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## Biblical Apocalyptic and Prophecy

There are relatively few serious readers of the Bible today who do not become aware, at some point, of an unsatisfactory alternative with which they are confronted by the apparent results of literary criticism on one hand, and a subjective exposition of the Scriptures on the other. It has, however, been laid down by a number of scholars that type-analysis, especially in Old Testament study,<sup>1</sup> has checked both extremes to some extent. For the clearer understanding of the message of the Bible it is evidently necessary to identify the various forms of literature which it contains, and to come to some conclusions regarding the situations in which they were originally written.

But caution, however, must be exercised with type-analysis or *Gattungsforschung*. We need to be reminded that our classification of the various types of biblical literature remain *ours*, and do not generally reflect any forms of which the original writers were necessarily conscious. The writers of the Bible did, of course, understand the main literary divisions of which we are accustomed to speak today, such as prose and poetry. It may be said, moreover, that biblical authors were more aware of contributing to particular traditions, against which technical names, that are often disputed in modern times, have been given.

Two literary categories that have intrigued students of the Bible are prophecy and apocalyptic. Specific mention of such a category is made within the Bible in Rev. i. 1, where the writer calls his work an apocalypsis. It would seem that the term is used by him in no technical way, though it does, in fact, describe the literary genre of the book in common with a greater body of mainly Jewish literature. This word has become the title of the book, and has been extended to a broad body of

<sup>1</sup> E.g., H. L. Ellison, 'Some Major Trends in Old Testament Study', *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute*. 88 (1956), pp. 32-36.

literature, some of which lies within the canon of the Old Testament, but most of which is extra-biblical and pseudonymous, belonging to the first century A.D. and the last two centuries B.C. Moreover, the author of *The Revelation* expressly calls his work 'a prophecy' (i. 3; xxii. 7, 10, 18, 19), and maintains that his visions recorded in it were the substance of prophetic ecstasy, (i. 10). He himself is called a prophet, (xxii. 9), so that there can be no doubt that in his mind *The Revelation* belongs to the prophetic tradition.

From our point of view, however, this is not a classification that is clear enough. Within the general classification of prophetic literature its authors have given us a great deal of different materials, prophetic oracles, summaries of teaching, often collected by the prophet's disciples, the life-story of the prophet or some other figure, and a number of others including what we have come to term apocalyptic. It is therefore this very association of apocalyptic with prophecy in the ancient mind which should impose on us the necessity to be clear with regard to the basis upon which we would distinguish the two.

Over seventy years ago, Herrmann Gunkel, with whom the Form Criticism of the Old Testament is first of all connected, argued that 'apocalyptic' was a word used all too freely by writers who did not have an agreed definition as to its precise meaning.<sup>2</sup> And the situation does not seem to have changed much since then. H. H. Rowley has consistently argued that apocalyptic literature is to be generally characterized by an occupation with the approaching consummation of history.<sup>3</sup> It does not, like prophecy, indicate how the future would arise from the present, but rather how the future should break into the present. 'No longer' he writes, 'is the Golden Age on the far horizon, or even merely near, illuminating the present with its brightness, through lying beyond the present in an undefined and unrelated way. It is related to human history in the precise sequence of events that are to lead to its establishment.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*. p. 290.

<sup>3</sup> *The Relevance of the Apocalyptic*.

<sup>4</sup> H. H. Rowley, *The Re-discovery of the Old Testament*, p. 186. Rowley has also given a valuable synthesis in 'The Literature of the Old Testament' in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, Ed. Black and Rowley, 1962.

