

Was Futurism Invented by a Jesuit Priest?

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A millennialist writers persistently claim that the premillennial teaching of the Lord's return (Futurism), was first taught by Ribera, a Jesuit priest in his AD1590, five-hundred-page, commentary on the Revelation. They claim that the purpose was to defend the corrupt Papacy at the time of the Reformation and that Premillennialism therefore has its roots in Roman Catholicism. They ignore the fact that the dominant view of the Church to the beginning of the fourth century was the Premillennial return of Christ.

Who then was Ribera?

The problem arises from the fact that the reformers taught that Antichrist was **not an individual** who would appear for a short time just before the Lord returned, **but the system of the Papacy** which lasted for many hundreds of years. In the lecture notes of a noted Amillennialist, Samuel Waldron, we have the following information about Ribera:

"Ribera proposed that the first few chapters of the Apocalypse applied to ancient pagan Rome, and the rest he limited to a yet future period of 3¹/₂ literal years immediately prior to the second coming.....Then, he proposed, the Antichrist, a single individual, would:

Persecute and blaspheme the saints of God; Rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem; Abolish the Christian religion; Deny Jesus Christ; Be received by the Jews; Pretend to be God; Kill the two witnesses; Conquer the world."

Waldron complains;

*"So according to Ribera, the 1260 days and 42 months and 3¹/₂ times of prophecy were not 1,260 years, but a **literal 3¹/₂ years**, and therefore **none** of the book of Revelation had any application to the middle ages or the papacy, but to the future, to a period immediately prior to the second coming, hence the name **Futurism**."*

Ribera was quite right in stating that 1,260 days means exactly what

it says - 1,260 days and that Antichrist will be an individual! The reformers had "spiritualized" the 1,260 days and used the "year-day theory" which has led to so much error. It was easy for Ribera to show that they were wrong on this point and to use Scripture to destroy their credibility.

The "year-day" theory was the basis of Seventh Day Adventist error which led them to teach that Christ would return in 1844 and when He did not come they changed it to 1845; then when that prediction failed Mrs White invented the blasphemous doctrine of the sanctuary.

Amillennialists seem to forget that Augustine, whose book "The City of God" (AD413-426) sets out the Amillennial position, also taught that the Church could "*physically coerce the heretical and unconverted*"- which justified the inquisitions when thousands of Jews and Christians were tortured and killed.

In Ribera's day (AD1590), Augustine's Amillennialism was the dominant view of both the Catholic and Reformed Churches and Ribera's exposition of the Revelation actually contradicted the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

Whether Ribera was right or wrong is of no consequence. It's a question of "*rightly dividing the word of truth*" and to do that one must take the Bible literally, interpreting it in its historic and grammatic context. When a text of Scripture is taken out of context it becomes a pretext for defending human error.

Just because Ribera was a Catholic bishop does not automatically mean that every thing he taught was error. Martin Luther was a Catholic priest when he was converted and protested against sin in the Church. At first he thought to reform the Church but had to leave.

There have been men in the Catholic Church who have had light during the dark ages. Erasmus was the most outstanding scholar in Europe in his day when the Catholic Church believed Latin was the holy language and used it to keep the Scriptures from the common people. Erasmus, contrary to Catholic belief, produced the Greek text of the New Testament in 1516 and in 1517 the Reformation broke out as Luther nailed his protest to the Church door at Wittenberg. We may not agree with all that Erasmus believed but his Greek

scholarship was mightily used by God to preserve the Word of God in its original language.

Luther translated the German Bible from Erasmus' Greek text which was representative of the vast majority of Greek manuscripts. Erasmus taught Greek at Cambridge University for several years where Tyndale studied Greek and later translated the Scriptures from the Greek and Hebrew into English; his translation is largely preserved in the 1611 King James Bible.

Immanuel Lucanza was a Jewish Jesuit priest who wrote a large volume entitled, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*. He died in 1801. He took the prophecies of Scripture literally. His work was rejected by the Papacy because he was in disagreement with Catholic and Reformed teaching on Bible prophecy. Again and again he reasoned against the Catholic teachers and strongly argued that the prophecies of the Bible must be interpreted literally. It's no wonder he concluded that Israel would be converted in the last days and that Christ would reign over the earth after His return.

It matters not that a man was Catholic or Protestant. The real issue is: What does the Scripture teach? We do not hold to the futurist view of Bible Prophecy because Ribera, Lucanza or Darby taught it. We stand for the futurist view of Bible Prophecy because it is clearly taught in the Bible. I personally had never read these men before I came to the settled conviction that the Church was a mystery hid in God from the foundation of the world; that God has not finished with Israel; that the Rapture must occur before the 7-year Tribulation; that Christ will come "*immediately after the Tribulation*" and will reign over the earth from the throne of David for 1,000 years.

Those who claim that the futurist view of Bible prophecy was an attempt by the Catholic Church to counter the Reformation conveniently forget that the premillennial view was the generally accepted view held by the early Church fathers up to the 4th century. Those who disagreed with the literal interpretation were the heretics such as Origen, his disciple Dionysius and Eusebius, the Arian friend of Emperor Constantine. The modern day Arians are the Jehovahs Witnesses.

The Church fathers who held to the premillennial return of Christ included those who had been the disciples of the Apostle John and their disciples ie. Papias, Polycarp, Irenaeus, Hippolytus down to the 3rd century. One would expect that those who were taught by the Apostle John would be more likely to reflect the true interpretation of Scripture.

If Ribera wrote to counter the Reformation he also contradicted Catholic doctrine because both the Catholics and the Reformers got their interpretation of Prophecy from Augustine's book, *The City of God* (413-426) and both hold to the Amilennial view. Ribera contradicted Catholic teaching as much as he contradicted the Protestant view.

We therefore conclude that it is clutching at straws to claim futurism was invented by Ribera to defend the Roman Catholic Church from the teaching of the Reformers.