

J. N. DARBY AND THE IRISH ORIGINS OF DISPENSATIONALISM

MARK SWEETNAM AND CRAWFORD GRIBBEN*

John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) is a figure of towering significance in the history of the Christian church.¹ Though his name is not widely known, and the details of his life are unfamiliar to many, even to many of those whom he influenced the most, he has been one of the most important shapers of evangelical thought throughout the last two hundred years. During his life, his influence and ideas spread by means of his prolific and indefatigable writing of commentaries, pamphlets, and letters, and through his wide-ranging travels, covering large parts of Europe and North America. But those ideas and their influence were destined to endure well beyond Darby's lifetime, and their impact would be felt in parts of the globe that Darby himself never visited. The principal legacy of this aristocratic Irish lawyer-turned-priest-turned-peripatetic evangelist has been the theology known as dispensationalism, and it is in this connection that his influence is most widely recognized. But there was a great deal more to Darby's thought than his innovative take on prophetic teaching. His ecclesiology was highly distinctive and, though its influence never extended as widely as that of dispensationalism, it was felt directly in the "open" and "exclusive" branches of the Brethren, and indirectly throughout a broad spectrum of primitivist evangelical groups. But Darby's originality did not stop there. His teachings

* Mark Sweetnam and Crawford Gribben are both associated with Trinity College, College Green, Dublin 2, Ireland.

¹ There is no scholarly biography of J. N. Darby. Two biographies are available: W. G. Turner and Edwin Cross, *Unknown and Well Known: A Biography of John Nelson Darby* (London: Chapter Two, 1990) is a new edition, with additional material, of a laudatory biography by a contemporary of Darby; Max Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1992) is a more recent work. The role of J. N. Darby in the development of dispensationalism has been discussed by a variety of writers. F. Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement* (2d ed.; Exeter: Paternoster, 1976) is a classic study of Darby in relation to the Brethren movement. More recently, Timothy C. F. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain, 1815–35* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), has set him in a wider context, with relevance to this chapter. Questions of Darby's influence, with considerable relevance to this article, have been discussed in Timothy C. F. Stunt, "Influences in the early development of J. N. Darby," in Crawford Gribben and Timothy C. F. Stunt, eds., *Prisoners of Hope? Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1880* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004) 44–68, and Timothy C. F. Stunt, "John Nelson Darby: Contexts and Perceptions," in Crawford Gribben and Andrew R. Holmes, eds., *Protestant Millennialism, Evangelicalism and Irish Society, 1790–2005* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 83–98. Jonathan D. Burnham, *A Story of Conflict: The Controversial Relationship between Benjamin Wills Newton and John Nelson Darby* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004) provides further useful material.

on soteriology, justification, and anthropology were, likewise, distinctly idiosyncratic.

Despite of the scale of Darby's legacy and the complexity and originality of his thought, he has been poorly served by modern scholarship. It is telling, for example, that no scholarly intellectual biography of Darby exists. And, in spite of the fairly romantic details of his life and the imposing figure that he cuts, the number of popular-level biographical treatments is very small.² Because of his foundational importance to the movement, studies of the history of the "Open Brethren" or "Plymouth Brethren" have, of necessity, discussed Darby's importance but, because of their wider agenda, have focused on a small number of episodes in his life.³ The unavoidable selectiveness of this treatment has tended to distort the total picture, focusing attention upon some of Darby's less attractive attributes and more divisive actions. Darby's thought has fared even less well than his life. Studies of his thought are limited in the extreme and have also been notable for their lack of synoptic overview. Some important work has been done on the detail of Darby's dispensational teaching, but the wider range of his thought has been largely ignored.

The reasons for this scholarly neglect are not difficult to identify. A primary problem is the nature of the sources with which scholars need to engage. The challenges that the scholarly study of Darby's work presents: the scale of his *oeuvre*, the *ad hoc* nature of much of his writing, the consequent diffuse and non-systematic treatment of theological principles, and Darby's famously and formidably impenetrable prose style conspire to make all but the most diligent student think twice about engaging with his work. In addition, the tendentious nature of some of Darby's biographies has made Darby an unattractive figure, seemingly unworthy of further study. Thus it has come to be that Darby's writing and thought form an enormous body of undigested teaching that has yet to be mined by scholars of the history of dispensationalism and the church.