Russell has drawn out a list of the more precise characteristics which may be observed. Though following Lindblom<sup>5</sup> in seeing an emphasis on transcendentalism, mythology, a generally pessimistic view of history with its issue in the periodic division of time, and the doctrine of the Two Ages, Russell adds that apocalyptic, nevertheless, shows an insistence on the unity of history under God, a note of primordially in which the issues of creation and fall are extrapolated; there is, he says, a greater emphasis on the role of angels, a marked tension between light and darkness, and a developed interest in life after death. Not all these are of the unique essence of apocalyptic, but 'they build up an *impression* of a distinct kind which conveys a particular *mood* of thought and belief.'<sup>6</sup> For this reason, argues Russell, apocalyptic literature displays a homogeneity which justifies its classification as a distinct *corpus* of literature.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that there should be some difference of opinion with regard to the period of emergence of apocalyptic writing in the Old Testament. S. B. Frost,<sup>7</sup> for example, maintains that Ezekiel was the first to write distinct apocalyptic, while for most others, (e.g. Rowley) it appears for the first time in Daniel. One of the more recent additions to the Isaianic collection, commonly called 'The Isaiah Apocalypse' (Isa. xxiv-xxvii) has also evoked strong criticism by a number of distinguished authorities.<sup>8</sup> There is also general disagreement over the question of apocalyptic sections in Joel and Zechariah. Even *The Revelation*, which has largely given its name to this literary genre is either regarded as out-and-out apocalyptic,<sup>9</sup> or as having little or nothing to do with Jewish apocalyptic tradition.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*. Cf. J. Lindblom, *Die Jesaja-Apokalypse*. *Jes.* 24-27 where he actually refuses the term 'apocalypse' to Isa. xxiv-xxvii, but which he prefers to name 'the Isaiah Cantata.'

<sup>6</sup> *op. cit.* p. 105.

<sup>7</sup> *Old Testament Apocalyptic. Its Origins and Growth*.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., J. Lindblom, H. H. Rowley, J. Skinner.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., R. H. Charles, *Revelation*, ICC (1920), F. C. Burkitt, *Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, (1914).

<sup>10</sup> Albrecht Oepke is cautious in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. III, Ed. G. Kittel, p. 578f. (Eng. trans by G. W. Bromiley) Cf. also G. Eldon Ladd, 'Apocalyptic' in *The New Bible Dictionary*, Ed. J. D. Douglas and others.

The relation of later Jewish apocalyptic literature to prophecy does not need to entertain us here. Much of it may be regarded as a pseudonymous imitation of canonical prophecy. By its time there was no longer any prophet in Israel, (I Macc. iv. 46; ix. 27; xiv. 41) and apocalyptic became the substitute for prophecy. The later part of the Old Testament had, in fact, provided a preparation for this to take place. All the characteristics of later developed apocalyptic are to be found in Daniel, and it is not surprising that the books which followed should have taken up the style of the last of the canonical books. This problem appears most sharply in connection with *The Revelation*. It is difficult to understand this book except as a christian presentation of an essentially Jewish apocalyptic model. Yet it is difficult to trace any marked dependence of *The Revelation* on the pseudonymous apocalypses. By far the major dependence of the last book of the Bible is on the prophetic literature of the Old Testament.

How, then, may we distinguish apocalyptic from prophecy? The difficulty of making a distinction has become increasingly apparent as the older view of the prophets simply as moralists with exceptional talents has faded more and more from the picture. As H. H. Rowley has put it: 'That apocalyptic is the child of prophecy, yet diverse from prophecy, can hardly be disputed. An earlier generation emphasized the predicative element in prophecy, and the relation between prophecy and apocalyptic, in which the predicative element is particularly prominent, appeared beyond question. . . . Both the predictive element in prophecy and the moral and spiritual element in apocalyptic need to be emphasized.'<sup>11</sup> As to Lindblom's marks of apocalyptic, Rowley claims that 'some of these are rather the accidents than the essence of apocalyptic.'<sup>12</sup> Lindblom's list is in fact neither inclusive nor exclusive. Not everything in it, as Russell agrees,<sup>13</sup> applies to all apocalyptic, and some of the characteristics mentioned can be noted in other literary forms of the Old Testament and Judaism, and some of them may not

<sup>11</sup> *op. cit.* p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23, n. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *op. cit.* p. 104.

