

Futurism Devised across the Centuries by the Jesuits



This is the next chapter of the book, [The Foundations Under Attack: The Roots of Apostasy – By Michael de Semlyen](#)

Chapter 4

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The Futurist interpretation of prophecy was originally propounded by the Spanish Jesuit scholar Francisco Ribera and was developed by the eminent Jesuit “Saint” and apologist, Cardinal Bellarmine, at the end of the sixteenth century. Ribera’s ingenious scheme was part of the spiritual counter-attack known as the Counter-Reformation, the spearhead of Rome’s fight-back against the growing threat posed by the Protestant Reformation.

The sixteenth-century Futurist theories of Ribera, which projected forward all but the first five chapters of the Book of Revelation into the future, and pointed forward to an individual and political Antichrist, found little favour with Protestants for approaching two and a half centuries. However, the Jesuit theories had laid the groundwork for the radical departure from the widely accepted historicist view.

Ribera’s ideas were further developed in a book, first published at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which has exercised inestimable influence on the church right up to the present day. The book, which was written in Spanish, was called *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty*. It laid the basis for “dispensationalist futurism” and originated the theory of the two-stage Second Coming. It was written under the name Ben Ezra, who represented himself as a scholarly Jewish convert to Christ seeking enlightenment for his Jewish brethren.

Although the Church of Rome distanced itself from Ben Ezra, and even banned his book in some countries, it seems highly probable that this was a deception perpetrated by the Jesuits, comparable in ingenuity and scope with any of the many elaborate wiles and schemes that have been devised in the long history of the Papal institution. It may be helpful and instructive to give but one other important example in history of this kind of deception.

For four centuries before the Reformation, the Church of Rome built up her pretensions on what are known as the "*Decretals of Isidore*", a fictitious collection of Bulls and Rescripts supposedly issued by the Bishops of Rome during the first three centuries of the Christian era. The decretals were said to evidence the authority of the popes of that early age. They were supposed to represent the fruit of the researches of Isidore of Seville, one of the most learned bishops of the ninth century, given to the world two centuries after Isidore's death. In the general ignorance that characterised that "Golden Age" of the Church of Rome, the Decretals were everywhere accepted as authentic, and men beheld with awe the power wielded by Peter and his immediate "successors." During the Reformation the genuine history of these centuries was examined, the forgery was discovered, and the "Decretals of Isidore" exposed, vying with "The Donation of Constantine" as the most audacious imposture ever palmed off on an unsuspecting world. Yet for four centuries they did their work, and Rome reaped the benefit.

Rabbi Juan Josafat Ben Ezra was in fact the assumed name of Emmanuel Lacunza, a Chilean of Spanish descent. He was a Jesuit, who joined the order at the age of sixteen and had risen within it to be a zealous superintendent of the Noviciates, before embarking on the task of writing the four volumes of *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty*. Had not his true identity been discovered and much later been made known through his untimely and mysterious death, the Christian world would have continued to believe, as many still do, that he was a Messianic Jew. With the Jews of his day marginalised by the Roman Church, this identity was ideal for gaining acceptance from Protestants. There can be little doubt that it was for the consumption of Protestants that this elaborate Jesuitical deception was prepared. To get them to begin dabbling in the theory of a future Antichrist was worth a vast amount of time and labour to the Church of Rome. The Protestants would have been impressed by the exclusion of the book by Rome and its listing among banned books, which were very often their favoured reading. Apart from the sheer scope and breadth of scholarship of the book, they also may have been perhaps cleverly won over by aspects of Ben Ezra's eschatology that were in step with the beliefs of the Reformers, but out of step with Rome. For example, Lacunza's scheme postulated not a single individual, but a world-wide organisation, as Antichrist.

In 1816, fifteen years after his death, the Diplomatic Agent of the Republic of Buenos Aires published the first complete Spanish edition of Lacunza's work in London. Ben Ezra's real identity, that being a son of the Mother Church from Chile rather than a Jewish Rabbi, must have been known to the publishers, but at that time had to be concealed in Protestant England. An English edition of Lacunza's book translated by Edward Irving appeared in 1827. Irving, described as the forerunner of the charismatic movement, was a highly intelligent and zealous Scottish preacher whose once Presbyterian congregation applied to join the Church of Rome and developed into the "Catholic Apostolic Church." Irving learned Spanish in record time in order to translate and publish Lacunza's book. In doing so he became an ardent advocate of Lacunza's prophetic views and with flaming oratory preached the Secret Rapture and a second Second Coming of Christ with His saints in glory after the seven-year reign of Antichrist. This is thought to be the first

time in the whole history of the church that anyone taught that the saints would be "caught up" or raptured secretly. It had not previously been considered part of the true faith once given to the saints.