Clearly, then, there is considerable scope for scholarly work on the life and legacy of John Nelson Darby. But even among the other lacunae, there is one area that stands out as deserving of immediate and concentrated scholarly attention. To understand this, it is helpful to reconsider the origins of dispensationalism, and the contexts in which Darby was immersed. While it is true that the detailed contours of the beliefs of many twenty-first-century dispensationalists do not exactly correspond with those of Darby, a clear lineage can be traced back from the popular and influential dispensationalism

² Most recently, see Marion Field, *John Nelson Darby: Prophetic Pioneer* (Godalming: Highland Books, 2008)

³ See, *inter alia*, Timothy Grass, *Gathering to His Name: The Story of Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006); Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*; Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement*; H. A. Ironside, *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1985); and W. B. Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren* (2d ed.; Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker, 2001 [1902]). (The first edition of Neatby's book is available online at http://www.exclusivebrethren.net/neatby_toc.htm, accessed January 17, 2009.)

of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries back to Ireland, back to Dublin, back to Darby, and back to the prophetic ferment of the eighteenth-century *fin de siècle*.⁴

I. DARBY IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The turn of a new century can never pass unnoticed, and the circumstances surrounding the dawn of the nineteenth century made it especially traumatic. Samuel Taylor Coleridge described this period as “an age of anxiety from the crown to the hovel, from the cradle to the coffin,” and his words accurately capture the pervasiveness of social uncertainty and upheaval as revolution overthrew established social orders in America and France.⁵ In this ferment, speculation about the future of the world turned many to a renewed study of prophetic Scripture. In Ireland, concern over global events was married with the increasing pessimism of an Anglo-Irish ascendancy reeling from the horrors of the 1798 rebellion and feeling ever more besieged.⁶ It is this context that provided a background for the development of Darby’s ideas. Although Darby, the son of a wealthy merchant, was born in Westminster, he had Irish connections, and in 1823 his father inherited Leap Castle in King’s County (now County Offaly). Even before that, Darby had followed his education at Westminster School with a period of study at Trinity College Dublin, and had graduated in 1819 with a Gold Medal in Classics—the highest reward conferred by the College on students of outstanding merit. Armed with this exceptional preparation, Darby prepared to practice law, and was admitted first to King’s Inn in Dublin, and later to Lincoln’s Inn in London.

However, Darby never enjoyed the glittering and privileged legal career that beckoned. Despite his father’s disapproval, Darby left the practice of law and in August 1825, was ordained as a deacon of the Church of Ireland. Along with his legal career, he also abandoned the comfortable world of Dublin’s Protestant ascendancy for the isolated and mountainous parish of Calary, County Wicklow. He chose to live like those to whom he ministered and adopted a plain and even ascetic mode of life. The poverty of his dress and the physical consequences of his life of self-denial were so marked that F. W. Newman, brother to the more famous John Henry Newman, recording

⁴ For discussions of the relationship between Darby’s theology and later dispensationalism see Stewart G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1931); Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy: 1918–1931* (New Haven: Yale University, 1954); Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970); and George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *A Book I Value: Selected Marginalia* (ed. H. J. Jackson; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003) 172.

⁶ For discussions of this context see the essays collected in Gribben and Stunt, eds., *Prisoners of Hope?*; and Gribben and Holmes, *Protestant Millennialism, Evangelicalism and Irish Society, 1790–2005*.

his first impressions of the “Irish clergyman” compared him to a “monk of La Trappe,” and recounted a story about his being offered a halfpenny by a person in Limerick, who assumed him to be a beggar.⁷

