subculture in America. Up to now we have spoken of the characteristics of apocalyptic in terms of why it is written and by whom it is received, but there are of course other attributes to apocalypticism. Apocalyptic movements create a strong sense of identity among the people on the side of God.

Koester describes apocalypticism as people possessing “[a] dualistic view of the cosmos and of the human sphere” and as a result, they view the situation in culture to be a conflict between “the elect of God and the men of Belial; good and evil spirits in the human heart (1982: 232).” Furthermore, in this outlook, “[t]he view of the present time is pessimistic” and “[t]he prophetic mission can only be accomplished by those members of the nation who remain faithful and observe the divine commandments...(1982: 232-233).”

This view in fact is entirely in line with what LaHaye has stated. Collins continues that “[t]he prospect of a final judgment, then leads to no evasion of responsibility in this world, but rather lends urgency to ethical behavior in the present (1998: 268).” This dynamic is what Cohn explains in *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*:

It seems, rather, that John [in Revelation] was intent on encouraging Christians to see themselves in conflict with the larger society. Like other apocalyptists, he had a notion of cosmic order which was in total contrast with the notions sanctioned by the Hellenistic world in general and by the Roman empire in particular. So far from reflecting divine government, the rule of kings and emperors was an expression of Satan’s power. This was not because that rule was “objectively” oppressive but because John was obsessed by his vision of the church and the world as radically antagonistic. That was enough to sustain his enthusiasm for the overthrow of the established order (1993: 216).

LaHaye denies that he is aiming for the establishment of a theocracy, but his denial seems shallow as he continues to advocate reaching a “Christian consensus” in America. As we have shown, this “consensus” consists of a radical take-over of all significant institutions in the culture by leaders he would deem appropriate. His philosophy goes far beyond simple political activism, because those who oppose his worldview are designated as belonging to the “religion” of secular humanism. For LaHaye, secular humanism is the “repackaged versions of ancient satanic doctrine that ruined Eden (LaHaye and Noebel, 2000: 36).” Such an outlook leads LaHaye to characterize the political situation in America in Manichaeistic terms. LaHaye states, “Our generation speaks of humanism versus biblical truth, but it is the same battle between good and evil (LaHaye, 1980: 24).”

While striving to Christianize America, however, LaHaye is engaged in a great irony: his conservative Baptist roots represent a form of patriotic Christians who “almost all held dogmatically to the ideal of ‘separation of church and state (Marsden, 2006: 135),” LaHaye commenced a project that is contrary to his own theological tradition. The attempt to unite

church and state, however, has not taken into account the evolution of the culture (nor its religious diversity) and its interpretation of the American Constitution. Hamburger says that now “vast numbers of Americans from remarkably diverse backgrounds [perceive] separation to be an ‘American’ constitutional right...[and it has] become established in popular opinion and eventually even in judicial opinions as a fundamental First Amendment freedom (2002: 391).”

LaHaye has therefore had to strive for greater political power in order to stem what he considers to be the humanist tide. With this outlook, LaHaye led evangelicals to unite with the Republican Party (though with the 2009 ascendancy of the Democratic Party, this unity has probably weakened). In the process, LaHaye became a key leader in forming or helping to form the Moral Majority, the American Coalition for Traditional Values and the Council for National Policy. These political bodies have been shown to have had a significant impact not only on presidential elections, but on U.S. political policy. LaHaye’s pursuit of aligning with Republicans was not merely for their anti-abortion and anti-homosexuality positions, but especially for their foreign policy in respect to being “pro-Israel.”

By being pro-Israel, America aligns itself to God’s side of future, fulfilled prophecy. In LaHaye’s teaching, the American invasion of Iraq was viewed to be a part of God’s plan (Wakefield, 2006: 17). According to LaHaye’s worldview the Palestinians are not the arch-enemies of Israel only, but everything that is of God. As set out in the exegetical chapter, LaHaye thinks the prophet Ezekiel predicted a Russian/Islamic massive invasion of Israel. When that happens, LaHaye teaches that war will and must erupt; the fulfilment of divine prophecy demands it. That is, LaHaye’s foreign policy includes leading dispensational evangelicals to prepare for a massive war which will hopefully find America on the side of

Israel and God. LaHaye says point blank: “nuclear war is inevitable (LaHaye and Hindson, 2007: 84).” What is truly frightening, however, is that LaHaye’s pursuits for American support of Israel align with the goals of political conservatives striving for oil and/or the establishment of democracy, the Christian Right, and the Israeli government. These combine to form a volatile combination.

Chapter Six: Apocalyptic Anxiety and Evangelical Spirituality

LaHaye’s second programme for apocalyptic people is an approach to Christian sanctification consisting of stages of Christianity and the opportunity for spiritual elitism. These concepts also align with the apocalyptic imagination. Collins presents early apocalyptic traditions that describe the people of God that must “separate from the habitation of unjust men” and this group corresponds to “those who walk in perfect holiness...(1998: 176).” Cohn describes the seriousness of their striving for sanctification:

Meanwhile the Church had the duty to keep itself apart from the world, the realm of sin which was about to be abolished. The ethical purity, asceticism – symbolized the separateness of the eschatological community, its fitness and readiness to enter into the kingdom at any moment (1993: 209).

LaHaye’s theological alignment with Pelagius is only the starting point in a Christian sanctification with its strong view of whatever God has commanded, man may accomplish. LaHaye, however, also goes beyond Pelagius. After attacking both Aquinas and Augustine for what LaHaye understands to be their syncretism with various aspects of Greek philosophy, LaHaye betrays his own warning against them. LaHaye actually combines his sanctification theology with the ancient medical theories of Hippocrates and the Hippocratic idea of temperament or character. LaHaye believes that by employing the basic concepts of

Hippocrates he uncovers personality weaknesses that Christian sanctification may be used to eradicate those weaknesses.

LaHaye separates Christian justification and sanctification to the extent of establishing levels of Christianity. When combined with the various Biblical descriptions of interacting with the Holy Spirit (being filled with, walking according to, not grieving, not quenching, etc.), the Christian may attain ever higher levels of sanctification. In our study we have examined LaHaye's Christian life work over the last 40 years and found that LaHaye presents a total of five distinct stages. The teaching seriously challenges Christ's call for the Christian to live in humility and in fact those who follow LaHaye's teaching are put in the position of entering into either a state of self-delusion (believing they have advanced into near perfectionism) or of despair (realizing their inability to achieve impossible standards).

In both programmes for modern apocalyptic people, LaHaye represents a grave danger not only to evangelicals, but to other Christians and to all other people. It is important to realize that part of this danger is a spiritual one in respect to knowing Christ. Recall that the survey revealed that while readers allow *Left Behind* to address their own evangelical identity and apocalyptic anxiety, these same readers are not at all impressed with LaHaye's actual presentation of Jesus Christ. In asking the question, "What impact does *Left Behind* have upon the Christian faith of the readership?" The overall answer (as stated above) is dismal in respect to increasing faith. Not only were the novels not perceived to help the readers know Christ better in an intellectual sense, but the novels also failed to impact the readers in a personal (spiritual) way. Finally, the survey revealed that readers expressed that there was practically "no increase" in enhancing their desire to be closer to Jesus Christ.

What *did* come out in the survey, however, is that Jesus Christ is presented as an object for increasing anxiety. This is further verified by the single most prominent image of Jesus Christ coming out of *Left Behind* as revealed in the survey. He is seen as “Judge” by 21.84% and while “Saviour” (12.64%) is in second place, even this is countered by the fact that he is also “terrifying” (6.9%), “confusing” (4.6%) and “unpredictable” (4.6%). This apocalyptic judge would have his people prove their allegiance and if they do not, the consequences will be horrific. LaHaye has made vivid the 21 judgments that await those who are deemed not worthy of rapture.

Response and Suggestions

The only proper response to this fear-inspiring theology is to warn people against it and to expose its character for what it is. Crucial to this task is to return to a better understanding of apocalyptic literature. Russell says that “the aim of prophetic interpretation was to discover, not this and that date or this and that circumstance governing the coming of the kingdom, but rather how the word of scripture had come to be fulfilled in Jesus (1994: 100).” And Christ, on account of his accomplished soteriological work, bids people no longer to live in fear, but to live in love that drives fear away (1st Jn. 4:18). Religions which strive to generate fear should always be held suspect. The proper use of apocalyptic, however, should lead the Church to counter fear with hope. Revelation is not so much about a linear future prediction of judgment as it is about a cyclical re-presentation of Christ’s victory over principalities and powers *already accomplished*. The message is that God will protect and preserve us no matter what happens. As Brighton says Revelation re-enacts this victory “in order to confirm [our] faith in the victory of the Lamb over the dragon, won years before at the cross and empty tomb (1999: 331).”

