

The Place of Apocalyptic in Biblical Religion

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Professor Ladd, of Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, who contributed an article on "The Revelation and Jewish Apocalyptic" to the QUARTERLY a year ago, is at present spending a sabbatical year in the University of Heidelberg. In July, 1957, he read an important paper to a study group convened by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research at Tyndale House, Cambridge. The first part of this paper is reproduced in the following pages, and we hope to print the second part, under the title "The Origin of Apocalyptic in Biblical Religion",^o in our next issue.*

Albert Schweitzer's interpretation of the person and message of Jesus marked a turning point in the modern study of the New Testament. Before Schweitzer scholarship was able to create non-eschatological interpretations of Jesus, confident in the historical soundness of its work. Schweitzer's contribution involves three positions which ought to be studied separately, for they are not mutually dependent and do not stand or fall together: (1) Apocalyptic is essential to Jesus' message and must be interpreted "realistically";¹ (2) Jesus' message was exclusively apocalyptic; (3) the expected apocalyptic consummation was expected to occur in Jesus' lifetime. We are here concerned only with the first of these positions: the question of the necessity of apocalyptic eschatology in New Testament religion.

Recent criticism has had much to say about eschatology; but, as indicated above, the word has received new connotations. Schweitzer's impact has been such that the eschatological character of Jesus' teaching is widely recognized; but eschatology has been redefined so as to exclude the apocalyptic element which to

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Schweitzer was essential. In England, C. H. Dodd has given us "realized eschatology", by which he means that "all that prophecy and apocalypse had asserted of the supernatural Messianic community was fulfilled in the Church". "All that the Church hoped for in the second coming of Christ is already given in its present experience of Christ through the Spirit."² The idea of an end to history or the end of the world "is no more than a fiction designed to express the reality of theology within history."³

On the Continent, Rudolf Bultmann has given us an existential interpretation of eschatology. The "salvation-occurrence" is an eschatological occurrence. By "salvation-occurrence", Bultmann does not mean something accomplished by Jesus in history but rather something which happens in human experience when one responds to the demand of God in the

* [Now on-line at http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/apocalyptic_ladd.pdf]

^o [Now on-line at http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/origin_ladd.pdf]

¹ In this day of refined definitions, the present writer suggests this term to designate a dramatic, futuristic eschatology in contrast with "realized eschatology", "existential eschatology", "prophetic eschatology" and the like which translate futuristic eschatology into some contemporary equivalent. Furthermore, eschatology in its broadest definition includes such questions as the intermediate state and the immortality of the soul. The term "realistic eschatology" can apply only to eschatology moving in the Hebrew-Jewish tradition.

² *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (London, 1936), pp. 145. 174.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

preaching of the Gospel. This occurrence is "eschatological" because "it does not become a fact of the past but constantly takes place only in the present... lifted out of all temporal limitation, it continues to take place in any present moment, both in the proclaiming word and in the sacraments".⁴ Eschatology is not a future event: it belongs to present human existence.

In America, John Wick Bowman has given us prophetic eschatology in contrast to apocalyptic eschatology. He insists that apocalyptic religion can know nothing of a present spiritual kingdom within history but thrusts the kingdom into a future non-historical realm. New Testament religion conceives of the kingdom of God as active here and now within history.⁵ In an earlier book Bowman says, "The Church needs no more of the religion of the throne [i.e., of apocalyptic religion]. Her function is, not to judge the world, but with her Lord and under his leadership to effect its salvation".⁶

All three of these representative interpretations eliminate the apocalyptic element together with any "realistic eschatology" from New Testament religion. In other words, a visible second coming

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of Christ is unnecessary for a New Testament eschatology. All that apocalyptic eschatology expected in a visible Parousia of Christ has been given in present spiritual experience or in the activity of God's kingdom in present historical existence.

Does the New Testament lend itself to such reinterpretations? Is the apocalyptic element of such a character that it can be translated into realized or existential or prophetic eschatology without the loss of real theological and religious values and without mutilating the true character of biblical religion?

We may use as a test case Paul's second letter to the Corinthians⁷ and examine Professor Dodd's treatment of the apocalyptic element in this letter.