In spite of this sacrifice for the sake of religion and his notable piety at this point in his life, Darby could not have been described as an evangelical. Rather he was an “exact churchman,” placing considerable emphasis on the importance of the sacraments as channels of divine grace, and, as he later acknowledged, denying the descendents of Luther and Calvin a place in the true church. This position was to change dramatically. In late 1827, Darby suffered a serious riding accident and was forced to spend months in recovery in the homes of his sister, Susan Pennefather. He spent this period of enforced inactivity reading and meditating upon Scripture, and these months were crucial to the future course of Darby’s life. Some of the results of his prolonged study of Scripture would blossom later than others. The most immediate effect was his conversion: his “deliverance from bondage.” On returning to his parishioners, Darby began to preach the gospel with the energy and commitment that were so typical of all he did. Initially, he experienced a great deal of success, particularly in seeing many hundreds of his Roman Catholic parishioners converted, both to evangelical faith and to the Church of Ireland.

In spite of these encouraging results, in the years immediately following his conversion, Darby became increasingly disenchanted with the Church of Ireland and moved slowly but surely towards secession. As a result of his study of Scripture, Darby became increasingly dismayed with the Erastian nature of the Church of Ireland—its status as the established Church of the state. During this period the Church of Ireland enjoyed a unique position. Like the Church of England, she was the church by law established, enjoying a special relationship with the apparatus of the British rule in Ireland. She was also a minority church, identified with foreign and oppressive rule and opposed to the Catholic beliefs of the majority of the Irish population. This status was emphasized by the Penal laws, which criminalized the practice of Catholicism and prevented Catholics from holding political office. In place since the establishment of the Reformation in Ireland, they had been the cause of growing unrest, and about the time that Darby was recovering from his riding accident, the campaign against them, led by the Irish Member of Parliament, Daniel O’Connell, was at its high point.

This was the context for *The Metropolitan Charge and Clerical Petition* issued by Archbishop Magee, the archbishop of Dublin, and Darby’s metropolitan. Magee denounced the Catholic Church and directed that oaths of

⁷ Francis William Newman (whose brother was the more famous John Henry, Cardinal Newman) met Darby in the late 1820s, and fell, for a time, under his spell. His autobiographical work *Phases of Faith or Passages from the History of my Creed* (6th ed.; Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1970 [1860]), provides a valuable, if generally unflattering, depiction of Darby. As Timothy Stunt points out, it is significant that he refers to Darby as the “Irish clergyman,” throughout, and equally noteworthy that Darby, in *The Irrationalism of Infidelity: Being a Reply to ‘Phases of Faith’* (1853), referred to himself by the same sobriquet. See Stunt, “Contexts and Perceptions” 85, 94.

allegiance and supremacy be imposed on anyone joining the Established Church. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the political and social tensions at play, this requirement resulted in a complete drying up of Catholic conversions, as religious faith became conflated and confused with political allegiance. Just as unsurprising was Darby's response. He was appalled and angered at this disastrous manifestation of the Erastian union of Church and State that was the present reality in Ireland.

One of the most interesting things about the way in which Darby's interpretation of prophetic Scripture emerged is that his development of dispensationalism was a result of his disaffection with the ecclesiastical status quo. Especially in the light of his later complaints that those he spoke to during his visits to the United States enthusiastically absorbed his prophetic teaching while ignoring almost entirely his views on church order, it is important to note that, with Darby, eschatology followed on from church doctrine. It was ecclesiological concern that led to Darby's rethinking of prophecy. Up to this point, he seems to have held to the sort of postmillennial scheme that was a key part of the intellectual landscape at Trinity College. His own evangelistic efforts were part of the global spread of the gospel, which would eventually bring about millennial bliss and the conditions for Christ's return. Magee's action and its consequences were probably not the only thing that changed this. But they did prove to be the straw that broke the camel's back, and, in the aftermath of these events, Darby became deeply pessimistic about the future of the world and disillusioned about the prospects of global evangelization and the growing success of the gospel. The revolution in his prophetic teaching was a slow one, but the key features that underwrote it were already visible in his reply to Magee. *Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ* (1828) was Darby's first tract, and it outlined his emerging understanding of the nature of the church. Christ's Church, Darby argued, was spiritual in nature. Its unity was not, could not, be the product of human effort—it was a work of the Spirit alone. The Church of Ireland was following a path well worn by the churches through the centuries, a path which led to involvement on human power and civil government, and away from the pristine simplicity of dependence upon the Holy Spirit. These churches had fallen from their original position because they had lost sight of their heavenly calling and had become mired in human mechanism.