Another response to rapture theology is to recognize that the way it generates fear and perpetuates anxiety is by never allowing one to reach a goal. A corrective approach to dispensationalism will question this worldview's obsession with stages. For this belief system, there are stages of church history, stages of dispensations, stages of prophetic fulfilment, stages of cultural decline, stages of the second coming and stages of sanctification. With such a view, it must be pointed out that God is perceived never to finish anything. This is seen in multiple resurrections, multiple wars and multiple judgments. God is made to appear both impotent and fickle. Such a theology counters the very doctrines of creation and new creation. For more orthodox traditions God in his love and power creates and does so completely and the proof of this is seen both in the natural realm and in the born-again spirit dedicated to serving others.

The more traditional antithesis to stages is therefore accomplished action. Jesus spoke this way on the cross when he said, “τετελεσται (Jn. 19:30).” In speaking this, Christ announced that human salvation was complete. This has tremendous religious ramifications.

Among the results of God's completed action is the Church. Since she is the recipient of God's grace in Christ even to the extent of being deemed His “body,” she is complete (Eph 5 elaborates on this completeness by describing her as “holy and without blemish”). Given this status, it seems counter-intuitive that the Church would suffer through various stages of decline over the centuries as LaHaye suggests. Furthermore, one must appreciate that the New Testament provides vivid pictures of the Church even in the pristine apostolic age going through terrible problems (e.g. Corinth). These are recorded, however, not to give the impression that one generation would be better than another, but to remind all generations of

God's perfect grace bestowed upon the Church of all generations. Even Corinth received God's grace.

An important facet to this second response includes the fact that the Church is also complete in the sense of being the fulfilment of Old Testament Israel. Israel too is spared of stages. Israel finds its Sabbath rest both in Christ and His body, the Church.

A third safeguard and corrective measure to this theology is to recognize that it lacks recognition of the signs that a completed status has been given by God to Christians and received by them. American evangelicalism is seeking desperately for a sign that God is with her. Given their alarmist theology of constant change and stages, they strive for some kind of external sign that will grant assurance that they are actually on the side of God. The signs are the political and spiritual programmes we have discussed above. Both the concepts of political activism and stages of experiential sanctification amount to the evangelical's "sacrament" or visible sign of God's Word in their lives. These signs, however, only perpetuate anxiety, because they are by nature fluctuating and unreliable.

From a more traditional perspective, evangelicalism would be helped by returning to the older perspectives of the original sacraments given to the Church. At this time the Lord's Supper is neglected within American evangelicalism not only in respect to what is lacking in practice (there is only infrequent reception), but also in their Eucharistic theology. Again, it is noteworthy that while LaHaye argues that the Church should return to early-church eschatology he manages to ignore early-church sacramental thinking. One response to this state of affairs is to encourage reconsideration of the benefits in the sacraments since the early church connected them to spiritual renewal.

Such an approach might provide a solution to the *Left Behind* concept of spiritual advancement which occasions spiritual pride. The sacraments engender humility. Baptism and confession represent dying to self and rising in the image of Christ who did not come to be served, but to serve. Communion is for forgiveness of sins and the one who admits their great need to be forgiven will foster forgiveness (as opposed to the hostility generated towards secular humanists). Such a theology applied to the culture has the potential to transform attitudes.

A fourth potential solution is to address the dualistic tendency of apocalyptic theology which encourages an “either-or” perspective. In this mindset, things and people are either good or evil (Manichaeism); countries are good or evil; and much is either black or white. A better approach to consider is the “both-and” nature of things that even applies to eschatology in the form of a more traditional “now” and “not yet” perspective. The principle, however, applies also to Christians and the places in which they live. Christians are *simul justus et peccator* and have two natures, not one. In the personal interview, LaHaye did not know whether the internal battle described in Romans chapter 7 applied to the converted or unconverted and this explains much of his extreme views about sanctification. The traditional interpretation is that the Christian struggles on account of the battle within them and this in itself is a source of perpetual humility for the Christian.

The “both-and” approach also dissuades the inappropriate aspiration to unite the Church to government as LaHaye has sought to accomplish in the relationship between the Christian Right and the Republican Party. Such an approach implies that the Church is either faithful or unfaithful depending on its level of political activism. This opinion, however, fails to recognize that while the Church is *in* the world it may inspire Christians to be active

citizens in politics, but the Church itself is never *of* the world and bound to government. This is why Pannenberg warned about the dangers of clerical control (1988: 43), but such counsel also helps the church avoid the tables turning and the possibility of the temporal authority overrunning the Church. Luther warned: “Therefore, where the temporal authority presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon God’s government and only misleads souls and destroys them (Luther, 1962: 105).” As citizens of the “kingdom of the civil realm” Christians can and should be as politically active as anyone else especially in respect to our call from Christ to be light and salt, however, this is far different than the Church itself becoming aligned with a political movement.

Another response offered to evangelical apocalypticism is to point out its unqualified acceptance of allowing itself to forgo the words of Christ. The Lord’s words are clear: no one knows when the end will come (Matt. 24:36, Acts 1:7) and yet as has been mentioned, LaHaye simply bypasses Scripture: “we come to the same period for the return of our Lord that many others have suggested: sometime between the turn of the century (A.D. 2000) and the first quarter of the twenty-first century. In other words, *our generation* (LaHaye and Jenkins, 1999: 61).” Such proclamations epitomize a disregard for responsible theology. Russell gives this warning:

To read these biblical books simply as “tracts for the times” is to deny their prophetic power; to read them simply as speculative forecasts is to reduce them to the level of cosmic horoscopes; to read them as forms of spiritual escapism into a fantastic world of mysteries and monsters is to demean and degrade them (1994: 108).

Needless to say, a proper response includes addressing every point of the evangelical/dispensational position that has been presented in this study, especially those points that represent misleading and inaccurate information (e.g. the spurious historical

research by Grant Jeffrey, the misrepresentation of St. Augustine and for that matter the false claim that Keil supported the dispensational position on Russia), but to *merely* argue about historical or exegetical details misses the *reason* such points were brought out. LaHaye seems deceptive. At the very least, he seems to be willing to compromise research integrity for the sake of serving his higher goals that are political, and political to the extent that lives are threatened. These matters of integrity therefore suggest that the anxiety raised by this theology is completely unnecessary and represent the manipulative tactics of a deceptive worldview or the misguided approach of a delusional one.

APPENDIX 1: *LEFT BEHIND* HIGHLIGHTS

The 16 novels of *Left Behind*

The sixteen novels in order of their publication dates are: *Left Behind* (1995); *Tribulation Force* (1996); *Nicolae* (1997); *Soul Harvest* (1998); *Apollyon* (1999); *Assassins* (1999); *The Indwelling* (2000); *The Mark* (2000); *Desecration* (2001); *The Remnant* (2002); *Armageddon* (2003); *Glorious Appearing* (2004); *The Rising* (2005); *The Regime* (2005); *The Rapture* (2006); and *Kingdom Come* (2007)

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The 21 Judgments in *Left Behind* correspond to the Bible and LaHaye’s “non-fiction”

LaHaye has called his fictional work in the *Left Behind* novels “faction,” because the depictions of the 21 (book of Revelation) judgments are described according to the actual understanding in pretribulational premillennial dispensationalism. That is, while the people and places in the novels are fictional, the presentations of the judgments are in accord with the actual understanding of LaHaye’s eschatology. Furthermore, most readers indicated being aware of reading what is considered actual biblical eschatology and were “entertained” in the process. These descriptions of the Revelation judgments are completely consistent with LaHaye’s “literal” approach to apocalyptic literature. The first 12 novels by LaHaye and Jenkins were based on the chronological presentation of the 21 Revelation judgments. The “LaHaye Commentary” refers to LaHaye’s “non-fiction” Revelation commentary, *Revelation Unveiled*.