necessarily apply to apocalyptic at all. To the extent that the list does characterize apocalyptic it includes mainly those qualities which apocalyptic shares with all the later Jewish literature, or which it acquired in a way which is strictly incidental, such as pseudonymity. So these properties, we may say, do not together form any adequate definition of apocalyptic. Much the same may be said about other characteristics which have been mentioned by other writers: fantastic symbols, doctrinal thought in symbolic guise, numerology, and the apparent predetermination of events on earth. Attention has been drawn by some to the editorial interest in numbers to be detected in the Pentateuch, not to mention Chronicles. The Book of Tobit can hardly be termed apocalyptic, yet it has a concern with the activity of angels, as does the New Testament in general. The coming of dualism into Israelite writing can be seen, possibly, in a comparison of II Sam. xxiv. 1 with I Chron. xxi. 1. Symbolism in apocalyptic may be excessive by comparison, but it is not by symbolism that apocalyptic is to be distinguished from prophecy.

In a fine study of apocalyptic, S. B. Frost<sup>14</sup> has summed up, largely following Mowinckel, what appears to be a prevailing idea about apocalyptic. According to this idea the Exile, broadly speaking, marked the dividing line between the historical and the eschatological in Jewish thinking about the future. Prophecy belonged to the former sphere and apocalyptic to the latter. The last of the prophets therefore became, almost imperceptibly the first of the apocalyptists as the eschatological perspective replaced the historical. This meant that with the passing away of prophecy *simpliciter*, apocalyptic assumed the character and authority of prophecy, through pseudonymity, as an act of trust in the divine promises: the unrivalled prophetic oracles were now to be fulfilled in the *eschaton*. The development of eschatology, indeed, is the corollary of the total despair of history, which, as we have noted, was one of the marks assigned to apocalyptic literature by many scholars. Some would add to this that it was partly under Iranian influence that the apocalyptic writers accepted a deterministic outlook to explain to

<sup>14</sup> *op. cit.* p. 56f.

themselves and their first readers the utter and irremediable evil into which the world had sunk, and which would otherwise have been irreconcilable with their conviction about a just and provident God. History, which had all but run its course, must, however *run* its course, no matter how bad things may become, since all would be set right in the Golden Age coming soon.

Besides laying emphasis on the eschatological character of apocalyptic, Frost considerably underlines the mythical element, which he likewise ascribes to foreign influence. Myth there was already in ancient Israel, properly the possession of the cultus, which remained lively so long as there was an optimistic view possible regarding the present and the future. But with the decline of the cultus, myth was appropriated by eschatology, and the result was the emergence of apocalyptic. Frost writes: '... we may define *apocalyptic* as the mythologizing of eschatology.'<sup>15</sup>

Frost's view that the last of the prophets were the first of the apocalyptists is hardly other than acceptable. But we may ask if the distinction which he makes between history and eschatology was quite as real to the Old Testament writers as it has come to be to some of their modern exponents. Even if this be generally admitted, we may also wonder if the point when Old Testament thinking ceased to be distinctively historical and turned to explicit eschatology can be located, even approximately, with such an event as the Exile. In other words, does apocalyptic begin as a perfectly logical outgrowth, not to say aspect, of prophecy, discernable within the age of classical prophecy; or was there a change necessary through which the thinking, that Frost refers to, could emerge as apocalyptic?

As in 'apocalyptic', so in 'eschatology' there is a confusion of opinions. If we take eschatology to mean that expectation of an end of this earthly order, an end that will be an accomplishment of God's purpose, and that a new order must inevitably result, it would seem impossible to deny that such eschatology appears in the earliest prophets. Even though in Amos, for

<sup>15</sup> *op. cit.* p.33. For a critical appraisal of Frost's view, cf. G. Eldon Ladd, 'Why Not Prophetic-Apocalyptic?' in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 76 (1957) pp. 192-200.

example, we do not find all this explicitly spelled out, it must nevertheless be presupposed in order to make sense of the prophet's mind. What Amos condemns is not condemned in the name of some abstract moral principle, but as a rebellion against a divinely constituted world-order, (cf. vi. 12) and revealed to Israel through its election, (cf. iii. 1f.).<sup>16</sup> The prophets were not philosophers of history; they clearly do not inculcate the idea that men, by taking thought and by aiming at some high ethical ideal alone that any earthly paradise can be attained. Sin is a transgression, (*pes'a'*) against the plan of God, which is a world-plan, (cf. ix. 7). But there is no doubt in the prophets' mind that God can and will bring that plan to its successful conclusion, with or without Israel. Yahweh's rule over Israel must be fulfilled in his rule over all.<sup>17</sup>