Following on from this controversy, Darby gave practical expression to these views by resigning his curacy and beginning an itinerant missionary work that was to continue throughout his life. At this point, he was still a member of the Anglican communion. However, his links with the church were inexorably loosening, and at the same time, he was discovering an alternative ecclesiology, shaped by insights similar to his own, which was emerging in the small gatherings of believers that were eventually to develop into the so-called "Brethren movement." Darby was to be an important influence on the shape of this movement and quickly came to be recognized as one of its most significant leaders.

By the time Darby's first writing on prophecy, *Reflections upon "The Prophetic Inquiry" and the Views Advanced in It*, was published in 1829, he had,

in line with his pessimistic view of the health of the church, adopted a clearly premillennial position. However, it also clearly displayed Darby's historicism, his belief that the events foretold in Revelation and other prophetic Scriptures had and were being fulfilled. Futurism would come later. His expectation of Christ's return was also post-tribulational—it would be some time before the pre-wrath and “secret” Rapture would fully emerge in his thought.

Throughout the early 1830s, then, Darby was developing both his ecclesiology and his eschatology. He was not alone in this. The prophetic speculation that had marked the turn of the century had settled down somewhat, but the energy it had released was feeding into a number of groups which were developing often very idiosyncratic views on prophecy. Some of the foremost students of prophecy gathered with Darby at a series of conferences held, under the patronage of Theodosia, Lady Powerscourt, on the Powerscourt estate in County Wicklow between 1830 and 1838. Initially the conferences gathered together a fairly typical spectrum of prophecy students: meetings were chaired by Robert Daly, the evangelical minister of the parish, and a number of Irvingites also attended. By the high point of the conferences in 1833, however, the attendance had become dominated by Brethren, and the increasingly anti-clerical and anti-Established Church tenor of the discussion had forced Daly to withdraw from his position. Darby's role in the conferences also developed, and he played an increasingly important role in directing discussion. Unfortunately, we have no detailed account of the discussions at Powerscourt. No minutes were taken, and only the outlines of some of the discussions survive. However, these outlines and the fact that Darby was felt to be increasingly dominating discussion are sufficient to indicate both that his eschatological understanding was taking defined shape and that he was beginning actively to propagate his new understanding. This is not to suggest that Darby had all the details of dispensational interpretation worked out by 1833—that was to be a prolonged and never entirely conclusive process. Nevertheless, the key features of his thought were already clear.

Clearly, then, the story of the emergence of the most distinctive features of Darby's thought is not a simple one. The genesis of dispensationalism is difficult to account for. Some scholarship, with a clear investment in dispensational teaching, has focused on the task of unearthing premillennialism and proto-dispensationalism in the writings of the early church. While such work is intended to address the charges of novelty that have often been leveled against the theology, it fails to trace any line of influence between these, generally fragmentary, references and Darby's convalescence. Other writers, generally historians of the Brethren movement, have acknowledged the novelty of Darby's ideas and, building on Darby's own view of his experience, have seen his development of these ideas as a special intervention and revelation by the Holy Spirit.⁸ However, even those who give assent to

⁸ For examples of this highly providentialist reading of the emergence and history dispensationalism see Andrew Miller, *Miller's Church History* (London: Pickering and Inglis, [n.d.]); idem, *The Brethren commonly so-called; A Brief Sketch of Their Origin, Progress and Testimony* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Book Room, n.d.); and E. H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