Judgment	Scripture	LaHaye Commentary	<i>Left Behind Novel</i>
1 st	Rev. 6:2	p. 142-143	<i>Left Behind</i> (p. 252, 272, 274, 413-415)
2 nd	Rev. 6:4	p. 144	<i>Tribulation Force</i> (p. 423-424, 443-445)
3 rd	Rev. 6:5b-6	p. 144-145	<i>Nicolae</i> (p. 297-299)
4 th	Rev. 6:8	p. 145	<i>Nicolae</i> (p. 320-321)
5 th	Rev. 6:9-11	p. 146	<i>Nicolae</i> (p. 348); <i>The Mark</i> (302, 304)
6 th	Rev. 6:12-17	p. 146-147	<i>Nicolae</i> (402-414)
7 th	Rev. 8:1-5	p. 163-164	<i>Nicolae</i> (328)
8 th	Rev. 8:7	p. 166	<i>Soul Harvest</i> (408-412)
9 th	Rev. 8:9	p. 167	<i>Soul Harvest</i> (417-419)
10 th	Rev. 8:10-11	p. 167	<i>Soul Harvest</i> (421)

11 th	Rev. 8:12	p. 167-168	<i>Apollyon (262)</i>
12 th	Rev. 9:3-11	p. 169-173	<i>Apollyon (304-305, 315-318, 325)</i>
13 th	Rev. 9:13-19; 11:13	p. 173-175; p. 191	<i>Assassins (115, 117, 127, 400, 402)</i>
14 th	Rev. 11:15, 19	p. 192, 195	<i>Assassins (175)</i>
15 th	Rev. 16:2	p. 250-251	<i>Desecration (130-131)</i>
16 th	Rev. 16:3	p. 251	<i>Desecration (260, 263-264)</i>
17 th	Rev. 16:4	p. 252	<i>The Remnant (279, 349-351, 355-356, 366, 373)</i>
18 th	Rev. 16:8-9	p. 252-253	<i>The Remnant (384-385, 393)</i>
19 th	Rev. 16:10-11	p. 254-255	<i>The Remnant (400-402)</i>
20 th	Rev. 16:12-16	p. 255-258	<i>Armageddon (277, 302-303, 316)</i> <i>Glorious Appearing (225-226)</i>
21 st	Rev. 16:17-21	p. 258	<i>Armageddon (335-336, 340)</i> <i>Glorious Appearing (129, 131, 133, 148, 160-161, 274-275)</i>

An Alignment of Texts: *Left Behind* Presents Pretribulational Eschatology

By presenting Revelation in “literal” fashion, LaHaye presents a terrifying picture for his readers. Once again, his goal is to wake his readers from complacency so that they may avoid being “left behind” and join the ranks of the 21st century apocalyptic people. LaHaye’s literalistic hermeneutical approach contributes to the generation of apocalyptic anxiety. The following example is based on the 17th judgment (from the Bible, *Revelation Unveiled*, and *The Remnant*).

Biblical Reference:

Revelation 16:4: The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.

Corresponding LaHaye Revelation Commentary:

The third bowl, a sequel to the second, carries with it an interesting explanation as to why God will permit it. God will destroy the only remaining sources of water, the rivers and fountains or springs of the deep, by letting them turn to blood. Whether this means literal blood is inconsequential, for if Christ can turn water to wine, He certainly can turn water to blood. What is significant is that it will become corrupt blood, which will breed disease and pestilence. One of the basic needs of humankind is water. Unless God provides water from another source or engineers by some process can turn this corrupted water into pure water, the world will be in a state of riot and confusion, seeking this necessity of life...[The Antichrist’s] quest for the blood of Christians during the first half of the Tribulation will result in his water supply turning to blood in the last half. This is God’s earthly vindication of the

suffering martyrs from earliest times to the present, answering the prayers of the souls under the altar in Revelation 6 (LaHaye, 1999: 252).

***Left Behind* Fictional Novel Elaboration:**

[In anticipation of the judgment] [The spiritual teacher] thinks the Bowl Judgment on the lakes and rivers is imminent. That one is for sure not permanent. [The judgment strikes] “My people tell me the next curse from the Lord has fallen.” “Uh-oh.” “I cannot imagine what blood looks like, being forced through the control doors of a dam.”...They just stood and watched for a minute. Two of the great doors in the wall of the dam were open, both disgorging huge arcs of liquid, splashing into a ravine and sweeping past them. Blood was so much thicker than water that it sounded and acted differently. It smelled awful, and Mac found it frightening somehow. It reminded him of a nightmare and chilled him...[then the Christian observers discover that for Christians the blood may be drawn out to become clean water] “God takes care of the ones he’s sealed, amen?” [The results of this judgment are realized] Hundreds of thousands were dying everywhere for want of drinkable water. [The second plague is lifted, but this third one remains] God had chosen, in his own time, to lift the plague from the seas, but the lakes and rivers remained blood (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2002: 279, 349-351, 356, 366, 373).

LaHaye’s Claim that *Left Behind* Presents a Loving and Merciful God

In the novel *The Mark*, the fictional leader elaborates that these judgments are more than God’s work upon an unholy and unbelieving world, but “one more evidence of the long-suffering, loving-kindness, and mercy of God himself (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2000b: 143).” In context of the 3 ½ great tribulation, the fictional leader further explains in the novel

Desecration, “God goes to extreme measures to compress the decision-making time for men and women before the coming of Christ to set up his earthly kingdom. Despite that this is clearly the most awful time in history, I still say it is also a merciful act of God to give as many souls as possible an opportunity to put their faith in Christ (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2001: 263).” This the spiritual leader says despite the fact that God has now wiped half the people off the face of the earth. But the optimism in this plot line is unrelenting. In this same novel, *Desecration*, a main protagonist is unwavering: “Buck believed [the teacher’s] prediction that a worldwide revival would break out in the midst of the worst terror of the Tribulation (2001: 263).” There is in this way of thinking the belief that there is evangelistic power in the face of terror.

In the novel *The Remnant*, one of the protagonists in the *Left Behind* drama confesses his struggle with the soteriological tension: “Dr. Ben-Judah [the spiritual leader of the Christians], how does this square with your contention that these judgments are as much about God’s mercy and compassion as they are about his wrath?”...[Answer] “God is just and God is holy, Rayford [the Christian inquiring] but I do not believe he would send any more judgments on the world now if he weren’t still jealous that some repent (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2002: 390).” And here we are informed as to how the dichotomy works: (1) the judgments for unbelievers who will never come to faith are understood especially as wrath and righteous verdict; and (2) the judgments for future believers are seen as expressions of mercy and compassion that will move them to repentance. LaHaye’s idea is that fear works to move a person to faith.

Even for a leading protagonist in the series, the paradox is untenable. In the scene (from the novel *Armageddon*) where darkness has covered Babylon (the fifth bowl judgment), the Christian protagonist observes the sight of an unbelieving woman blinded by the darkness

and in agony. The dialog displays the difference within the tension: God has determined some to suffer beyond description.

“Oh! The pain!”

“I don’t mean to hurt you,” he said quietly.

“Who are you?...An angel?”

“No.”

“I prayed for an angel.”

“You prayed?”

“Promise you’ll tell no one, sir. I’m begging you.”

“You prayed to God?”

“Yes!”

“But you bear [Antichrist’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.”

“Why didn’t you ask for his forgiveness and accept his gift? He wanted to save you.”

She sobbed. “How can you be here and say that?”

“I am not from here.”

“You are my angel!”

“No, but I am a believer.”

“And you can see?”

“Enough to get around.”

[After the Christian is unsuccessful in retrieving food for the suffering woman...]

“I’m back, ma’am,” he said quietly. “No food. I’m sorry.”

“Oh, God, oh, God and Jesus, help me!”

“Ma’am,” he said, reaching for her. She shrieked...

“I knew before everybody disappeared,” she said pitifully. “And then I knew for sure. With every plague and judgment, 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. But knowing it didn’t mean Rayford understood it. And it certainly didn’t mean he had to like it. He couldn’t make it compute with the God he knew, the loving and merciful one who seemed to look for ways to welcome everyone into heaven, not keep them out (LaHaye and Jenkins, 2003: 14-15, 17-18).

This dialog is evidently what LaHaye considers to be motivation for coming to faith.

APPENDIX 2: THE WORKS OF TIM LAHAYE

Marriage and Family

1. LaHaye, Tim (1968, 2002). *How to Be Happy Though Married*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
2. LaHaye, Tim and LaHaye, Beverly (1976, 1998). *The Act of Marriage*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
3. LaHaye, Tim and LaHaye, Beverly (1976, 1984). *What Lovemaking Means to a Woman*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
4. LaHaye, Tim (1978). *Six Keys to a Happy Marriage*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
5. LaHaye, Tim and LaHaye, Beverly (1978). *Spirit Controlled Family Living*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company.
6. LaHaye, Tim (1984). *What Lovemaking Means to a Man*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
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9. LaHaye, Tim (1989). *Four Steps to an Intimate Marriage*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
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11. LaHaye, Tim and LaHaye, Beverly (1993). *Against the Tide: How to Raise Sexually Pure Kids*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Books.
12. LaHaye, Tim and Tuma, Jerry (1994). *Smart Money*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Books.
13. LaHaye, Tim and LaHaye, Beverly (1995). *The Spirit-Filled Family: Expanded for the Challenges of Today*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.
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15. LaHaye, Tim and LaHaye, Beverly (1997). *Alike in Love: When Opposites Attract*. Denver, CO: New Leaf Publications.