Dodd believes that 2 Corinthians marks an important turning point in Paul's attitude toward apocalyptic. At his conversion, Paul came into Christian faith with the outlook and structure of Jewish apocalyptic. He retained it until a profound religious experience loosed him from a *Weltanschauung* which was really alien to the Gospel. Dodd suggests that apocalyptic involved for Paul both an eschatological dualism and an outlook on life which coloured the very springs of his religious experience. Both the apocalyptic dualism and the apocalyptic temperament are sub-Christian, and Paul had to be converted away from both before he achieved a really mature Christian experience. In tracing the steps of Paul's second conversion from Jewish apocalyptic to Christian maturity Dodd finds the turning point in 2 Corinthians 1-9, which he thinks was written after 2 Corinthians 10-13. The apocalyptic *Weltanschauung*, which is found in the Thessalonian letters, in 1 Corinthians, and in 2 Cor. 10-13, embodies an "absolute dualism which relegated the whole natural order to the realm of

⁴ *Theology of the New Testament* (Eng. tr; New York, 1951), vol. I, pp. 302, 303.

⁵ *Prophetic Realism and the Gospel* (Philadelphia, 1955).

⁶ *The Religion of Maturity* (Nashville, 1948), p. 310.

⁷ The subject of the Study Group at Tyndale House where this paper was read was the Corinthian Correspondence.

evil".⁸ This "harsh dualism" is expressed in the antitheses of the " 'things of the Lord' and 'things of the world', of 'this age' and the 'age to come', of 'the elect' and the rest of humanity, of redeemed humanity and the whole living universe" (126). In Dodd's view 1 Cor. 7 represents a more or less typical apocalyptic depreciation of the present order. The key verse is, "The time is short... the fashion of this world is passing away" (vv. 29-31). Dodd finds this same stern dualism in 2 Cor. 6: 14-7: 1, which he thinks is

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out of place and is an "erratic block" preserved from an earlier letter, now lost.

Paul's apocalyptic outlook, according to Dodd, was psychologically grounded. "This dualism is very deeply rooted in the apocalyptic eschatology, which moulded the *Weltanschauung* with which Paul began" (126). The apocalyptic outlook has no patience with evil. It is unable to accept reality, because the world belongs to the powers of evil, and the man who knows the promise of God's redemption in his coming Kingdom at the Day of the Lord can make no peace with the present state of things. This apocalyptic impatience, Dodd finds expressed in 2 Cor. 10-13. Paul had visited Corinth but had been humiliated and frustrated, and he had written in anger because of his lost prestige and wounded pride. The apocalyptic outlook is unable to abandon its claim to personal vindication. It is "*the apotheosis of a personal claim upon reality for satisfaction, power, and vindication*" (127).

Between the writing of 2 Cor. 10-13 and 2 Cor. 1-9, Paul experienced a new religious crisis which amounted to a second conversion. 2 Cor. 1-9 breathes an entirely new atmosphere. Paul is now chastened. He has made peace with the will of God. He has surrendered his apocalyptic outlook with its demand for personal vindication. He has gone to the depths and has made terms with reality (81). He apologizes for his earlier letter and abandons his intolerance along with the anxious insistence upon his own dignity.

This second religious crisis, with its abandonment of the apocalyptic outlook, carried with it very important consequences. "Paul's revision of eschatology involved a transcending of the absolute dualism which relegated the whole natural order to the realm of evil" (122). We may find in Paul's later letters a revaluation of the natural order and a concomitant growth of universalism, which stem from the spiritual change to which 2 Corinthians bears witness.

We would not minimize the importance of the contribution Professor Dodd has made to biblical theology by his emphasis upon the element of realized eschatology in the New Testament. However, his reconstruction of Paul's experience and thought confronts us with several critical questions concerning the significance of apocalyptic. Does 2 Corinthians reflect a movement away from apocalyptic eschatology, as Dodd suggests? Does apocalyptic thought represent an immature and transient element which Paul

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in his spiritual maturity outgrew? Are we therefore to conclude that apocalyptic is an extraneous element in early Christianity which was borrowed from its Jewish milieu but which does not properly belong to pure Christian thought? These are questions of fundamental importance in our interpretation of biblical religion as a whole; and since 2

⁸ *New Testament Studies* (Manchester, 1954), p. 122.

