

“Theology of the End Times in Conflict With Catholic Teachings”
Illinois Bishops’ Statement on “Left Behind” Books and Videos

CHICAGO, JUNE 24, 2003 (Zenit.org).- The Catholic Conference of Illinois is taking on the Rapture.

The Rapture, according to many fundamentalist and evangelical Protestants, is the fast-approaching secret and silent disappearance of Christians from the earth before a time of tribulation. The notion has soared in popularity with the “Left Behind” novels, which have sold tens of millions of copies. Recently the Catholic conference issued this statement on the phenomenon.

Statement on Left Behind Books and Videos

When Jesus told us to be alert and ready for his return, he also warned there would be false prophets. One of the most attractively marketed recent false “prophets” has been the *Left Behind* series, published by Tyndale House Press in Wheaton, Illinois. Since 1995, the series by Mr. Tim LaHaye and Mr. Jerry B. Jenkins has been a tool for active promotion of a fundamentalist theology of the end times in conflict with Catholic teachings. More than that, the series has been a vehicle for anti-Catholic sentiments by the way Catholics are characterized and treated in the plot line.

Promoted nationally in grocery checkout aisles, discount outlets and bookstores, over the Internet and even through book sale fundraisers in Catholic schools, these novels are now in the tenth installment of the adult series and the twenty-fourth volume of the children’s version. There are also two videos, (produced by Cloud Ten Productions) a board game, and other marketed items. These materials, about fictionalized end-times, popularize a common fundamentalist belief in a time of tribulation after the “rapture” (when the “good people” are secretly taken up overnight to Heaven) and before the Second Coming of Christ. This belief is not supported in Scripture.

Responding to similar fundamentalist agendas back in 1937, Pius XI, in “*Divini Redemptoris*” said any such speculations about a period when a remnant of the Church progresses towards its own ultimate victory might of themselves be a sign of the Antichrist:

The Antichrist’s deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment. The Church rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism ...

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* continues:

The kingdom will be fulfilled then, not by a historic triumph of the church through a progressive ascendancy, but only in God's victory over the final unleashing of evil ... (676-677)

The scenario in *Left Behind*, of a “tribulation force” of born-again former sinners who attempt personally to derail the progress of the Anti-Christ, is broadly classifiable as pre-millenarianism. The pseudo-historical backdrop for the story ties apocalyptic scripture to specific events in history, an error known as pre-millennial dispensationalism. In later books in the series, the new Pope is depicted as instrumental in establishing a relativistic world religion encouraged by the AntiChrist and operated from New Babylon (formerly Rome). The *Left Behind* series is anti-Catholic in content and form, consistent with Mr. LaHaye's other writings, in which he associates the Church with “Babylonian mysticism.”

Tyndale House, and by association Cloud Ten Productions, have made clear in their marketing that they feel divinely inspired to promote their theological agenda among the most vulnerable. A recent promotional mailer, created by the Christian Film and Television Commission for their second *Left Behind* video, claims: “God is using the “Left Behind” films, as He has used the books, to reach out and touch the lives of people who won't go to church, but in their hearts are looking for the answers to life's questions.” If there are any doubts that the aim of the Left Behind series is as much to promote a fundamentalist agenda as to make money, these marketing techniques should put them to rest.

Attractively packaged proselytization

While many adult Catholics are secure enough in their faith to avoid being proselytized by such works, or by the direct preaching of fundamentalists, the real danger of *Left Behind* is its attractiveness as a story of good people in a heroic battle against ultimate evil. Readers lacking a full understanding of Catholic scriptural teaching about the end times in many cases have internalized this fictional post-rapture time of tribulation when sinners are left to battle the Anti-Christ, because it sounds familiar and “biblical.”

Overall, these books reinforce an unhealthy and immature belief in a harshly judgmental God whose mercy we earn by good behavior. In response to reading them, Catholic catechists have been observed confusing and even frightening children in religious education programs by teaching the “rapture” as if it were an article of Catholic faith. There is also real danger that Catholics persuaded by this agenda may judge other people on spiritual fitness for the “rapture.”

A call for better catechesis about the end times

We, the Catholic Bishops of Illinois, call upon 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. We also call upon

Catholic institutions -- libraries, bookstores, schools, and parishes -- to remove any *Left Behind* books and videos from their shelves, to prohibit the sale of these materials in Catholic venues, and to provide the faithful with information that these materials are, in fact, a marketing tool for fundamentalist preaching about the end times and a thinly disguised polemic against the Catholic Church.

Any persons interested in obtaining a more faithful reading list, on this subject or any other aspect of Catholic teaching, should contact their Diocesan Office of Religious Education for guidance.

For good books on this topic, read [*Will Catholics Be "Left Behind"*](#), by Carl Olson, [*The Rapture Trap*](#), by Paul Thigpen, [*Rapture, the End-times Error that Leaves the Bible Behind*](#), by David Currie, and [*Is Jesus Coming Soon?*](#) By Ralph Martin.