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Review: The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?

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The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational? By Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Paul D. Feinberg, Douglas J. Moo and Richard R. Reiter. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984, 268 pp., \$7.95 paper.

If your first reaction to the title of this volume is "Oh, no! Another book arguing about the rapture!", you may be pleasantly surprised. Not only is the quality of exegetical and theological "debate" (responses to each of the positions are included) exceptionally high, but the tone of the contributors' interchange is irenic and friendly without sacrificing precise scholarship. Add to this the helpful preliminary essay tracing the development of these prominent positions on the rapture in premillennial circles over the last century, and we find a truly worthwhile addition to the mass of recent evangelical literature in the field of eschatology.

An initial word on the background of the book is in order. Its format (each presentation followed by two dissenting replies) is like that used in the helpful volume edited by R. Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (InterVarsity, 1977). However, this work began as presentations of their distinctive positions on the rapture by Feinberg, Archer and Moo, who are colleagues at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, at the 1981 annual ministerial conference of the Evangelical Free Church, sponsors of the school. Subsequently their papers and responses have been revised and expanded into their present form. Reiter, who is completing a related doctoral dissertation, brings to bear the historical data needed to gain proper perspective on the interaction of the three positions since the beginning of the Niagara Bible Conference in 1878 (pp. 11-44).

The book's structure is simple, forceful and thoroughly successful. The first chapter, by Reiter, moves from the latter 1800s to the present day, concluding with the state of affairs in the Evangelical Free Church since the 1960s. Then Feinberg leads off by presenting the pre-tribulational position. In the shortest of the main presentations, Archer presents a "mid-seventieth week" position. He disavows the "mid-trib" title, holding that his is a variant pre-trib view in which the rapture occurs midway in Daniel's seventieth week, before the outpouring of "divine wrath." Finally, Moo lays out his nuanced post-tribulational understanding. Copiously documented endnotes and three helpful indices conclude this significant volume.

It is difficult to assess a book of this type as to strengths and weaknesses in content. For example, Reiter's essay, somewhat artificial in structure and selective, is nonetheless an excellent piece of bibliographic craftsmanship. Unfortunately most readers will make their judgments of the primary presentations on theological loyalties. Still, Zondervan and the contributors to *The Rapture* are to be commended for their service to the evangelical community, particularly the premillennial sector. Regardless of position held, thinking students of the rapture will find sharpened, even innovative, historical, exegetical and theological reasoning with which to profitably interact.

In closing this review, it might further surprise some readers to know of several of the (surface) agreements between Feinberg, Archer and Moo, as well as some significant assertions/admissions that are made along the way. As to "agreements," all three, who are premillennial and futurist in position, believe that not only will believers be spared from God's wrath but also that the rapture will be "pre-wrath." All believe in "imminency," as they define it. All hold that there will be an interval between the rapture and second coming (though Moo only divides them pre- and post-Armageddon).

The admissions/assertions could make a difference in future discussions. Feinberg concedes (cf. R. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*) that "there is no necessary or logical connection between dispensationalism and pretribulationism" (p. 48). Further, for the sake of argument Feinberg asserts that "an any-moment imminency could be wrong and pretribulationism could still be right" (p. 152). Archer (p. 107) calls attention to Feinberg's concession (p. 61) that the "day of the Lord" does not begin until the middle of Daniel's seventieth week. Finally, Moo postulates that "a posttribulational Rapture is not necessarily

excluded by a view that keeps Israel and the church separate" (p. 171).

Obviously, whether the statements are valid or not, they do not represent conventional thinking. They, along with other distinctive positions found in this book, should influence the premillennial theological agenda in the time ahead. There needs to be deeper investigation of such key items as the meaning of "imminency," the scope of God's tribulational "wrath," the exegesis of Rev 3:10, the relationship between ecclesiology and eschatology, and the similarities and differences between rapture and second-coming passages (if such passages can be agreed upon).

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Relatedness: Essays in Metaphysics and Theology. By Harold H. Oliver. Macon: Mercer University, 1984, xvi + 178 pp., \$14.00.

Western philosophy after Descartes can be understood as a constant struggle to dig oneself out of a series of craters. First of all we must establish our subjectivity. Then we have to show that a world around us exists as well. Now we need to discover whether this world is populated by other subjects. Finally we have to prove that these beings can communicate. Thus we have the modern problems of subjectivity-objectivity, metaphysics, intersubjectivity, and hermeneutics, to name a few.

Oliver, professor of NT and theology at Boston University, attempts to reverse this whole process with a metaphysics of relatedness. The underlying principle is very simple. Traditionally philosophy begins with the assumption of objects that stand in various relationships to each other. The objects have priority over the accidental relationships. Oliver claims that a better analysis would be to say that the relations are prior; the resultant "relata" are mere derivatives of the relations. Thus if "a" is related to "b"—aRb—the relationship "R" has priority and "a" and "b" are derived from "R."

This theory forms the background to the ten essays collected in this volume. As a follow-up to an earlier work (*A Relational Metaphysic*, 1981), these articles develop an application to various issues of concern to the contemporary theologian. Treated are theology and cosmology (essay 1), hermeneutics (2, 4, 7, 8, 9), selfhood (3, 5, 10) and the future (6).

An evaluation of the metaphysics needs to be done on a scope beyond that possible in a review. A few remarks concerning the theological application need to suffice. It is in hermeneutics that the distinctiveness of Oliver's contribution becomes most apparent. In his view, religious language is myth. Myth must be understood not as a story that may be true or false but as a symbol of an immediate experience of relatedness. This is the intentionality of a religious text, and it is in this way that we ought to let the text speak for itself. As a consequence, if we look away from the particulars we find that for example Judaism and Christianity have the same intentionality of declaring the relatedness of God and humanity. Fine textual distinctions are obliterated in the overall message that invariably turns out to be the message of relatedness.

Although these ideas are worked out in a philosophically and theologically competent way, one cannot but get the feeling of reductionism at work. It seems that all issues are reduced and then—unsurprisingly—solved with the metaphysics of relatedness. Even the most basic issue of human despair and hope comes down to these technical distinctions.

This impression is reinforced by the literary form of the work. Since it consists of ten essays that have previously been published in diverse places, much of the background material is repeated ten times in the book. On the plus side, this repeated clarification makes the book much easier to read than one would expect from a cursory glance at the title and the topic. A final accolade needs to go to Mercer University for continuing to publish innovative technical manuscripts.

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