Corinthians allegedly reveals a change in Paul's thought away from apocalyptic, it provides a field of fruitful investigation for these problems.

To place this study in proper perspective, we must be reminded that the term "apocalyptic" has two different meanings—a fact which, unfortunately, most of the discussions of the term do not make clear. However, Ernst Lohmeyer correctly points out in his article in *Die Religion in Geschichte and Gegenwart* (1 Aufl.; I, 402-404) that apocalyptic designates first a type of literature and secondly the kind of religion found in these books. As a type of literature, apocalyptic writings contain allegedly supernatural disclosures of the secrets of the universe and the mysteries of the future and the end of the world. These revelations were given through visions, dreams, or journeys through the heavenly or lower realms. The authorship of the apocalypses is usually pseudonymous, the true author attributing the content of his apocalypse to some ancient worthy—a Moses or Ezra or Enoch or Baruch. Apocalypses often contain prewritten history giving a sketch of the course of Israel's experience and her relations with the great nations of the earth from the time of the pseudonymous author to the day of the actual author, at which time the end of the world is shortly expected. Finally, the apocalypses usually employ a radical form of symbolism and picturesque imagery in relating the course of history and the fate of Israel. For instance, the menagerie appearing in the Dream Visions of Enoch represents a thinly veiled outline of historical events.

The word apocalyptic is used also to designate the kind of religion which is embodied in the apocalyptic writings. Apocalyptic religion has been frequently contrasted with prophetic religion. This distinction was made by Wilhelm Bousset in *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (3 Aufl.; Tübingen, 1926), and has been followed by Paul Volz in his detailed study *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (Tübingen, 1934). The same distinction appears in Rudolf Bultmann's *Das Urchristentum im Rahmen der antiken Religionen* (Zürich, 1949), which is now fortunately translated into

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English under the title *Primitive Christianity in the Setting of Ancient Religions* (London, 1956); and it has received classic treatment for English readers in the recent translation of Sigmund Mowinckel's *He That Cometh* (Oxford, 1956). According to this group of scholars, the prophetic religion of the Old Testament and the apocalyptic religion of the later Jewish writings are two different kinds of religions. The prophetic expectation is that of an earthly, this—worldly, historical, nationalistic kingdom of God. God is represented as working through ordinary historical events, persons, and nations by ordinary historical means to bring about a Golden Age for His people, Israel, in terms of known historical experience. God is the Lord of history and manifests His lordship in and through historical events to bring to pass His purposes within history. When a Messiah appears, he is thought to be an historical personage, rising out of Israel as a Davidic king to reign in an historical kingdom.

Later Judaism came to despair of a kingdom in history. The prophets had interpreted historical reverses and evils as the hand of God in judgment upon Israel because of her sins in forsaking God. They promised deliverance and restoration if Israel would return in repentance and obedience to God. In the mind of later Judaism this prophetic interpretation of history had broken down. Israel was no longer disobedient and apostate, meriting the judgment of God. On the contrary, Israel was righteous. God's people were faithful to the Law. In the time of

Antiochus Epiphanes, the righteous remnant proved their loyalty to God by suffering tortures and martyrdom rather than violate the Law. Yet in spite of the righteousness of this true remnant, deliverance did not come. The kingdom did not appear. God did not intervene. This enigma of the suffering of God's righteous people was so profound that the only adequate solution was a dualistic interpretation of history. Thus there arose the antithetical structure of This Age and the Age to Come. This Age was seen as evil, abandoned by God to the powers of Satan and evil demons. Israel was suffering not because, as the prophets had said, God was acting in historical judgments to correct her for her backsliding and her sins; Israel no longer merited such judgments. Evil could no longer be explained as the merited chastisement of an offended Deity. Evil prevailed because God had handed over this age to evil spirits. Thus there arose a despair of history. God's kingdom could come neither in this age nor on this earth. Both were ruled by evil. Only in the age to come, in a different, transcendental order, would

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God bring to Israel the promised salvation. The kingdom would come beyond history. This new eschatology was dualistic, cosmic, universalistic, transcendental, and individualistic (Mowinckel, p. 271). Thus we have, in the words of Mowinckel, "two profoundly different concepts of the future, one of which is older and more truly Jewish than the other" (267). Mowinckel furthermore insists that these two types of eschatology must be described separately and labels the effort to make a unified presentation of these two tendencies as a retrograde step in historical scholarship (p. 267, n. 2). The dualistic development was brought about by the influence of Persian eschatology during and after the captivity.