the truth of dispensationalism might well be interested to look further and harder at the influences that acted upon Darby and the results of that action. The contemporary context of prophetic ferment indicates that Darby was not alone in feeling these forces, though he may have been unique in his response to them. But historians who see Darbyite dispensationalism as much as the result of influences in the human as well as the spiritual realm have disagreed on the source of that influence. Some suggestions have been polemically driven: Dave MacPherson has made a long career of suggesting that Darby and his followers successfully perpetrated a “Rapture Hoax,” skillfully and successfully repackaging the ecstatic utterances of Margaret Macdonald as dispensational theology.⁹ Other, more scholarly contributions have questioned the existence of any such relationship. So, for instance, F. F. Bruce argued simply that the material that shaped Darby’s prophetic ideas “was in the air in the 1820s and 1830s among eager students of unfulfilled prophecy . . . direct dependence by Darby on Margaret Macdonald is unlikely.”¹⁰ More recently, Timothy C. F. Stunt has pointed to the pre-millennial writing of the Dominican Jansenist theologian Bernard Lambert as important influences both on Edward Irving and J. N. Darby.¹¹

But what is equally notable about the emergence of Darby’s ideas is the degree to which his ideas were rooted in a particular social, national, and historical context. Darby’s story and the story of dispensationalism are closely imbricated with the contours of Irish history and the fortunes of ascendancy society. The Irishness of this theology has seldom been acknowledged, and the questions that this raises about the international, and especially transatlantic, success of dispensationalism have seldom been addressed. The relationship between Ireland, Darby, and dispensationalism is a complex and incomplete but fascinating picture.

One of the most interesting elements of that picture is the role played in Darby’s religious and intellectual formation by his years in Trinity College Dublin. Gary Nebeker, who has gone some way towards unraveling some of the influences at Trinity that formed Darby’s thought, emphasized the University’s importance in this context:

Of the many questions surrounding the origins of British millenarianism and Dispensational premillennialism, one in particular merits consideration: Why

⁹ See the books by Dave MacPherson: *The Rapture Plot* (Simpsonville, SC: Millennium III Publishers, 1994); *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin* (Kansas, KA: Heart of America Bible Society, 1973); *The Three R’s: Rapture, Revisionism, Robbery*, (Monticello, Utah: P.O.S.T., 1998); *The Great Rapture Hoax* (Fletcher, NC: New Puritan Library, 1983); *Rapture?* (Fletcher, NC: New Puritan Library, 1987); *The Incredible Cover-Up* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1975); and *The Late Great Pre-Trib Rapture* (Kansas, KA: Heart of America Bible Society, 1974). For some responses see R. A. Huebner, *The Truth of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Recovered* (Millington, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 1976); R. A. Huebner, *Precious Truths Revived and Defended Through J. N. Darby*, Vol. 1 (Morganville, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 1991); Thomas Ice, “Why the Doctrine of the Pretribulation Rapture Did Not Begin with Margaret Macdonald,” *BSac* 147 (1990) 155–68; Gerald Stanton, *Kept From The Hour* (4th. ed.; Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle, 1991); and, most recently, Timothy C. F. Stunt, “The Tribulation of Controversy: A Review Article,” *Brethren Archivists and Historians Network Review* 2/2 (2003) 91–98.

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, review of *The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin*, *EvQ* 47 (1975) 58.

¹¹ Stunt, “Influences in the Early Development of J. N. Darby” 44–68.

did Trinity College, Dublin, become such a center of millenarian ferment in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Ireland?¹²

In posing this question, Nebeker is echoing the insights of Ernest Sandeen who acknowledges that “if more were known about early nineteenth century Irish Protestantism and, particularly, the intellectual history of Trinity College, Dublin, a clearer light might be thrown upon these puzzling and difficult points” concerning Darby’s development and influence.¹³ And David Hempton has likewise raised the importance of this issue: “without knowing the intellectual history of Trinity College in the first quarter of the century it is difficult to be certain about the relationship between anti-Catholicism and premillennialism.”¹⁴ Specifically in relation to Darby, Floyd Elmore has re-echoed the importance of this concern, contending that “Darby’s Trinity College background cannot be discounted when analyzing his later doctrinal formulations.”¹⁵ Nebeker’s own attempt to engage with the question builds on the insights of Floyd Elmore. Elmore had found in the postmillennial teaching of Richard Graves, Edward Hincks, and Thomas Elrington “the theological grist for Darby’s later synthesis.”¹⁶ Nebeker, ultimately, foregrounds the contrast between the optimistic postmillennialism espoused by his tutors at Trinity, and Darby’s pessimistic premillennialism to argue that he was reacting against, as much as responding to, the intellectual formation that he had received. The insights of Elmore and Nebeker are helpful, but they are at least as useful for the questions that they raise as for the answers that they provide.

