

## Isn't the rapture more "biblical" than the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption?

Here is the full text of the question: My question is about Mike's comments at the June 15 class about the Rapture. He said it's a fairly "recent" theory, only going back to the 1830's, and that there is no biblical basis for it. By those standards, the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception (1850's) and the Assumption (1950) are also "recent" and have no strict biblical basis. The Church pulls Scriptures from various sources--Song of Solomon, Revelation, etc.--and patches them together to support those doctrines. I think in that respect the Church has far less scriptural support for those two Marian dogmas than the Evangelical Protestants do for the concept of the Rapture, which does seem to have some biblical basis. Also, the idea, from Fatima, of "the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart" (whatever that means) which is often used as part of Catholic eschatology, makes even LESS sense than the Rapture. And again, even has less biblical basis. It seems like a double standard to me.

Thank you for this interesting comparison between certain Marian dogmas and the concept of the [rapture](#). We'll provide some comments below that we hope will clarify the Church's teaching in this area.

(1) It is true that the Immaculate Conception was officially defined in 1854 and the Assumption was defined in 1950. However, those teachings, deeply rooted in Scripture as well as Tradition, did not simply appear out of nowhere on those dates. Rather, on those occasions the Pope formally affirmed teachings that were part of the deposit of faith and already believed by Catholics through the ages. For proof of this, check out these links to the actual papal documents that define the dogmas of the [Immaculate Conception](#) and [Assumption](#).

The only point here is to stress that while the dogmatic definitions only came in the 19th and 20th centuries, there is a clear "paper trail" (or should we say, "papal trail") that goes much farther back, and we can see the continuity as well as the growth of the Church's understanding during the course of two millennia.

Stay tuned to this site: In the next few weeks we will post more extensive biblical explanations of the Church's teachings about the Blessed Virgin Mary.

(2) It is also true that the "rapture" is of fairly recent origin. Unlike the Marian teachings mentioned in the preceding section, there was widespread "silence" concerning this theory for the first 1800 years of Christianity. Aside from the significant issues of tradition and Church authority (see number 6, below), it seems odd that a teaching that is seemingly so important would be unknown to Christians for that span of time.

This doesn't "prove" the point one way or another, but I think it's a fair point to raise. It seems pretty well established that the "rapture" didn't come along until John Nelson Darby (1800-82), an ex-Anglican priest, created (or some might say, discovered) this teaching in developing his new "dispensationalist" theological system.

(3) The biblical evidence for the rapture is pretty sparse. For proponents of the rapture, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 is especially vital:

“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.”

Carl Olson, author of [Will Catholics Be “Left Behind”?](#), points out three problems with claiming this passage refers to the rapture.

First, neither it nor the entire book of 1 Thessalonians mentions Christ returning two more times (as the rapture theory presupposes a subsequent return by Christ), or makes any reference to such a distinction.

Second, dispensationalists believe the rapture will be a secret and silent event, yet this passage describes a very loud and public event. This is all the more problematic because dispensationalists insist that they interpret Scripture “plainly” and “literally,” allowing for symbolism only when such is the obvious intent of the author.

Finally, dispensationalists teach that all other New Testament references to Christ coming in the clouds (Mt. 24:30 and 26:64; Mk. 14:62; Rev. 1:7) refer to His second coming, but inexplicably deny that that is the case here.

Then there’s 1 Corinthians 15 and its reference to “the twinkling of an eye,” which is often used as a proof text, but is equally unconvincing. Olson explains that the point of the passage is that Christians will be glorified at the Second Coming, not that they’ll be secretly whisked off the planet prior to the tribulation. It describes an event that will occur at “the last trumpet” and states that “the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:52).

Yet, rapture proponents claim that Matthew 24:29-31 describes the Second Coming, which will include “a great sound of a trumpet” (Mt. 24:31). So how can 1 Corinthians 15, which speaks of “the last trumpet,” refer to the rapture when there is yet another trumpet to be sounded, several years later, at the Second Coming?

For more on this aspect of the question, see the books and resources listed [here](#).

(4) There’s also the issue with the larger dispensationalist theology, which includes the rapture, as it denies that the Church is the kingdom of God on earth and the fulfillment of the covenants God made with the chosen people in the Old Testament. Instead, there are two people of God—the Jews, the “earthly people” and the Christians, the “heavenly people.” This is a much bigger theological issue which is addressed in more detail in the resources mentioned above. The point here is that the rapture:

(a) was unheard of for 1800 years

(b) is based on really thin/dubious biblical “evidence”

(c) is part of a larger theological model that has set itself up in opposition to the Church

All those points need to be treated patiently and fairly, but clearly those are significant concerns.

(5) “The triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary” is nowhere mentioned in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, so it’s probably a stretch to say that it’s “often used in Catholic eschatology.” Our Lady’s appearances in Fatima in 1917 and the messages she had for the world are in the nature of a [private revelation](#). All the same, the Church has thoroughly investigated Fatima and has found the apparitions worthy of belief and the message consistent with the Word of God. The 100,000 people who witnessed the miracle of the sun were surely convinced!

But aside from that, whatever one might think of Our Lady and the possibility of her appearing to us, urging us to do whatever Christ tells us (cf. Jn. 2:5), it seems in retrospect that a message of conversion, prayer, and peace, coming at the threshold of two world wars and the bloodiest century (by far) in human history, was most appropriate.

And while Fatima has done much to spread devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the fact is that devotion specifically to the Immaculate Heart of Mary goes back at least to St. John Eudes in the 17th century. It relates to her maternal love for us. She is, according to the earliest Christian witnesses, the “New Eve,” the mother of all those alive in Christ (cf. Gen. 3:20; Jn. 19:26-27). With a mother’s heart, she lovingly remembered the events of Jesus’ life (e.g., Lk. 2:19, 51). She is sinless and “full of grace,” and as our spiritual mother she intercedes for us, that we will turn to the Lord and be saved.

Again, we’ll include more on the Church’s teaching regarding Mary in the coming weeks.

(6) Last but not least, this really comes down to the question of authority. What is our rule of faith? If it is Scripture alone, then each believer is his or her own arbiter (or Pope) of what the Word of God means.

As Catholics, we believe that the Church is “the pillar and bulwark of truth” (1 Tim. 3:15) established by Christ to safeguard the “deposit of faith” that was entrusted to the Peter and the other Apostles (cf. 1 Tim. 6:20).

Without a divinely protected “Magisterium” to guide the faithful concerning Christian teaching, the interpretation of Scripture is really up for grabs. That’s just the truth of the matter, as sincere people of good-will on their own inevitably come up with different interpretations of the text. And that’s especially true when it comes to mysterious, apocalyptic passages that describe the end times.

“Double standard”? I guess you could say that if all interpretations were equal. But they’re not. We realize that doesn’t sound particularly American or democratic, but when it comes to God’s revealed truth, we have the promises of Christ that those who hear the apostles and their successors hear Him (cf. Lk. 10:16).

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