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19. LaHaye, Tim and LaHaye, Beverly (1998). *Raising Sexually Pure Kids: How to Prepare Your Children for the Act of Marriage*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Books.
20. LaHaye, Tim, LaHaye, Beverly, and Yorkey, Mike (2000). *The Act of Marriage after 40*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
21. LaHaye, Tim (2006). *Understand Your Man*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House.
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Society and Culture

23. LaHaye, Tim (1976). *The Bible's Influence on American History*. San Diego, CA: Master Books.
24. LaHaye, Tim (1978). *The Unhappy Gays: What Everyone Should Know About Homosexuality*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
25. LaHaye, Tim (1980). *The Battle for the Mind*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company.
26. LaHaye, Tim (1982). *The Battle for the Family*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company.
27. LaHaye, Tim (1983). *The Battle for the Public Schools*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company.
28. LaHaye, Tim (1984). *The Hidden Censors*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company.
29. LaHaye, Tim (1986). *The Race for the 21st Century*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.
30. LaHaye, Tim (1989). *Finding The Will Of God In A Crazy, Mixed-Up World*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
31. LaHaye, Tim (1990). *If Ministers Fall, Can They Be Restored?* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.

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33. LaHaye, Tim and LaHaye, Beverly (1994). *A Nation Without A Conscience*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.
34. LaHaye, Tim and Noebel, David (2000). *Mind Siege*. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing.

Christian Life, Temperament and Attitude

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36. LaHaye, Tim (1971, 1993). *Transformed Temperaments*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.
37. LaHaye, Tim (1974, 1996). *How to Win Over Depression*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
38. LaHaye, Tim (1974). *Ten Steps to Victory Over Depression*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
39. LaHaye, Tim (1978). *Your Temperament Can Be Changed*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.
40. LaHaye, Tim and Phillips, Bob (1982, 2002). *Anger Is a Choice*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
41. LaHaye, Tim (1983). *How To Manage Pressure Before Pressure Manages You*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
42. LaHaye, Tim (1984). *Your Temperament: Discover Its Potential*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.
43. LaHaye, Tim (1984). *Why You Act The Way You Do*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.
44. LaHaye, Tim (1984). *Increase Your Personality Power*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.
45. LaHaye, Tim (1989). *What Should I Do, Lord?* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
46. LaHaye, Tim (1991). *Transforming Your Temperament*. New York: Inspirational Press.
47. LaHaye, Tim (1998). *The Power of the Cross: Real Stories, Real People, A Real God*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Books.

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49. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (2002). *Will I Be Left Behind?* Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.
50. LaHaye, Tim, Jenkins, Jerry and Rohrer, Norman B. (2003). *These Will Not Be Left Behind*. Colorado Springs, CO: Alive Communications, Inc.

Understanding Scripture

51. LaHaye, Tim (1976, 2007). *How to Study the Bible for Yourself*. Irvine, Calif.: Harvest House Publishers.
52. LaHaye, Tim (1990). *How to Study Bible Prophecy for Yourself*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.
53. LaHaye, Tim (1998). *Understanding the Last Days*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.
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55. LaHaye, Tim (2001, 2009). *Understanding Bible Prophecy for Yourself*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.

Apologetics

56. LaHaye, Tim and Morris, John D. (1976). *The Ark on Ararat*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Co.
57. LaHaye, Tim (1996). *Jesus Who Is He?* Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Books.
58. LaHaye, Tim (2004). *Why Believe In Jesus?* Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.
59. LaHaye, Tim and Minasian, David (2009) *Jesus: Why the World Is Still Fascinated by Him*. Elgin, IL: David C. Cook.

Eschatology

60. LaHaye, Tim (1966). *Christ and the Tribulation 1-3*. La Mesa, California: Post, Inc.

61. LaHaye, Tim (1972, 1991). *The Beginning of the End*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.
62. LaHaye, Tim (1973). *Revelation -- Illustrated and Made Plain*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
63. LaHaye, Tim (1981). *Life in the Afterlife*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
64. LaHaye, Tim (1984). *The Coming Peace in the Middle East*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
65. LaHaye, Tim (1992). *No Fear of the Storm*. Sisters, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.
66. James, William T. (ed) (1992). *Storming Toward Armageddon*. Denver, CO: New Leaf Publications. [Tim LaHaye is an essayist in this publication.]
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72. LaHaye, Tim and others (eds) (2001). *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*. United States of America: AMG Publishers.
73. LaHaye, Tim and Ice, Thomas (2001). *Charting the End Times*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.
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75. LaHaye, Tim (2002). *The Rapture: Who Will Face the Tribulation?* Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.
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80. LaHaye, Tim and Swanson, Sandi L. (2005). *The Authorized Left Behind Handbook*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.
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Devotionals

84. LaHaye, Tim (1999). *God's Precious Promises: New Testament, Rainbow*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers. [This is a KJV New Testament with promises highlighted by LaHaye.]
85. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (2001). *Perhaps Today*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.
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87. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (2003). *The Promise of Heaven*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.
88. LaHaye, Tim, Jenkins, Jerry and Martin, Frank M. (2004). *Embracing Eternity*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers.
89. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (2004). *Jesus and the Hope of His Coming*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.
90. LaHaye, Tim and Dinallo, Gregory S. (2005). *The Best Christmas Gift*. New York: Kensington Publishing Corps.
91. LaHaye, Tim and Dinallo, Gregory S. (2005). *Come Spring*. New York: Kensington Publishing Corps.
92. LaHaye, Tim and Dinallo, Gregory S. (2008). *Always Grace*. New York: Kensington Publishing Corps.

Fictional Series

93. LaHaye, Tim and DeMoss, Bob (2001). *The Mind Siege Project Soul Survivor Series, Book 1*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.
94. LaHaye, Tim and DeMoss, Bob (2001). *All the Rave Soul Survivor Series, Book 2*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.
95. LaHaye, Tim and DeMoss, Bob (2002). *The Last Dance Soul Survivor Series, Book 3*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.
96. LaHaye, Tim and DeMoss, Bob (2003). *Black Friday Soul Survivor Series, Book 4*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.
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102. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (2007). *Mark's Story, The Jesus Chronicles, Book 2*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
103. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (2009). *Luke's Story, The Jesus Chronicles, Book 3*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
104. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (1995). *Left Behind*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
105. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (1996). *Tribulation Force*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
106. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (1997). *Nicolae*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
107. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (1998). *Soul Harvest*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

108. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (1999). *Apollyon*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
109. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (1999). *Assassins*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
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116. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (2005). *The Rising*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
117. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (2005). *The Regime*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
118. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (2006). *The Rapture*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
119. LaHaye, Tim and Jenkins, Jerry (2007). *Kingdom Come*. Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
- 120-159. LaHaye, Tim, Jenkins, Jerry and [many with] Fabry, Chris (1998-2004). *Left Behind – the Kids’ Series*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

APPENDIX 3: SURVEY

Left Behind Doctoral Survey

Between 1995-2004 Rev. Dr. Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins published a 12-volume *Left Behind* series of fictional, Christian novels. The novels are entitled: *Left Behind*, *Tribulation Force*, *Nicolae*, *Soul Harvest*, *Apollyon*, *Assassins*, *The Indwelling*, *The Mark*, *Desecration*, *The Remnant*, *Armageddon*, and *Glorious Appearing*. In addition, this *Left Behind* series had a parallel “The Kids” series that originally appeared in 40 volumes. The main, adult series is being completed through a three-volume prequel: *The Rising*, *The Regime*, and *The Rapture*. The latter was released in 2006. Finally, there will be a one-volume sequel – probably coming out this year -- to conclude the entire series.

I am conducting research through The University of Birmingham in England on Tim LaHaye’s Christian theology and its potential influences upon American Christianity and culture. Another important consideration is why the *Left Behind* series has been so successful in America. *Left Behind* is a form of apocalyptic literature (a genre that reveals things otherwise unknown like details on the end of the world). The series also predicts a literal 1000-year reign of Jesus Christ on this earth. *Left Behind* is therefore millenarian. That is, it perpetuates the idea of millenarism, millennialism or chiliasm: again, the belief that a 1000-year kingdom of God on earth is coming. This is a well-known characteristic of apocalyptic literature. Why is this form of literature so popular in America? What might the popularity of these works say about our American culture? Furthermore, since these works claim to be Christian and representative of the Christian faith, it is also my goal to understand how the Christian faith – especially Jesus Christ – is presented and perceived through these works. Thank you for your participation! Rev. Alfonso O. Espinosa, Senior Pastor of Living Word Lutheran Church, The Woodlands, TX of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

I. Preliminary Information:

1. Have you read at least one of the *Left Behind* novels mentioned above?
Yes ____ No ____
2. If yes, how many of the novels have you read? ____

3. How old are you? 13-19 ____ 20-34 ____ 35-42 ____
43-54 ____ 55-62 ____ 63 and over ____
4. Are you male ____ female ____
5. Marital status: Single/Never Married ____ Single/Married Before ____
Married ____
6. In what region of the United States have you lived the longest?
West Coast ____ Mountains ____ North ____ Midwest ____
South ____ East Coast ____
Hawaii ____ Alaska ____ Southwest ____
7. In what kind of community have you mostly lived?
Rural ____ Town (under 5000) ____ Small city (to 100,000) ____
Large City (100,000 +) ____ Megalopolis (e.g. NY, LA) ____
8. What is your annual income?
Student ____ Up to 30K ____ 30K-65K ____
65K-100K ____ Over 100K ____
9. What is your ethnicity?
Asian ____ Hispanic ____ African-American ____ White, non-Hispanic ____
Other: _____