II. TOWARD THE RECOVERY OF DARBY SCHOLARSHIP

The search for answers to these questions is behind an ambitious new program of research at the Millennialism Project at Trinity College Dublin.¹⁷ The Millennialism Project is a center for the study of millennial belief, with a particular focus on evangelical millennialism generally, and the history of dispensationalism more particularly. Scholars associated with the project are involved in scholarly work of international stature across a range of disciplines. An important part of their work is the examination of Darby’s life and legacy in its Irish context, and in the context of Trinity College Dublin. In addition to the publications of scholars associated with the Millennialism Project, the center has been responsible for organizing a number of events

¹² Gary L. Nebeker, “John Nelson Darby and Trinity College, Dublin: A Study in Eschatological Contrasts,” *Fides et Historia* 34/2 (2002) 87.

¹³ Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) 90.

¹⁴ D. N. Hempton, “Evangelicalism and Eschatology,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (1980) 185.

¹⁵ Floyd Saunders Elmore, “A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of the Two Peoples of God in John Nelson Darby” (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990) 74.

¹⁶ Elmore, “A Critical Examination of the Doctrine of the Two Peoples of God in John Nelson Darby” 73

¹⁷ The Project website is available at trinitymillennialismproject.wordpress.com.

designed to bring together historians of dispensationalism to foster the exchange of ideas and to raise the profile of research on Darby. To this end, Trinity hosted a colloquium entitled “J. N. Darby and the resurgence of premillennialism” in September 2008, with participation from American, British, and Irish academics. This event provided a foretaste for a much larger international conference, entitled “Trinity College, Powerscourt, and the origins of dispensationalism,” for which funding is still being sought. This conference will involve some of the leading students of dispensational history and will include sessions at the historic Powerscourt estate in County Wicklow, where Darby’s ideas received their first public discussion.

In addition to its efforts to showcase the high quality research being carried out on Darby and dispensational origins, the Trinity Millennialism Project is also committed to supporting that research. An important element of that support has been the funding of the digitization of J. N. Darby’s Greek NT. This interleaved and heavily annotated NT is part of the holdings of the Christian Brethren Archive at the John Rylands Library, University of Manchester. Darby had the four volumes of this Greek printing dis-bound, interleaved with larger blank sheets, and then re-bound. The resulting volumes provided ample space for his annotations, and those annotations are a goldmine for students of Darby’s thought, exegesis, and—by virtue of the items of personal testimony contained on the leaves—his biography. While some of the material contained in Darby’s notebooks has been published, these jottings have not been made available in print. Personal notes, intended to record and prompt his own study of Scripture, they provide a fascinating window to the most private reflections of this enigmatic figure. Previously available only to those who made the trip to the Archive in Manchester, these documents are being digitized and, thanks to funding provided by Trinity College, will shortly be made freely available over the internet. Both in facilitating access to this material, and the conservation benefits for the fragile originals, this is a most valuable contribution to the resources available to students of Darby, dispensationalism, and the Brethren. Graham Johnson, archivist of the Christian Brethren Archive, has commented on the implications of this initiative by the Trinity Millennialism Project:

Virtually everything John Nelson Darby ever wrote is reproduced and widely consulted online. The major exception to this is the extensive and detailed annotations contained in his personal copy of the New Testament in Greek. The digitization of this document will open up a unique resource to scholars and others interested in the life and work of this important figure in the history of modern Christian thought.

The support of this initiative by the Trinity Millennialism Project brings John Nelson Darby back to his *alma mater*, but it also makes him accessible to scholars everywhere, and may yet foster the critical appreciation that will justify our conviction that John Nelson Darby was among the most significant of Irish and evangelical theologians.