

some of his followers" (p. 7), even though later the fact is stressed that Bultmann finds the real *meaning* in Christ's teaching about the kingdom to be an existential one (p. 21).

Ladd's new book retains, of course, all the values of the original edition. The updating, though not extensive, is useful; and the new paperback form is most welcome. On the whole, this book—in either of its editions—continues to be an instructive volume by an author who moves as a master in the field.

Andrews University

KENNETH A. STRAND

MacPherson, Dave. *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin: The Recent Discovery of a Well-Known Theory's Beginning—and Its Incredible Cover-Up!* Kansas City, Mo.: Heart of America Bible Society, 1973. 123 pp. Paperback, \$2.95.

Pretribulationism, with its "Secret Rapture" theory, is usually thought of as originating with the "Plymouth Brethren" movement in the British Isles about A.D. 1830. The pioneer popularizer of the view, if not the very originator of it, is believed to be John Nelson Darby, an early leader among the "Brethren." But how did Darby reach his pretribulationist conclusions?

This is the question which the present book proposes to answer. The author, a journalist much interested in tracing the origin of pretribulationism, has done a great deal of careful research on the subject. He claims to have made a remarkable discovery in finding and reading works by Robert Norton published in 1840 and 1861. Norton's material, he feels, indicates that a prophetic revelation to one Margaret Macdonald in Port-Glasgow, Scotland, early in 1830 reveals the origin of the pretribulation-rapture concept. Says MacPherson, "It is quite possible that Norton is the only person who ever preserved Margaret Macdonald's Pre-Trib revelation in a book" (p. 48).

MacPherson presents various materials that supposedly support his conclusion. It appears to this reviewer that he gives four lines of evidence: (1) He quotes extensively from a letter written about 1834 by one Francis Sitwell to Sitwell's sister Mary. This letter mentions the Macdonalds, and it also discloses Sitwell's own pretribulationist view (pp. 68-70). (2) He refers to an 1833 book of Robert Baxter of Doncaster which supposedly relates an obvious pretribulationist doctrine to Margaret Macdonald's revelation. According to MacPherson, Baxter gives several significant Bible texts in the same sequence as they were treated by Margaret in her so-called "Pre-Trib revelation" (pp. 94-99, especially pp. 95-97). (3) Reference is made to a visit of Darby to the Macdonalds in 1830, at which time he undoubtedly adopted the pretribulationist view even though he never gave credit to Margaret Macdonald for it (pp. 91-94). (4) The text of Margaret Macdonald's vision itself is provided by MacPherson in an appendix (pp. 105-108). This text is taken from Norton and is given both in the form in which it appears in Norton's 1840 publication and in the somewhat shortened form from 1861.

Unfortunately, MacPherson's thesis falls apart when one scrutinizes the source materials he provides: (1) The Sitwell letter praises the Macdonalds

and does reveal a pretribulationist view on the part of Francis Sitwell himself, but it makes no connection between his view and the Macdonalds (at least not in the excerpts which MacPherson has furnished from Sitwell's letter). (2) The book by Robert Baxter attacks pretribulationism, but it speaks of this view as being put forward in writing by *Edward Irving*, not Margaret Macdonald! Indeed, in the quoted material from Baxter, as furnished by MacPherson, Margaret Macdonald is not so much as mentioned once! The reference to several Bible texts having been used by Baxter and by Margaret Macdonald in the "same sequence" is not convincing; and, moreover, one would need to determine whether Irving might have provided a closer parallel to Baxter's use of these texts. (3) It is impossible to prove that Darby adopted pretribulationism from Margaret Macdonald, as MacPherson himself recognizes. But in the absence of any forceful positive evidence, there is really very little help in MacPherson's explanation that this supposed silence exists because it was characteristic of Darby not to give credit to others for his views. (4) Although the foregoing arguments have at best built only an extremely weak circumstantial case for Margaret Macdonald as the source of Darby's new views, the greatest difficulty, it seems to this reviewer, is found in the text of Margaret Macdonald's so-called pretribulationist revelation itself, as furnished by MacPherson. The implication of a "secret rapture" must, in fact, be read into that account, which speaks of the church being purified *during* the final tribulation, instead of being caught up to escape that tribulation: "The trial of the Church is from Antichrist. It is by being filled with the Spirit that we shall be kept," said Margaret Macdonald (see p. 107 of MacPherson's book). MacPherson's own evaluation that Miss Macdonald was a "partial rapturist" will not do, for the passage just quoted nowhere gives such an impression, nor does anything else in the entire text of her revelation as provided by MacPherson.

Thus the case for the "unbelievable pre-trib origin" falls apart. What MacPherson's book does do, however, is to give valuable insights regarding the charismatic movements of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. In this respect it does serve a useful purpose. The considerable amount of first-hand detail incorporated from the writings of Norton lends particular interest.

Because the pretribulationist rapture concept is such a widespread view among conservative Christians in North America today, its exact origin is still of interest, if this can indeed be discovered. Perhaps MacPherson's work will stimulate a further search for this.

MacPherson utilizes a considerable number of writers on dispensationalism, and usually quite periphrastically. One striking omission, however, is the work by Clarence Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1960), which should at least have merited inclusion in the bibliography.

In closing, the reviewer would point out that this is a fascinating book, written in a rather popular style. Moreover, we can be grateful to the author for throwing additional light on the charismatic manifestations which were in evidence in southwestern Scotland and in various other places in the British Isles during the 1820s and 1830s, even though his book falls short of reaching the goal implied in its somewhat spectacular title and even more sensational subtitle.