The idea was originated in *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, the manuscript of which was published in London, Spain, Mexico, and Paris between 1811 and 1826. Lacunza had written, "When the Lord returns from heaven to earth upon His coming forth from heaven, and much before His arrival at the earth, He will give His orders, and send forth His command as King and God omnipotent: with a shout ('by the order') with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. At this voice of the Son of God, those who shall hear it, shall forthwith arise, as saith the evangelist Saint John 'those who hear shall live.'" Here may be found for the first time, with the selective use of Scripture, the concept of "the secret rapture" (the saints to meet their Lord in the air without the world knowing), perhaps prompting the Voice from heaven (and the ecstatic utterance of a young girl named Margaret McDonald) that is said to have commanded Irving to begin preaching the "secret rapture of the saints." Then follows the appearance of the individual world ruler, "the Antichrist", who will swiftly emerge as the world dictator and revive the old Roman Empire as a ten-nation confederacy. He will make a covenant with the Jews, involving the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstitution of animal sacrifices and promising peace and safety; then break it and launch the great tribulation prior to the return of Christ with his saints. Thus, at odds with Scripture, Christ's second (or third) coming is dated, and the day will be known to the world several years in advance.

The Seed is Sown

The Diplomatic Agent made a copy of Irving's translation of Lacunza's book, with its Futurist elements, available to the library of the Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1826, Dr. S.R. Maitland, the scholarly librarian to the Archbishop, published the first of a series of tracts on futurist prophecy, *An Enquiry into the generally accepted year-day view of the 1260 days of Daniel and Revelation*. Probably not realising that he was advancing the theories of a Jesuit, he adopted the ideas of Rabbi Ben Ezra, a Jewish convert, as it seems likely he believed Lacunza to be. He also adopted the concept of a future personal Antichrist, a world ruler, again presumably unwittingly, from the earlier work of Ribera.

The *Catholic Emancipation Act* was enacted in 1829, and the Jesuits were again active, having been allowed back into England. In 1833 the Tractarian or Oxford Movement was launched. Dr. Maitland's publications and those of William Burgh and Anglican Professor James Todd, both members of the faculty of Trinity College, Dublin, provided the spiritual fire-power and the theological foundations needed to help launch the new movement. Its leaders included John Henry Newman, who building on the foundations laid by Maitland and especially by Todd's large treatise, wrote on the future Antichrist in several of his Oxford Tracts. He and fellow Futurists Sir Robert Anderson and Reverend Michael Baxter were able to argue that the tracts showed that Protestants had unjustly represented the Papacy as the Antichrist of Scripture and that the Reformation had gone much too far. The new reading of

Scripture confirmed them in their partiality towards ritualism and Romanism. The sense of injustice and outrage aimed at the Reformed faith spurred them on in adopting Roman Catholic doctrine and practice as well as blinding them to its errors.

The Brethren, newly formed in Dublin in 1827, and in particular J.N. Darby, one of the founding fathers of the movement, an Anglican High Churchman who had been “rocked in the cradle of Tractarianism,” also acclaimed the “great discovery” of Maitland and Irving as a divine revelation. Significantly, “J.N. Darby and Edward Irving both attended lengthy meetings on the study of Bible Prophecy at Powerscourt House in Ireland. Topics discussed included the 1260 day-years, the gifts of the Spirit, Antichrist, and, very probably, the secret rapture that would precede Antichrist’s appearance.”

Directed by Darby’s Tractarian background and instincts, the early Brethren, based in Plymouth, outdid the Oxford Movement in the publishing of tracts, many of which were directed to the foretelling of future events, most particularly the exciting prospect of the secret pre-tribulation rapture. Scottish Hebrew and Gaelic scholar Duncan McDougall in his booklet *The Rapture of the Saints* described what took place:

“‘Here was a tree to be desired to make one wise,’ the foretelling of future events which Christians could never have discovered for themselves by the most diligent study of the Bible. This detailed story of the coming Antichrist and all that he was to do had all the subtle attraction of clairvoyance or crystal-gazing. It enabled people to read between the lines of their Bible many things that their own ministers had never discovered, and so to become wise, very wise, above that which is written. It placed them on a pedestal from which they could look down on the very pastors who had led them to Christ.”