10. What is your level of education?
 Did not complete high school ____ Currently in high school ____
 Completed high school ____ Currently in college ____
 BA/BS ____ Master's Degree ____ Doctorate ____
11. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being "very little," 5 being "very much"), how much did you enjoy the novel(s)? ____
12. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being "not likely," 5 being "very likely"), how likely is it that you will purchase recent or upcoming editions of the series (e.g. the prequels or sequel)? ____
13. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being "not likely," 5 being "very likely"), how likely are you to recommend the novel(s) to a friend? ____
14. Why did you read the novel(s)? (check as many as apply)
- Entertainment ____ Personal growth ____ Recommended by a friend ____
 Recommended by my church and/or pastor ____
 Learn about possible future ____ Learn more about Christianity ____
 Curiosity ____ Inspirational ____ To get closer to God ____
 Learn about how Biblical prophecy plays out ____
 To prepare for the end times ____ To avoid being left behind ____
15. While the *Left Behind* series is fictional, the Biblical teaching within it is supposed to be real and accurate. While you read the novel(s), were you aware that the authors present what they actually believe the Bible teaches?
 Yes ____ No ____
16. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being "not happy," 5 being "very happy"), how happy were you with your occupation (job, school or main daytime activity) at the time of reading the novel(s)? ____

17. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “not stable,” 5 being “very stable”), how financially stable were you while reading the novel(s)? ____
18. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “not healthy,” 5 being “very healthy”), how physically healthy were you while reading the novel(s)? ____
19. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “not happy,” 5 being “very happy”), how happy were you with your life in general while reading the novel(s)? ____
20. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “not strong,” 5 being “very strong”), how strong were your family relationships while reading the novel(s)? ____
21. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “not stable,” 5 being “very stable”), how stable was your life in general while reading the novel(s)? ____

22. Which of the following applies to you?

Christian ____ Adhere to another world religion (e.g. Islam, Judaism, Hinduism) ____ Have spiritual beliefs in a higher being but claim no religious affiliation ____ Consider yourself to be agnostic or atheist (either believe that God cannot be known or believe that God does not exist) ____ Other:

23. If you are a Christian, approximately how often do you attend congregational worship services?
- Every week ____ Every other week ____ Once per month ____
- Three or four times per year ____ Once per year ____
- Rarely ____ Never ____

24. If you are a Christian, which characterization of faith seems most accurate to you?

It is a gift from God through His Word and Spirit (the work of God that creates this act of man) ____

It is something we have to decide upon and develop ourselves (the work *and* the act of man) ____ Don't know ____

25. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no enjoyment,” 5 being “enjoy very much”), how much do you enjoy “disaster” films? ____
26. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “do not believe,” 5 being “strongly believe”), how much do you believe the Bible to be the inspired, inerrant Word of God? ____
27. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “not likely,” 5 being “very likely”), how likely is it that Christ will return in your lifetime to conduct a universal judgment of all people? ____

Part I: The Situation in America:

28. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no anxiety,” 5 being “much anxiety”), how much anxiety do you think exists in America about the world we live in? ____
29. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “very little,” 5 being “very much”), how much anticipation do you think there is in America about the possibility that the world might end very soon (within the current or next generation)? ____
30. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no stress,” 5 being “high stress”), how much stress do you think is caused in America by our inability to clearly identify what threatens our national security? ____
31. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “unlikely cause,” 5 being “likely cause”), how much do you think our economic climate causes anxiety in America? ____
32. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “unlikely cause,” 5 being “likely cause”), how much do you think our high immigration rate causes anxiety in America? ____
33. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “unlikely cause,” 5 being “likely cause”), how much do you think the disintegration of the traditional family in America causes distress and anxiety in our country? ____
34. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no anxiety,” 5 being “high anxiety”), how much anxiety do you think exists due to the high rate of new and changing technology?

35. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no anxiety,” 5 being “high anxiety”), how much anxiety do you think exists due to our living in the 21st century since there are so many predictions that the world will end in 2012 or 2030, etc.? ____
36. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no anxiety,” 5 being “high anxiety”), how much anxiety do you think is generated from the current culture wars in America between liberal and conservative poles? ____
37. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no anxiety,” 5 being “high anxiety”), how much anxiety do you think is caused by our worrying about the deteriorating ozone layer, the greenhouse effect, and the general changes in our weather patterns? ____
38. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no worry and concern,” 5 being “high worry and concern”), how much worry and concern do you think exists because of the possibility of our entering into a major war that could touch American soil? ____
39. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “not close,” 5 being “very close”), how close do you think America is to losing her current way of life as she knows it? ____
40. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “not safe and secure,” 5 being “very safe and secure”), how safe and secure do you think America is? ____
41. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “not anxious,” 5 being “very anxious”), how anxious are you about our current political leadership? ____
42. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “not anxious,” 5 being “very anxious”), how anxious are you about the end of the world? ____
43. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “keep totally separate,” 5 being “combine as much as possible”), how much do you think America should combine Church and State, Religion and Politics? ____
44. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “should not incorporate,” 5 “should incorporate”), how much do you think America should incorporate the civil and moral laws (e.g. The Ten Commandments) described in the Bible? ____
45. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “no support,” 5 being “strong support”), how much do you support the death penalty? ____

46. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “not important,” 5 being “very important”), how important do you think it is to teach other theories on the origin of the earth (besides evolution) in the public schools? ____
47. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being “not important,” 5 being “very important”), how important do you think it is that America think of herself as a “Christian Nation”? ____

Part II: The Presentation of Jesus Christ

48. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being “not clear,” 5 being “very clear”), how clear in your opinion is the presentation of Jesus Christ in the novel(s) from a traditional Christian perspective (i.e. that He is true God and man, that He came to save us from sin, death and the power of the devil, that He rose bodily from the grave and that He leads His Church today)? ____
49. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being “no change,” 5 being “a lot better”), how much better do you know about Christ (intellectual knowledge) through the novel(s)? ____
50. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being “no change,” 5 being “a lot better”), how much better do you know Christ in a personal way (spiritually) through the novel(s)? ____
51. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being “no change or possibly less appealing,” 5 being “much more appealing”), how much more appealing is Christ to you as a result of reading the novel(s)? ____
52. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being “no increase,” 5 being “great increase”), how much did the novel(s) increase your desire to be closer to Jesus Christ? ____
53. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being “not positive,” 5 being “very positive”), how positive do you think is the image of Christ in the novel(s)? ____
54. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being “not negative,” 5 being “very negative”), how negative do you think is the image of Christ in the novel(s)? ____
55. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being “no association,” 5 being “strong association”), how much do you think the image of Christ is associated with such concepts as judgment, war, conflict, battle, fear and anxiety in the novel(s)? ____

56. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being “no association,” 5 being “strong association”), how much do you think the image of Christ is associated with such concepts as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and hope in the novel(s)? ____
57. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being “no inspiration,” 5 being “strong inspiration”), how much did the presentation of Jesus Christ in the novel(s) inspire you to either become a Christian or remain a Christian? ____
58. Select the three words below that, in your opinion, best describe how Jesus Christ is presented in the novel(s):

Judge ____ Savior ____ Lord ____ God ____ Friend ____

Victor ____ Redeemer ____ Legalist ____ Threat ____

Just ____ Unfair ____ Confusing ____ Appealing ____

Terrifying ____ Attractive ____ Repulsive ____

Intimidating ____ Oppressive ____ Unpredictable ____

Cruel ____ Merciful ____ Loving ____ Compassionate ____

Conclusion:

Thank you for your participation! Please fill out the information below *if you would be open to a personal interview*.

