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## RAPTURE

The term *rapture*, derived from the Greek *harpazō* and the Latin *raptus*, has the general meaning of something being quickly snatched away or taken by force. Since the earliest centuries of the Church, Christian writers have used the term to describe a particularly elevated kind of mystical experience or ECSTASY (cf. TERTULLIAN (c. 160–235), *Against Marcion*, V, 8). In the latter nineteenth century certain Protestant fundamentalist circles began using the term with reference to the “end times.” In both cases, biblical texts that include forms of *harpazō* form a basis for the use of the term in Christian life and literature. The present understanding is also profoundly affected by a long history of extrabiblical developments.

**Mystical Rapture.** Paul’s statement that he was “caught up into Paradise and heard ineffable things, which no one may utter” (2 Cor 12:4; NAB) is the most prominent biblical description of mystical rapture. In the later tradition of Christian MYSTICISM, general characteristics of rapture (as distinct from other deep experiences of union with GOD) include the following: It comes suddenly, without warning; one has the awareness of being irresistibly acted upon by God; one is completely entranced interiorly, temporarily losing some or all physical and mental faculties; and blissful supernatural knowledge is infused.

The term *rapture* is applied with different nuances by various mystics, and some use other terms for what appears to be the same phenomenon. St. TERESA OF AVILA, for example, names “suspensions,” “transports,” “flights of the spirit,” and “impulses” (1976), whereas the Rhineland and Flemish mystics such as HADEWIJCH of Antwerp and Jan van RUYSBROECK speak of a “storm of love” (Underhill 1911). All of these seem to manifest the general features named above.

The extreme character of these experiences sometimes leaves the body exhausted, in pain, or out of joint, but if rapture is genuine its long-term effects will be beneficial. Authentic raptures usually occur at an advanced point in the mystical life, when the mystic is undergoing the final PURIFICATION before entering the culminating spiritual marriage. Spiritual teachers agree

that these experiences are not to be sought after, especially because of the great danger of false raptures induced by causes such as mental illness, emotional or physical stress, overwrought imagination, or malevolent spirits.

**End Times Rapture.** Quite different is the notion of a coming rapture toward the end of the world, when Jesus Christ will return secretly to earth. In this scenario, popular among contemporary fundamentalists and evangelical Protestants, Jesus will “snatch away” his true followers into heaven, leaving behind everyone else to suffer the tribulation that will punish the world before his final coming in glory.

Rapture teachers claim biblical support for the notion in several texts. The passage most cited is 1 Thes 4:17, which says that believers who are still alive at Christ’s coming “will be caught up [in the Latin Vulgate translation, *rapiemur*] together with [those who have died] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (NAB). Also quoted are Jesus’ words in Mt 24:40–41 (as well as the parallel passage in Lk 17:34–35), which speak of a coming judgment in which “one will be taken and one will be left.”

Until historically recent times, however, the notion of a secret rapture has been conspicuously and consistently absent from the various interpretations of these passages by Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant writers alike. Paul’s words have been viewed simply as a reference to Christ’s final coming in glory. Jesus’ words have been taken to refer either to the terrifying events surrounding the fall of JERUSALEM in AD 70 or to the final judgment day when, “as it was in the days of Noah” (Mt 24:37), the wicked will be swept away in judgment while the righteous are left to stand secure.

Nowhere, in fact, among ancient or medieval Christian teachers, nor even among the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, do we find clear historical evidence for belief in a secret rapture. Similar notions appeared occasionally, however, in early America. In the eighteenth century, for example, Increase Mather (1639–1723), a Puritan minister in Boston, wrote of Christians being “caught up in the air” before the world was consumed by divine judgment. In 1788 Morgan Edwards (1722–1795), a Baptist pastor and educator in Philadelphia, taught that Christians would be taken to heaven three and a half years before Christ judged the world (although he admitted that few of his contemporaries embraced such a belief).

Ironically, the writer of that period whose end-times ideas came closest to the modern rapture teaching was a Chilean Jesuit, Manuel de LACUNZA Y DÍAZ. His *Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, first published in Spanish in 1812, proposed that toward the end of the world, Jesus would snatch from the earth faithful

Catholics who regularly received the Eucharist. They would remain safe with him for forty-five days while terrible judgments chastised the world. Then they would accompany him when he returned to judge the world.

The rapture teaching as commonly presented today did not appear until later in the nineteenth century. Two sectarian religious leaders in England, Edward IRVING and John Nelson DARBY, developed and promoted the secret rapture belief among their respective followers. Irving had translated Lacunza's book into English in 1827 and so may have adapted Lacunza's ideas for his purposes.

The more fully developed rapture notions of these teachers were transplanted to North America through Darby's visits there and his influence on several nineteenth-century revivalist preachers. They gained widespread popularity through the publication of *The Scofield Reference Bible* (1909), which sold nearly two million copies within thirty years after its appearance. American attorney Cyrus Ingerson SCOFIELD, who produced the extensive commentary within this edition of the King James Bible, presented belief in the rapture as part of the system of biblical interpretation developed by Darby and known as dispensationalism.