In this fashion the carefully devised seeds of Futurism, patiently planted by the Counter-Reformation over a period of more than two centuries, had grown into a theological tree with many heretical branches, which, by and large, deny the fulfilment of prophecy until right at the very end of the Christian era. History, foretold by God the Holy Spirit, had been declared redundant by the preaching and teaching of Irving, Maitland, and Darby, and before them by the scholarship of the Jesuits Ribera, Bellarmine, and Lacunza. As former Secretary of the Protestant Truth Society and author Albert Close wrote in 1916, “So the Jesuits have enticed our Theological professors and the Plymouth Brethren to fire high over the head of the great Antichrist, at their two mythical Antichrists; one in the past, the Praeterist, the other in the future, the Futurist Antichrist. Between these two schools the whole Christian Ministry has been mixed up, and is practically sitting on the fence. Few ministers now preach from Daniel or the Revelation.” (From: [Antichrist And His Ten Kingdoms – By Albert Close](#))

By no means did all of the early Brethren, the majority of whom were ardent and committed Christians, embrace the new theories. Many were carried along by the tide of enthusiasm for the new teaching for a time, but changed their view when they learned of its origins. This was the experience of the eminent Greek scholar, S. P. Tregelles, who said of the secret rapture, “... it came

not from Holy Scripture, but from that, which falsely pretended to be the Spirit of God." He was later excommunicated from the Brethren.

Given the impact of the theological colleges and the wider church of the new Higher Criticism in the climate of advancing humanism and Darwinism, it is not surprising that, in the years that followed, the new understanding of Bible prophecy spread as swiftly as it did. Early in the twentieth century, the popular Scofield Reference Bible, which like so many other bibles today is filled with scholarly footnotes, incorporated Futurist theology into its Dispensationalist scheme in such a convincing way that few were able to distinguish it all from the inspired Scriptures. Dispensationalist Futurism has subsequently spread widely in evangelical circles, especially among Charismatics. As *Evangelical Times* writer John C. J. Waite has pointed out, "Dispensationalism has propagated the notion that the Old Testament Prophets have nothing to say about the church; that in fact they have only to do with Israel. The Church Age is regarded by some as a kind of parenthesis. Even those who do not accept the dispensational theory (of the Bible being divided up into up to seven distinctive dispensations...) have been affected unconsciously by this approach."

As we have already seen, this has contributed much to the neglect of the study of Church History. Dispensationalist Futurism, in restricting so much of Scripture to Israel and the Jews, has seriously weakened the spiritual armoury of the church. Thus the Antichrist portrayed in Old and New Testaments is deemed not necessarily to come out of the church. But the Bible is entirely about Christ, and those who belong to him – not those who reject Him.

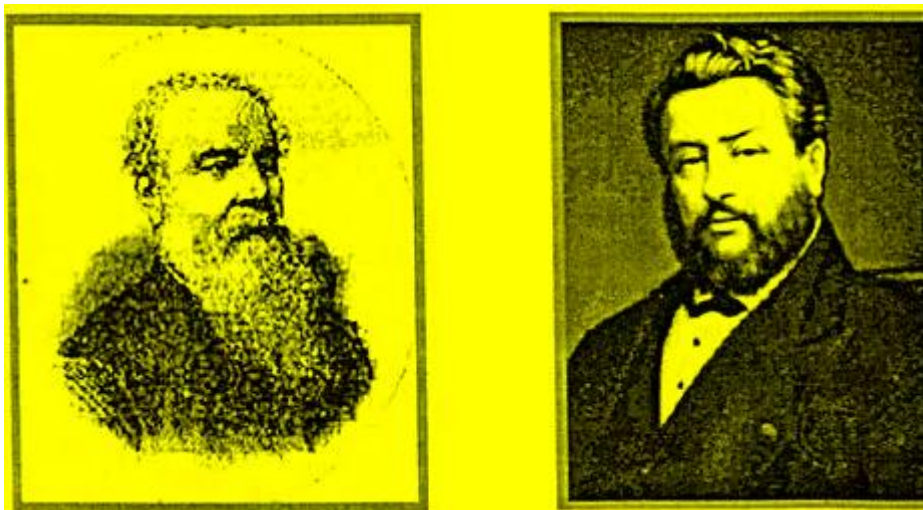
'Thus it was that *sola scriptura*, the Word and only the Word, the axiom of Luther and the matrix of the Reformation, was put to one side by the many who took to the exciting new teaching. With the Antichrist yet to appear and the Papacy vindicated from its accusers, the authority of Scripture was enhanced among those who sought reconciliation with Rome. The Counter-Reformation, so hostile and confrontational towards heretics in the past, had emerged with a new face and a new strategy. The stage was being set for reunion with Rome. True, a new Bible would be required, to firmly establish Futurism within a revised text and undermine the faith of Protestants with a corrupted translation. The basis was being laid for the twentieth-century ecumenical movement. The stakes were high indeed. A few years before the Revising Committee (headed by Anglo-Catholics Westcott and Hort) produced the new Bible, Cardinal Manning, the leader of Catholicism in England (and, like Newman, a convert from the Church of England), spoke to the Jesuit "fathers" in stirring fashion, calling them to battle and unmistakably laying out the strategy for the twentieth century.