This distinction between prophetic and apocalyptic religion in its historical development appears to underlie much of the contemporary discussion of apocalyptic in the New Testament. If it is a sound analysis, we must conclude that apocalyptic is not intrinsic to Old Testament prophetic religion but is a later accretion due to foreign religious influences. When New Testament religion is freed from the apocalyptic element and is interpreted "prophetically" or in some equivalent terms, we only revert to the authentic message of the Old Testament prophets. In other words, apocalyptic is an overlay and not an essential element in prophetic religion.

With this point of view we find it difficult to agree. On the contrary, it is our thesis that the basic apocalyptic structure is fundamental to New Testament religion, and that this structure is derived ultimately from the world view implicit in the Old Testament prophetic writings. Apocalyptic therefore is intrinsic to biblical religion.

We may test our thesis by an examination of 2 Corinthians, the first nine chapters of which, according to Professor Dodd, were written after Paul's conversion away from the apocalyptic outlook.

The basic apocalyptic structure of 2 Corinthians is found in 4: 3-4. "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only in those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." Here is the most unqualified expression of temporal dualism to be found in the New Testament. In fact, some scholars have maintained that this dualistic formulation is

sharper than anything to be found in Judaism; and Robinson and Plummer in the I.C.C. admit that it may be so.

The very phrase, "the god of this age", carries with it a complex

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association of ideas. The first is that redemptive history is to be unfolded in the antithetical structure of this age versus the age to come; and this demands the conclusion that the age to come and the fulness of the kingdom of God will be realized only by an apocalyptic act of God at the end of this age. The kingdom of God and the blessings of redemption can never be experienced in their fulness until evil and Satan are destroyed. This phrase alone would appear to eliminate the possibility of a completely realized eschatology, unless it represents merely a formal verbal remnant of a discarded thought-structure—a problem which we shall shortly discuss.

Furthermore, the two-age structure is associated with darkness and light, which in this context are eschatological concepts belonging to apocalyptic religion. Those who disbelieve are in darkness: their minds have been blinded. There is a light belonging to the glory of Christ which is proclaimed in the gospel, but it has no effect on those who are in darkness.

It is of course true that light and darkness can be used in a gnostic type of dualism, as in the Hermetic writings. This, however, is not the Pauline usage. Darkness belongs to this age, light to the age to come. This is apparent when Paul says, "The night is far gone, the day is at hand" (Rom. 13: 12). This age is in its closing days, the age to come is at hand. Yet the life of the age to come can be experienced in this dark age. God has already "delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1: 13). Here again is apocalyptic thinking belonging to the two-age structure. The light which belongs to the age to come is elsewhere described by the word "glory" (see 1 Thess. 2: 12; Rom. 8: 18, 21; 1 Cor. 2: 7; 2 Cor. 4: 17). So when Paul says that God "has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4: 6), he is not using verbal remnants of a discarded thought-form but is expressing something fundamental to this thinking. The light which belongs to the age to come has pierced the darkness of the present evil age—in Christ. The light is shining; but the darkness remains and will remain until the fulness of the age to come.

Thus when Paul in 2 Cor. 6: 14 asks whether fellowship can exist between light and darkness, we cannot agree with Professor Dodd that he is giving expression to an erratic idea which does not belong to 2 Cor. 1-9. Rather, he appears to be expressing a prin-

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ciple which is fundamental to his thought. This age is characterized by darkness; the believer belongs to the age to come, i.e., to the realm of light. There is therefore a fundamental difference between the believer and the unbeliever so far as his loyalties are concerned, and this difference must express itself in terms of outward relationships.