The idea of the 'Day of the Lord' can be found in the earliest of the prophetic writings. Amos, (viii. 9) speaks of it in apocalyptic language. What perhaps saves the utterance from being wholly apocalyptic is that the prophet refers here to a coming historical event, to be specific, to the total eclipse of the sun which was visible in Palestine on 15 June 763 B.C.<sup>18</sup> This is doubtless the case, just as the description in viii. 8 refers back to the earthquake mentioned by the Prologue, (cf. i. 1). But the prophet's later utterances indicate, (cf. ix. 5f.) his use of the motif of cosmic disturbances is to signify divine visitation in Judgement. To us, that judgement is historical; it is an event that occurred, and after it the world went on. But how did it appear to the prophet? Granted that Amos' perspective was of judgement coming soon, he surely was not looking for another to follow after, for a whole series of judgements, but for Yahweh's definitive intervention. Is this not eschatology? In much the same way it might be hard to justify the view, taken by some, that there is an essential difference between the Day of

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, pp. 61-65.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Eng. trans J. A. Baker, Vol. I, pp. 384ff.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. W. R. Harper, *Amos and Hosea* (ICC).



the Lord of the opening chapters of Joel and that of the so-called 'apocalyptic supplement'.<sup>19</sup>

It is obvious that Amos, when he refers to the Day of the Lord in the first instance, (v. 18) is not coining a new expression, but invoking an ancient one. It appears here for the first time in the Old Testament, but it is not new in Israel. J. K. Howard has put the matter succinctly: 'The events of the Exodus and the establishment of the Davidic kingdom held hopes which thus far were unrealized in Israel's experience. That these promises would be fulfilled was essential to Israel's philosophy of history.'<sup>20</sup> The expression is the 'that day' of viii. 9, 13, quite as the apocalyptists mean it, the Day of Yahweh's vindication, of his settling accounts. It is true, nevertheless, that Amos is correcting an over-optimistic view of the consequences of this Day entertained by his contemporaries, and it is to this view that the apocalyptists in fact return, but it would appear from this that the difference between the apocalyptists and prophets, (e.g. Amos) on the matter lies not so much in eschatology as in the interpretation of eschatology.

It is questionable whether we should make any difference between the Golden Age of the apocalyptists and what Frost calls 'the Better Age' of pre-exilic eschatology, solely on the grounds of the extravagant imagery which we find in apocalyptic literature. The Royal Psalms show us that the use of mythical descriptive language does not of itself constitute an 'eschatological' as distinct from an 'historical' perspective. The messianic oracles of the prophets may suggest the same conclusion. It is difficult to understand what precisely consists the 'absolute' difference in the world of the apocalyptic *eschaton* which some find to distinguish it from the world of history. To speak, as some do, of a 'qualitative' difference is largely meaningless: 'qualitative' is not an Old Testament category. Time and time again the picture of the *eschaton* is that of a *restored* world, whatever changes we may find in the New Testament teaching. This belief in restoration is as old as the prophets and older than

<sup>19</sup> Cf. A. S. Kapelrud, *Joel Studies*, but cf. also L. H. Brockington, 'Joel' in *The New Peake*, p. 614f.

<sup>20</sup> *Among the Prophets*, p. 85.

the prophets. It does not appear so clearly in Amos, because he is almost exclusively concerned with the Day of the Lord as a day of wrath for Israel, but it is clear enough in his contemporary, Hosea, who describes it not only in terms of Israel's great past, (ii. 16-18), but also in terms of a universal paradise of peace, (ii. 20). This last reference is to be connected with others as Isaiah ii. 4, xi. 6-8; Micah iv. 3; Ezekiel xxxiv. 25; all these presuppose the restoration of a once ideal world. The language is mythological, (to coin an explosive term!) like the language of Genesis ii. 4b-25. What other language could be used?