"Great is the prize for which you strive. Surely a soldier's eye and a soldier's heart would choose by intuition this field of England. None ampler or nobler could be found. It is an head of Protestantism, the centre of its movements and the stronghold of its power. Weakened in England, it is paralysed elsewhere. Conquered in England, it is conquered throughout all the world. Once overthrown here, all else is but a war of detail. All the roads of the world meet in one point, and this point reached, all the world is open

to the Church's will."

But it was not all one-way traffic—at least not in the nineteenth century. The historical view of Prophecy was, as we have seen, widely and well presented. Gifted and godly preachers like Charles Spurgeon, Grattan Guinness, and J. C. Ryle spoke out uncompromisingly; and books and tracts were published, matching the output of the Tractarians and the Brethren. Ryle, the first Bishop of Liverpool, saw what was happening as clearly as Cardinal Manning and the Jesuits:

"The subject I now touch upon is of deep and pressing importance, and demands the serious attention of all Protestant Churchmen. It is vain to deny that a large party of English clergy and laity in the present day are moving heaven and earth to reunite the Church of England with the idolatrous Church of Rome. The poor Church of England stands on an inclined plain. Her very existence, as a Protestant Church, is in peril. I hold, for one, that this Romish movement ought to be steadily and firmly resisted. I regard it as a most mischievous, soul-ruining, and unscriptural movement. To say that reunion with Rome would be an insult to our martyred Reformers is a very light thing; it is far more than this: it would be a sin and an offence against God! Rather than be re-united with the idolatrous Church of Rome, I would willingly see my own beloved church perish and go to pieces. Rather than become Popish once more, she had better die! Unity in the abstract is no doubt an excellent thing: but unity without truth is useless. ... When Rome has repealed the decrees of Trent, and her additions to the Creed, when Rome has recanted her false and unscriptural doctrines, when Rome has formally recanted image-worship, Mary-worship and transubstantiation; then, and not till then, it will be time to talk of reunion with her. Till then I call on all Churchmen to resist to the death this idea of reunion with Rome. Till then let our watchwords be, No peace with Rome! No communion with idolaters!"



Bishop J.C. Ryle and Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Spurgeon saw the danger too. "It is the bounden duty of every Christian to pray against Antichrist, and as to what Antichrist is no sane man ought to raise a question. If it be not the Popery in the Church of Rome there is

nothing in the world that can be called by that name. ... Popery is contrary to Christ's Gospel, and is the Antichrist, and we ought to pray against it." He pointed to the cost of commitment to the truth. "If a man be earnest about Truth, he will be sectarian. When we cease to strive, seek, contend and maintain the Truth, it will cease in our land and error alone shall reign." The Westminster and Baptist Confessions of Faith of his day took the same position with respect to the Scriptural identity of the Papacy. When the Metropolitan Tabernacle was being built in 1859, Spurgeon placed the newly reprinted *Baptist Confession of Faith* under the foundation stone.

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A generation earlier Lord Shaftesbury and other Protestant leaders had vigorously opposed the reconstitution of a Roman Catholic hierarchy for England and Wales, which they regarded as "Papal aggression". Shaftesbury sounded a warning, "Let us turn our eyes to that within, from Popery to Popery in the bud; from the open enemy to the concealed traitor."

Continued in chapter 5 [Historicist Expositors of the Nineteenth Century](#)

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