Yes, I am open to a personal interview. I would be willing to communicate to you through:

E-mail: _____ (your e-mail address)

Telephone: _____ (your telephone number)

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW

Dr. Tim LaHaye Phone Interview, Thursday, August 14th, 2008

Preliminary comments, questions, etc.:

I think his wife Beverly answered the phone as I called right on the dot at 4 pm Texas time (2 pm California time). Dr. LaHaye came to the phone and gave a generic “hello.” I identified myself and immediately thanked him for the opportunity and his time. While cordial, he was also a little formal at first. He immediately informed me that he had an important phone call coming in from his attorney at 5:15 pm (3:15 pm California time). He also immediately asked me if the interview was being recorded. I informed him that it was not, but that my laptop was set-up so that I could type as much of each response as possible. He said that that would be difficult, but I assured him I would do my best. He then continued by saying, “I have a question for you: why would a Reformed man like yourself want to interview an Evangelical like me?” (paraphrase) He seemed genuinely intrigued about my motives and I did not hesitate to answer his question. I gave him two answers:

First, I explained that my work at the University of Birmingham in England was through the department of historical theology and that therefore my work was worthwhile from a historical perspective in terms of Christian theology in America since he has been published since 1966 and that his name is connected to -- either through sole authorship, combined authorship or as an editor -- over 150 published works. Secondly, that it was a worthwhile question to consider: “Why the great success of *Left Behind* in America and what does this success say about Christianity and the culture in America?” For this second question, I acknowledged the Evangelical Christian answer to the question: *Left Behind* was successful on account of God’s blessing and the work of the Holy Spirit. Admittedly, I was trying to connect to him and he seemed to very much affirm what I had said. We then moved right into the questions. He had requested the questions weeks before the following interview, so he had the questions in written form in front of him and he read each question aloud. It was my goal to get through the questions and learn as much as possible. I had no interest in debating him, though there were many opportunities to do so as our two traditions are quite different. However, I thoroughly enjoyed his immense passion, sincerity, conviction and frankly, his very loving and friendly demeanour over the phone.

1. Question: How do you want to be remembered in terms of your public ministry legacy?
Answer: I have never thought about this. I want to be remembered for my absolute commitment to the Word of God in everything I did: my pastoring, writing, radio, television, movies (someday). I want to be known by laypeople that I was true to the Scripture.

[Post-interview reaction: An admirable answer from a traditional, Evangelical perspective. He seemed very sincere, very genuine.]

2. Question: Do your areas of expertise like prophecy, Christian political activism against secular humanism and temperaments inter-relate? If so, how? Answer: [He admitted in so many words that he did not have a pre-conceived connection for these areas.] I have been impressed with the promise of the second coming of Jesus ever since I started preaching. There are at least 321 references to the second coming. Every ancient church creed according to its doctrinal content includes the second coming of Jesus. The second coming is at least three times as certain as the first coming which is stated just over 100 times. Then [after his initial interest in prophecy], in the 1970's, secularizers were destroying the educational system, our government and Christianity. In the meantime, the church was sound asleep. The prevailing attitude was just let the nice civic people run the country, but there were no nice civic people, so I did all I could to get Christians involved, to get the right people elected. In 1980, I realized that when those who were elected went to Washington, they would represent differently [they were not consistent in the way they had run for office]. Then the voter's guides came out. This changed the perspective. I do not trust secular humanists, but when the righteous are in control, the people rejoice. People are more interested in moral values, not a political party.

[Post-interview reaction: He left out temperament theory which is a major aspect of his overall body of work. However, I consider it significant that he admitted to not having planned a particular connection or relationship in the three major areas of his work. I say that the absence of any thought of correlation is significant because I see some rather clear intersections. For example, he wants to refer to the growing immorality in our nation as a sign of the end-times that ties directly to his works on prophecy and eschatology. His cultural and political work substantiates this sign in the way he elaborates on his perspective of the evils of secular humanism. Within his system, the cultural and political diagnosis legitimizes his opinion that we are living in the end-times. Furthermore, the sense of security offered to true believers/Christians who will be raptured springs from a very experiential form of Christianity that is richly elaborated on through his books on temperament. I see connections at every turn, but he indicates that he intended no connection. It is surprising to me that he did not bring out a common denominator or shared theme in his works.]

3. Question: Why do you believe the *Left Behind* series was such a huge success? Answer: It was so successful for two reasons: One, it is based so faithfully on the literal interpretation of Bible prophecy and two, because I had prayed for a master fiction writer and the Lord brought Jerry Jenkins, who is very much a master fiction writer.

[Post-interview reaction: He seems to attribute the success to divine providence. The supernaturalism in his published theology was also clear in this interview.]

4. Question: Why did you write *Left Behind* with Jerry Jenkins and what were you hoping to achieve? Answer: I wanted to confront people with the prophetic hand of God in the Word of God so that they could be prepared to meet God. Tens of thousands have come to Christ [as a result of this work].

[Post-interview reaction: He is focused on an evangelical motive consistent with the Great Commission as recorded in Matthew 28. His answer is consistent with what he has written on several occasions: his work is for the purpose of spreading the Gospel.]

5. Question: How would you describe the core group of readers or the more or less typical reader of *Left Behind*? Answer: The readers run the gamut: from dedicated Christians, to backslidden Christians, to atheists and to people who just like fiction. I have heard remarkable stories of atheists who came to faith through *Left Behind*. In one case, the atheist who was converted gave the book back to the person who gave it to him so that that person would also be converted!

[Post-interview reaction: In his view there is no core group: the readers are from all backgrounds. This sounds impressive, but the research shows a unique primary audience.]

6. Question: How successful and influential has the Council of National Policy been over the years? Answer: I started the organization in 1981 to offset the many organizations of liberals and the one-world global concept of giving up sovereignty of the U.S. to the U.N. which is doomed to failure. It [the CNP] has been extremely successful. I was founder and also president for its first two years. Since then the Lord has raised up the people [CNP leaders]. One reason I got involved was because I am pro-family, but many of the leaders in the pro-family movement are choleric [in temperament] and so would compete against each other. So I made it my goal to make them friends and have them become compatriots so that they would work together...there have been great leaders like Ed Meese, Judge Pressler, Pam Moore and others.

[Post-interview reaction: I was looking for a strong statement of the mixing of the two kingdoms. His answer, however, made no indication of this. He wanted to influence government to be more in line with his -- and other conservative leaders' -- view of what is known as "pro-family."]

7. Question: What was your personal relationship like with the late Bill Bright, D. James Kennedy and Jerry Falwell? Answer: I met Bill Bright over 45 years ago and I was impressed with his passion for evangelism. He was Presbyterian and had great faith and vision. He believed that God could do anything. He probably led more people to Christ than anyone since the apostle Paul. D. James Kenney was a dear friend, and put great emphasis on patriotism and American values (which I loved). He was another Presbyterian from the Reformed Church. Both of them launched the best soul-winning programs. Jerry was a close friend who I knew since the mid-70s. He was a good friend. He had a photographic memory and trusted the Word of God for everything. All three have had a profound influence upon America. I dread to think where America would be without them. I miss them to be honest with you. Whenever I started a new organization, they were there to help.

[Post-interview reaction: My goal in this question was to try to find a shared stripe, theological tradition and fabric with other politically and culturally oriented Evangelicals. Sure enough -- even though he states that Bright and Kennedy were "Reformed" -- they all represent the same basic American Evangelical tradition. That is, LaHaye is truly representative of conservative Evangelicalism in light of his close relationship with these other leaders who were also prominent in America. This would appear to place Dr. LaHaye within a larger movement. These three other Evangelicals, though now recently deceased, established ministry organizations still active today.]

8. Question: In *Are We Living in the End Times* page 61: "...we come to the same time period for the return of our Lord that many others have suggested: sometime between the turn of the century and the first quarter of the twenty-first century. In other words, *our generation*." Do you still maintain this time period? Answer: I really believe ours could be the [last] generation. Here is a minor example of why I believe this to be the case just from today's paper: AP released that by 2042, whites [non-Hispanic Caucasians in the U.S.] will no longer be the majority. This is important because new immigrants do not share the values and commitment to the Biblical principles of our founding fathers. Secularizers have been working for over 200 years and have tried to change the history of America. In my book *Faith of Our Founding Fathers* I cited some of these things.

[Post-interview reaction: LaHaye continues the pretribulational premillennial dispensational tradition of predicting the season of the rapture, tribulation, etc. I believe this boldness in prediction is a sensationalistic quality contributing to the movement's populist/revivalist tendency. In regards to his comments about immigration, it is interesting to me that the increase of immigrants is not first mentioned as an opportunity for evangelism, but as a liability to America's Christian moorings.]

9. Question: Hypothetically speaking: If early discoveries on the rapture like the one from Pseudo-Ephrem didn't exist and the only historical records of the rapture were confined to the last 500 years, would this in any way dissuade your teaching on the rapture? Why or why not? Answer: The rapture teaching did not start with John Darby, but even if Pseudo-Ephrem did not exist, we believe that other early documents existed and have over the centuries been destroyed. In time, there will probably be others that have not been destroyed. However, even if we couldn't find any, it would not change my mind. If you take John 14:1-6 literally you have Jesus own promise, the first promise of the rapture. In 1st Thessalonians 4 Paul answered the questions of the Thessalonians and taught on the rapture. Within six months, Paul sends a letter to Corinth and reaffirmed the rapture in 1st Corinthians 15. The rapture is also taught in Revelation 3:10 and Revelation 4:1-2. Furthermore, the Church is no longer mentioned from chapters 4 through 19 in the book of Revelation. The Jews, however, are mentioned 24 times in those chapters, because this time is for the Jews [and not the church].