Therefore, we must admit that Paul's thought in 2 Corinthians shares the basic structure of Jewish apocalyptic. However, there are characteristics of biblical and Pauline apocalyptic

which set it apart from its Jewish counterpart. The theology of Jewish dualism and the theology of Christian dualism are not the same. Jewish dualism is premised on the conclusion that evil spirits dominate this age and inflict evil upon God's people because God has withdrawn his aid and has become aloof and remote. In a real sense, while God is the King of the future age, he is not the King of all the ages, for He has surrendered His rule over this age. Evil is inflicted by Satan: and God's people, Israel, are helpless before him and can only await the coming salvation at the end of the age, for God has no work of salvation for this age.

On the contrary, Paul sees the evil, which does indeed come from Satan, as the judicial and corrective activity of God Himself. Satan is called the god of this age, but he is being used unwittingly to serve the divine purpose. This fact may be illustrated at two points. The blindness of unbelievers is caused by Satan; but it is also the judicial act of an omnipotent and just God. Speaking of the problem of the unbelief of the majority of Israel, Paul says that they were hardened because God gave them a spirit of stupor. Their blindness, their unseeing eyes, is a divine judgment upon them (Rom. 11: 8).

Furthermore, the evils of this age, the physical afflictions and sufferings are indeed "messengers of Satan" (2 Cor. 12: 7). It is consistent with the character of this age that we groan from the burden of frailty, weakness and death in general, as well as from those evils which are endured in the course of preaching the Gospel described in 2 Cor. 12. Paul does contrast the evils and sufferings of the present with the glories which are to be disclosed in the future age in typical apocalyptic fashion. The thought of 2 Cor. 4: 17 is quite similar to that of Rom. 8: 18: "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory"; "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us".

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Yet while this hostility of the evil age and of Satan to God's people is their inevitable lot because of the structure of things, there is no thought, as in Jewish apocalyptic, that these sufferings result because they have been given over into the hands of Satan and his hosts. On the contrary, the evils of this age, while messengers of Satan, are also instruments of God's grace for Christian growth and for a richer experience of divine blessing. Paul's thorn in the flesh was not removed but was given to him, probably by God (ἐδόθη), to be a means by which he might better learn the sufficiency of God's grace in weakness. Evils, then, for the Christian do not point to the aloofness and the unconcern of God; rather they are the very experiences by which he learns most intimately the deeper meaning of fellowship with God. In fact, to such an extent does God overrule the role of evil in the life of His people, even in this present evil age, that Paul can say in Rom. 8: 28, with the problem of evil in mind, that God causes all things to turn out for good to those who love Him.

We must conclude that while the underlying structure of the thought of 2 Corinthians is basically apocalyptic, it is a modified apocalypticism. The basic structure is that of the two ages; Satan remains the god of this age. The kingdom of God can therefore be fully realized only in the age to come when the redeemed will experience the glory of God. But God has not abandoned this age to evil or to Satan. We cannot find what Professor Dodd calls an "absolute dualism" in any of Paul's letters. We must confess difficulty in accounting for such extreme statements as that of Pringle-Pattison in his *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford, 1930), when he tells us that "the New Testament writers go even further than the Jewish

apocalypses in the ascendancy which they ascribe to Satan in the present world" (158). Such a statement does not appear to us to square with the data. The dualism of Jewish apocalyptic has been modified because "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5: 19). When Paul says that, for the man who is in Christ, the old things have passed away, and new things have come (2 Cor. 5: 17), he is referring to the fact that the life of the future age has come to us who live in the present age. While the old age continues for the world, there is a sense in which it has passed away for the man in Christ. He is no longer subject to evil and sin and Satan as is the world; for him the new things of the age to come have begun. Yet he still awaits their fulness and the consummation of salvation. What he has received—the deliverance from darkness,

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the gift of the Spirit, the glory of God—are only an earnest of the coming glory. The night continues; we wait for the day; but we do not sit in darkness. Rays of light have pierced the night so that men of faith can walk in the light while they await the dawning of the day. In other words, Realized Eschatology and Realistic Eschatology stand side by side in 2 Corinthians. Both are essential to Paul's thought. The apocalyptic antithesis provides the basic structure for Paul's thought; but it is a modified dualism. In Christ, God has entered into this age for man's salvation.

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