In more recent times, the rapture notion has received extensive publicity as the premise of the *Left Behind* series of novels by Tim LaHaye (1926–) and Jerry B. Jenkins (1949–), which sold more than 43 million copies between 1995 and 2007. Numerous popular television preachers also make the rapture an essential part of their message, most notably Jack van Impe (1931–), who has focused largely on end times subjects since the 1950s.

Many contemporary scholars criticize the dispensationalist doctrine of the rapture on both biblical and theological grounds. They say the imagery of the Thessalonians text needs to be interpreted in view of its background in Jewish APOCALYPTIC literature, in which it is not uncommon for visionaries to be snatched up to heaven. This genre of writing is not intended to provide literal descriptions of past or future events, but rather to offer a mythic framework of hope to communities in crisis.

The larger context of 1 Thes 4:17 indicates that Paul's main purpose is to reassure grieving Christians that a day is coming when the dead and the living will be equal and together again as one community with the Lord. The dispensationalist doctrine of the rapture, on the other hand, stresses separation, VENGEANCE, and destruction rather than reconciliation, HOPE, and constructive activity. An adequate understanding of rapture must be approached by careful study of the full range of biblical and post-biblical insights into how God

acts powerfully and salvifically within human lives and communities.

Critics of the secret rapture teaching—including many evangelical Protestants—have observed that, like certain other essentials of dispensationalist thought, such a belief easily leads to despair about the world's future and indifference toward efforts to improve it. The notion also implies that God will spare his people from SUFFERING rather than make use of it for their benefit. Catholic critics in particular have noted that rapture believers often display hostility toward the Church and insist that if Catholics reject fundamentalist teachings, they will be “left behind” by Christ when he returns secretly.

The “Statement on *Left Behind* Books and Videos” by the Catholic Conference of Illinois (2003) urged the faithful to reject the rapture belief, which apparently had found its way into some Catholic catechetical and educational settings. The bishops identified the *Left Behind* literature as “a tool for active promotion of a fundamentalist theology of the end times in conflict with Catholic teachings” and “a vehicle for anti-Catholic sentiments.” They urged the removal of such books and videos from Catholic institutions and called on “those responsible for faith formation to provide planned, coherent, and informed catechesis to all age groups about Church teachings on the end of the world, based on Scripture and Tradition.”

**SEE ALSO** DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY; MYSTICI CORPORIS; REVELATION, BOOK OF.

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**RAVASCO, EUGENIA, BL.**

Founder of the Congregation of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, also known as the Ravasco Institute; b. January 4, 1845, Milan, Italy; d. December 30, 1900, Genoa, Italy; beatified April 27, 2003, by Pope JOHN PAUL II.

Eugenia Ravasco was the third of six children born to Francesco Matteo and Carolina Mozzoni Frosconi. Her mother died when she was three, and her father and elder brother Ambrose moved to Genoa. Eugenia remained in Milan, where a pious aunt raised her until 1852, when her father reunited the family in Genoa. After her father died in 1855, Eugenia lived with a devout aunt and uncle and their ten children. She and her family became concerned about Italy's anticlerical atmosphere and its effect on Ambrose.

When Eugenia's uncle died in 1862, she helped raise the family. She and her aunt tried unsuccessfully to save Ambrose from anti-Catholic influences. In 1863 Eugenia discerned a religious vocation and began teaching catechism to poor girls who lived on the street. Other women joined in that ministry, and Eugenia founded the Congregation of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary on December 6, 1868. Also known as the Ravasco Institute, the congregation taught catechism and opened secular schools for the poor.

Mother Eugenia served as the congregation's superior for the remainder of her life. In 1878 she opened a school to teach girls and prepare Christian teachers. She also traveled throughout Italy, France, and Switzerland to establish new communities, teach, and give direction to sisters. She also ministered to the dying, the imprisoned, and people who fell away from the Church.

Mother Eugenia died of natural causes on December 30, 1900, in Genoa. The congregation she founded currently ministers in Italy, Switzerland, Albania, Africa, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay,

Venezuela, and the Philippines. The sisters serve in schools, parishes, and missions. They maintain their founder's dedication to young people, the poor, and the promotion of the dignity of women.

Pope John Paul II declared Mother Eugenia VENERABLE on July 1, 2000. On July 5, 2002, the pope signed the decree recognizing the cure of a Bolivian girl, a miracle obtained through Venerable Eugenia's INTERSESSION. The pope beatified her on April 27, 2003, at St. Peter's Square. The pontiff remarked that Bl. Eugenia "joyfully devoted her whole life to young people and the poor. With foresight, she was able to open herself to the pressing needs of the mission, with special concern for those who had 'fallen away' from the Church."

Feast: December 30.

**SEE ALSO** RELIGIOUS (MEN AND WOMEN); SACRED HEARTS OF JESUS AND MARY, CONGREGATION OF THE.

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**REDEMPTION (THEOLOGY OF)**

Central to the Christian message is the announcement that only in Jesus is salvation to be found (cf. Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:4–6). The term *redemption* designates the mystery of God's deliverance of mankind from the evil of sin and death, as well as its restoration to grace by the supreme act of divine power and merciful love achieved and manifested in Christ's death and resurrection. This redemptive act spans the whole of human history in its effects, for "God wishes all men to be saved and to