[Dr. LaHaye elaborates and goes beyond my question] One of the major divides in prophecy among Christians occurred through Augustine who was brilliant and who was marvellously converted. He made a definite impact [for Christendom], but he was also a Greek philosopher or influenced by Greek philosophy before he was saved [converted to Christianity]. For him, the allegorization of Scripture became a standard. In his early days he was a premillennialist, but he later changed his position. He tried to bring peace to the church. There was a divide between literal vs. allegorical, so he taught that we should take everything in Scripture literally, except prophecy. I contend that God never intended that prophecy should be interpreted by the Greeks. We are to take the Bible for what it says. Amillennialism cannot be proven from the Scripture. It is a theory that is based on allegorizing Scripture. During the Dark Ages when the Bible was kept in museum's, archives, etc. that's when amillennialism was supreme except in heretical churches -- like the "Church of the First Born" [interesting reference as this is a name associated with Mormonism] -- that had retained the original premillennial teaching. It was not until the Bible was translated into English by Wycliff and the invention of the printing press that the Bible was made available to the people. Today, the Bible is still the #1 bestseller. It is interesting that the national bestseller lists simply do not list the actual #1 bestseller which has always been the Bible. Their #1 bestseller is actually #2 because of the Bible. As soon as the Bible was spread to the lay people, they took it literally. Otherwise [for them to have a different understanding] they have to be brainwashed to take the Bible symbolically. If you take the Bible literally then you can understand prophecy. Revelation 1:3 says, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy...". I am a teacher of prophecy, because when people "get it" [understand it] they know that the best is yet to come. That's why when my friends are promoted to heaven, I do not mourn them. I know that they are in better shape.

[Post-interview reaction: Dr. LaHaye does not seem aware that Augustine's spectrum of interpretation in application to eschatology (which includes aspects of Dr. LaHaye's "prophecy" teaching) was quite broad and was not limited to allegorical interpretations. Furthermore, there continues to be a tendency to treat early church premillennialism with modern-day pretibulational dispensationalism as synonymous. In addition, his understanding of amillennialism as allegorization skirts the issue of apocalyptic as legitimate genre. Finally, extra-biblical historical witness is almost treated as immaterial. It is enough for Dr. LaHaye to make a case for his rapture teaching based on his unique interpretation of Scripture alone apart from external and historical witnesses.]

10. Question: The Church is raptured and is not present during the tribulation. At the same time, people come to saving faith, are filled with the Spirit and fellowship in the Word of God and prayer during the tribulation. Is it therefore appropriate to say that even though the Church is not initially present, that the Church (part of it) is *eventually* present on earth during the tribulation? Answer: This is an important question. The Church is made up of all the born-again (John 3) and when Jesus shouts from heaven, the Church will be taken up. However, people are also saved during the tribulation. For example, the 144,000, but they are never called “Christians.” They are called “saints.” They enter into a different relationship. We [the Christians who will be raptured] will be the bride of Christ, but they [those who are converted during the tribulation] will have a different relationship. One reason for this difference is because if a post-tribulation rapture were true [LaHaye’s position is pre-tribulation], then there would not be anyone left to populate the Millennium.

[Post-interview reaction: I don’t think Dr. LaHaye really answered my question. He admits that the Church is made up of all the born-again. He clearly teaches that many will be born-again during the tribulation, but says in many places within his writings that the Church is removed during the tribulation. This is a basic contradiction. A key reason for his Church removal doctrine is to reinforce the dispensational idea that God must conduct separate dispensations (eras and methods of salvation) for separate groups of people: one for the Jews and one for the Christian Church. This entire system, however, seems compromised by the fact that the Church is in fact clearly represented those who are converted to Christ after the rapture. By simply stating that these Christians are referred to as “saints” and that they will populate the Millennium does not solve the dilemma.]

11. Question: In *Kingdom Come* [the last novel of the *Left Behind* series] the Lord has the Jews continually bringing sacrifices to the millennial temple. One reason for this is page 23: “...and because they rejected Me for so long.” What does this mean? Answer: [Dr. LaHaye pleasantly laughs] This is a perceptive question. No nation has had more reason than this one [the nation of the Jews] to believe. They were just blind. They do not even read Isaiah 53 in the temple [synagogue?] today. They refuse the Messiah. Right now I’m working on my new book: *Why This Fascination With Jesus?* [I’m not sure if this is the title or simply the main question addressed in this book] The cover has 13 different pictures of Jesus. Of the 13 billion people who ever lived in the history of the world, Jesus Christ is the most influential. Even the greatest philosophers combined over hundreds of years did not influence history as much as Jesus did in just three years! But the Jews refused to accept Him. Fortunately, a third of the Jews during the tribulation will receive Christ.

[Post-interview reaction: Dr. LaHaye evaded this question more than any other. Based on how he answered my question, I don't see how my question could have been considered "perceptive." The point of my question alludes to the fact that Christ is depicted as remembering past sin during the millennium. The Jews are depicted as conducting a 1000-year long penance for their past failure. This paints a very interesting picture of Christ. Dr. LaHaye's answer, however, simply tried to justify the remembrance of sin. This seems contrary to the theme of God's love and forgiveness in Christ. God is said to remember our transgression no more.]

12. Question: You've emphasized that the tribulation judgments are actually expressions of God's mercy to awaken people from complacency for the sake of repentance. At the same time, you've also acknowledged the possibility that the Lord might remove those He knows will remain hardened. *Assassins* page 174: "...God may be winnowing from the evil forces the incorrigibles whom he, in his omniscience, knows would never have turned to him regardless." Is it therefore safe to say that the stated main purpose of the judgments which is to awaken from complacency applies only to those who will come to faith? Answer: God gives people during the seven year tribulation a chance to make a decision. He is going to seal the believers, but the incorrigibles will never change. This [the chance to decide] is an act of mercy. Study Revelation very carefully and you find many acts of mercy by God.

[Post-interview reaction: There seems to be a considerable problem in Dr. LaHaye's theological system at this juncture. His overall teaching is strongly Armenian as he constantly propounds on the freedom and ability of the will of man to choose salvation. Within such a system, it would seem that all men receive his version of mercy to be awakened from complacency so that they may all exert the freedom of their will for salvation. However, in the quote from *Assassins* and for that matter in his interview answer, there are certain individuals who will quite simply never change. There are serious implications in respect to Dr. LaHaye's teaching on "mercy" at this juncture. That is, what is the purpose of pouring fiery judgments upon those who will never change, esp. when God knows that they will never change? That is, his previous claims that such judgments are for "mercy" no longer seem applicable.]

13. Question: As you know better than most, Dr. Francis Schaeffer taught co-belligerency for the hope of leading America back to a Christian consensus. If this is ever achieved, what should be the next political agenda item for conservative Evangelicals? Answer: I have never been asked this question before. If a miracle took place and America turned to God -- and it would be an absolute miracle since the institutions of America are so enslaved by secular

humanism -- but if this happened, we would still have the mandate to preach the Gospel; to communicate the Gospel around the world. That is what we would have to do.

[Post-interview reaction: It is significant to note that as much as Dr. LaHaye has invested himself to change America that he does not really foresee the kind of change he has sometimes described in his books. His underlying goal, however, seems always to reach more and more people with the Gospel. It is plain to see that his vision goes beyond our country, but extends to the entire world.]

14. Question: What is your opinion of the Christian re-constructionist movement? Answer: Quite negative. They are amillennialists and would like a theocracy, but this is *not* God's intent nor was it the intent of our founding fathers. We have a republic based upon "we the people." The power should not come down from top. If Christians would wake up and only elect to office those who share their faith or candidates that best reflect their faith on moral issues, then our country would return to moral sanity.

[Post-interview reaction: I have often wondered about Dr. LaHaye's position on a modern-day theocracy for America, but in his answer here he is completely consistent with the claims recorded in his books: He is not proposing a theocracy. I believe that it is self-evident that he has never proposed anything like the biblical theocracy described in the Old Testament. However, he has described many theocratic tendencies in his writings. It is significant, however, that he distances himself from re-constructionists who are *clearly* pursuing a theocracy and that he is clear and consistent in his verbalization and writing that he does not support a theocracy.]

15. Question: How long have you personally been a 3rd-level "father" in terms of your Christian sanctification? [this question is based on 1st John chapter 1 where Dr. LaHaye theorizes on three levels of Christian sanctification] Answer: In my early years when I was a pastor in Minneapolis in the early 50's (1950-56), I became associated with the Navigators who really touched my heart with their campaign to train men. They said you can train seven men a week, but I could train 25 in a week: through reading the Bible daily, memorizing at least three verses of Scripture a week; and then studying the Word of God to make a servant not ashamed. Another step is to meditate on the Word of God. I taught these [steps/principles] in small groups and then went to San Diego. At this large church, I was immediately surrounded with 30+ deacons. I hardly knew them and had made no spiritual contribution to their lives, but within three years over 50% of these men were discipled. It was Ed Rice, the chief navigator who took me under his wings.

