

3 Problems for Catholics and the Rapture

2015

The recent film based on the Left Behind series and the cable TV show the Leftovers bring back to the forefront the question of Catholic teaching concerning what our understanding should be. The term "rapture" is derived from the text of the Vulgate of 1TH 4:17—"we will be caught up," [Latin: rapiemur]). It is the belief that our Lord will come and take up the saints on earth leaving behind the people who are good but not saints and the evil people to go through a period of persecution called the Tribulation. These people will then be judged based upon how they go through the Tribulation. Being raptured is a blessing because a person is spared the trials. Catholics have three problems with this concept. This is not meant to be inclusive of any other issues but a sufficient set of examples.

The first problem is the lack in Scripture of more than one coming of Jesus. Scripture speaks of the coming of Christ, the Parousia, in association with the end times. Jesus Himself speaks of the Son of Man coming with the angels. Nowhere does it speak of a first Parousia where Jesus will come and be known only by the taking away of select individuals and then coming again in glory. So the teaching is not in accordance with Scripture.

The second problem is the scriptural texts that are used in its defense. One commonly used text is Luke 17:35, which reads: "And there will be two women grinding meal together; one will be taken, the other left." If one looks at the scriptural texts as a whole as opposed to in parts, one must look at Jesus' images of judgment. Earlier in Luke (28-30) our Lord states, "Similarly, as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building; on the day when Lot left Sodom, fire and brimstone rained from the sky to destroy them all. So it will be on the day the Son of Man is revealed." We see the good and evil living together side by side. Consider then the parable of the wheat and the tares (Mt 13:24-30). In this parable, the wheat and the tares (the weeds) represent the righteous and the evildoers. Both are allowed to coexist. Unrepentant evildoers will be punished only at the end of time. The point is that ultimately, God alone punishes grave offenders. It is the weeds that are removed and taken away to be burnt. The good are left behind and the evil that are taken away.

The third problem is distinctive of our Church. Revelation ended with the death of the last apostle. No new teachings can be given. New understandings of original teachings are what is found in the Fathers of the Church or the teaching authority of the Church referred to as the Magisterium. For contemporary Ukrainian Catholics, the teachings of the Church are founded on Scripture in accordance with the wisdom of the Fathers and in line with the 2,000 years of teachings of the Church. Until the nineteenth century, all Christians including Catholics who had an interest in this small area of eschatology agreed that the lifting up of the good at judgment day would occur in relation to the Second Coming, at the close of the period of persecution. In the 1800s, a new teaching that the rapture would occur before the period of persecution, tribulation. This position was held by John Nelson Darby, an early leader of a Protestant Fundamentalist movement. Darby's pre-tribulation view of the rapture was then picked up by a man named C.I. Scofield, who taught the view in the footnotes of his Scofield Reference Bible, which was widely distributed in England and America. This work, along with his concordance, was widely used for scripture studies in American

Protestantism. As opposed to being a new understanding, it is a unique teaching diverging from two thousand years of Christian doctrinal teaching, not just Catholic. Rapture is not found in the Church Fathers, Eastern or Western or in the teachings of the Catholic Church.

In summary, Ukrainian Catholic teaching does not include Rapture. The Church has not found it in accordance with Sacred Scripture, the teachings of the Church Fathers and two thousand years of Church teaching. Since the Church cannot add or delete doctrines from the "Deposit of Faith," it cannot add this new teaching and its members should not hold it.