[Post-interview reaction: Dr. LaHaye reminiscence gave some unique details about his past experience, but I was intrigued by his quick acceptance of my assumption that he is indeed a 3rd-level father. He has a very high view of his own sanctification. He is very confident and he exudes this confidence powerfully. The question, however, is whether the categories of levels of sanctification are exegetically legitimate. This approach to levels among Christians is an occasion for discouragement for those who feel that they do not meet the right standard and an occasion for pride for those who are confident of their own sanctification. My concern is that such a system is contrary to Christ's call for His followers to know and to practice humility.]

16. Question: When a Christian is Spirit-filled and furthermore is effectively walking in the Spirit while avoiding grieving or quenching the Spirit, is it accurate to say that such a Christian is not sinning in this state? Why or why not? Answer: If you are filled with the Spirit, you can't sin. The minute something repulsive to God occurs in [our] life, we must repent, but I don't worry about it. When that happens, the Spirit makes you aware. It is not an uninterrupted walk. Be sensitive to sin and confess it when it happens.

[Post-interview reaction: Obviously, Dr. LaHaye understood a specific definition of the word "sin" in my question. I take it that he understood a deliberate violation of God's Word [God's moral standard] or at least something close to such an understanding. Even at this, however, his answer is quite incredible. According to his answer, there are occasions when it is quite possible for the Christian to be able not to sin. His answer approaches a form of perfectionism.]

17. Question: Is the struggle St. Paul describes in Romans 7 (*"the good that I would..."*) describing a conflict that represents either pre-conversion or a carnal Christian? Does it represent a Spirit-controlled Christian? Answer: There is no definitive answer, but a Spirit-filled Christian is going to walk in harmony with God. Let me add this for your consideration as a pastor: I have had the dubious distinction of helping ministers who have committed sexual sin, but before they ever committed these outward sins, they committed mental sins. Whenever I've worked with such a man, I've dealt with the sin of pride: Pastors who thought that they were above the rules. The moral sins in the mind and imagination led to the sins of the body. In 1st Peter and James [the devil is referred to in a different way in James] the devil is pictured as a roaring lion. In both contexts, pride is the issue. Pride promotes greed, envy, and the minute a man becomes filled with himself, he is not filled with the Holy Spirit. St. Peter says to "humble yourself before the mighty hand of God." This is a problem we all have as pastors. We work hard and preach and then someone compliments us and it is so easy for pride to rise up. I have learned to answer such compliments by saying, "Praise the Lord!"

[Post-interview reaction: It is quite significant that he is unclear about the struggle recorded in Romans 7. Many traditional positions understand Romans 7 to describe the battle within the Christian as is consistent with the clear context in Galatians 5. This reveals something about Dr. LaHaye's understanding of Christian sanctification. If nothing else, there is less occasion for conviction and humility about our ongoing weakness as Christians. He did, however, go on to speak of our need to be constantly aware of the sin of pride which apparently -- and in accord with his examples -- can rise up at any time. However, Dr. LaHaye's inference seems to be that if we exert a certain level of self-control, we may avoid the struggle as described in Romans 7. This position is quite idealistic and may reveal a basic idealistic tendency applied to all of his writings.]

18. Question: How would you describe a more or less ideal foreign policy between America and Israel? Answer: The Abrahamic covenant is just as much in vogue today as it was then [in the time of the Old Testament]. Despite all of our problems as a nation [America], we still have freedom. Why? I believe that it is because we have been better to the Jew than any other nation. If we continue to be good to the Jews; continue to protect Israel, then we will be blessed. However, Ezekiel 36-38 warns us that during the future attack against Israel that Israel is brought back by a miracle of God. No one else comes to Israel's help. The reason is so that God can and will show that He will defend them. Then all the world will know that the Lord *is* Lord. Then man will be without excuse. The church will stand by and wring its hands and the U.S. will do nothing.

[Post-interview reaction: It is clear that Dr. LaHaye's recommended policy is to protect Israel. His fatalistic prediction follows. He is completely consistent with his writings once again.]

19. Question: How would you compare President Bush (our current president) to President Reagan in terms of representing the Christian faith in America? Answer: They were/are very different people. I think Reagan grew in his faith and the outspokenness of his faith during his presidency, but I think that Bush with all the pressures, I think he is less the clarion of his faith than when he was when he was running for office. But in almost eight years he has done almost nothing in terms of Roe v. Wade. What is the next president going to do for the unborn? 47 million unborn babies: If they had been left to grow up, then the problem with Social Security would not be a problem. We would have the workers we currently need. We are bringing on our own destruction. We let the left change nomenclature. But morally speaking, it is a sin and a violation of our Constitution [implying the right to life].

[Post-interview reaction: It is fascinating that while many Americans have complained about our President mixing his faith with politics that Dr. LaHaye is not impressed. He obviously views the abortion issue as a key issue in our country. The strength of his convictions is admirable.]

20. Question: What should be our foreign policy position towards Russia? Towards Iran? Answer: As long as communists control Russia, we cannot trust them. A funny story -- in the 40's during the Second World War -- I was a high school senior year (17). The teacher was talking about Russia being a wonderful country and I objected. The teacher got red in the face and scolded me, but I knew even back then that you couldn't trust Russia. You cannot trust atheists. You might be able to trust some, but as a rule there is no commitment. The enemies of Israel are enemies of humanity.

[Post-interview reaction: Again we see that Dr. LaHaye's political positions are based on theological considerations.]

21. Question: Do you believe that conservative Evangelical Christianity has become over-identified with the Republican Party? Why or why not? Answer: Two reasons why: 1) The Democratic Party has pulled away from any moral standard. They are flat-footed on Roe v. Wade; the license to kill the unborn; and 2) Phyllis Schlafly is going to the Republican Convention to keep Roe v. Wade on their platform. So be proud to be identified with those identified with pro-life and those who want less government, not more. But Democrats look at government as a saviour. So the Republican Party is the more God-like.

[Post-interview reaction: He has no problem in the mixing of the kingdoms. This confirms one of my major concerns.]

[Transition: I had only written 21 questions, but then he added: "You forgot to ask me about religious freedom! I was therefore given more material!"]

22. Question: What about religious freedom? Answer: We demand freedom of expression of our religion. We believe the Gospel can stand up against any false religion. At age 82 I see the need to maintain our freedom. The evolutionist wants us to believe that a lightning bolt

struck some ooze that led to life. The question we should ask is, “Who made the lightening?” [and] “Where did the ooze come from?”

[Post-interview reaction: Again, he reveals his great passion and his sense of a culture war.]

[Transition: Since he was kind enough to add some material, I asked for one last question.]

23. Question: When might we expect *Left Behind* the Hollywood movie to come out? Answer: It's funny you asked that! I've been working on that very question all morning long! In fact, I just received a message on that from Jerry Jenkins [*Left Behind* co-author]. Just recently we got the option back; we bought back rights for a block-buster movie! Jerry says that we should use the same name, but I [Dr. LaHaye] say that we should use a slightly different name. Jerry used the example of the Incredible Hulk movie. They came out with a lacklustre version, but then a new and improved version -- but stayed with the same name -- it was a great success. I don't know about doing the same thing for our movie. It is going to cost us 45 million dollars to produce and another 45 million to distribute. I have asked God for over 100 million people to come to Christ through this project!

[Post-interview reaction: I continue to be impressed by the fact that even when he speaks of ambitious projects like Hollywood movies that he wraps these with the greater intention of sharing the Gospel. His creativity, ambition, energy and drive are absolutely stunning.]

Finally, I asked him to consider a book project on *How To Live Life To The Fullest*. I for one would be fascinated on reading about his way of accomplishing so much. He truly possesses an incredible drive and is amazingly productive, despite my concern about some of the things he has produced. He thanked me for the request and then asked if I would send a copy of my dissertation to him. He gave me his home address:

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He then asked if we could close in prayer. In the prayer he prayed for me. He prayed that the complex thoughts in relation to the dissertation would be translated into bringing people to Christ. He prayed for my holiness of living and for my family. After the prayer, he then

invited me to call him if I got stuck on anything in my writing! He was very friendly to say the least.

Early on in the work of the dissertation, I wondered if he was putting on a racket, but I have since moved away from that suspicion. I think he is 100% sincere in believing that what he is doing is true and good. He also does not seem to be a greedy person. I believe that he wants to use his money to perpetuate ministry. At the same time, he is extremely confident in his position and seems blinded to some of the problems in his theological system.

Despite our theological differences, however, I admire his determination not to sit around, but to act on his conscience and to strive to make a difference. I want to ensure more than ever to objectively critique his work and make sure that there is not even a hint of what could be conceived as an *Ad hominem* attack. He appears to be a good man who has accepted theological positions that do not appropriately represent his passion to help people and to make a positive difference especially within the Christian Church in the U.S. and American culture.

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