The difference in the apocalyptic *eschaton*, it is sometimes suggested, lies in its inauguration. Prophecy sees a fulfilment that comes about through the accepted pattern of divine activity—through cause and effect. Punishment or salvation is administered through natural phenomena, plagues, drought, locusts and the like, or through the instrumentality of other nations, even persons. But apocalyptic fulfilment comes through Yahweh's direct and extraordinary intervention, to be a definitive end in which he takes a personal hand. It is to be questioned, however, if such a careful distinction existed in the Old Testament mind. The Biblical view seems to be that the intervention of God, in judgement, or in mercy, is always unique. The Exodus, the passing of the Red Sea, the Conquest, are not any of them the outcome of any 'normal' divine action; they are all miracles. All of Yahweh's deeds of kindness to his people are his wonders.<sup>21</sup> And the oracles against the nations which we find in the prophets from the very beginning, more often than not speak in terms of Yahweh's direct intervention. More often than not, also, the destruction of the nations is at the most only motivated in conventional terms. From this it would appear that the avowedly miraculous and general character of apocalyptic eschatology forms no radical change from traditional salvation-history, or *Heilsgeschichte*.

It is obvious that the Day of the Lord for the apocalyptists should be one of woe for the enemies of Israel and of salvation for the people of God, whereas among the pre-exilic prophets it is often enough a day of woe for Israel herself. Nowadays,

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Psa. cv: 5.

however, it is generally recognized that to excise all the doom oracles from the pre-exilic prophets is a misguided exercise in hyper-criticism. Salvation was part of the message of these prophets from the beginning. Even Amos, who may be regarded among the gloomiest of the prophets, is willing to consider salvation as a possibility, (cf. v. 15). He did reject the popular notion of the Day of the Lord as one of certain bliss for Israel, to be sure, but he acknowledged the validity of the ancient promises of salvation, seeing in them the light of another ancient idea, that of the remnant.<sup>22</sup> Salvation oracles are, of course, found more easily in the other prophets. Isaiah joins Hosea in describing the messianic age in terms of a universal peace restored to the whole of the animal kingdom as well as to the world of men, (cf. xi. 6-9, etc.). In Zephaniah we find it explicitly stated that the remnant of Israel will receive salvation after a universal catastrophe.<sup>23</sup> The idea is surely not new to Zephaniah, but he has drawn on a tradition shared by the prophets who preceded him. In referring to this Amos N. Wilder has stated<sup>24</sup> that it is necessary to see that eschatology is in the line of prophecy. 'If we are to draw a contrast it will be rather between a superior and an inferior eschatology throughout the period.'

The transition from prophecy to apocalyptic was an effortless one, for the prophets shared the eschatological tradition of which apocalyptic came to be the elaboration. The circumstances of pre-exilic prophecy will have decreed that this tradition should be minimized, but in the changed conditions that followed the Exile it could once more be allowed full sway, and the prophets themselves became the first apocalyptists.

There seems to be no good reason why we should deny that much of Ezekiel is apocalyptic. Besides the vision of the final chapters, we can see most of the 'agreed' characteristics in the

<sup>22</sup> Though W. R. Harper, *op. cit.* p. 125f. suggests that Amos uses 'remnant' in a sense other than the technical one, of the nation as having barely survived the Aramean wars.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. A. Bentzen, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 154

<sup>24</sup> 'The Nature of Jewish Eschatology' in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 50, (1931), p. 205.

two chapters, xxxviii.<sup>25</sup> The coming of Gog is set in the eschatological future. Gog comes to fill out the unfulfilled predictions. "Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel . . . ?" (xxxviii. 17 RSV). He comes from the 'uttermost parts of the north'. Here, whoever may be the enemy from the north in earlier prophetic utterances, (cf. Joel), the expression is symbolical, the more so as Gog and the land of Magog have never been successfully identified, and Gog's full complement of nations includes those which no Israelite would have put in the north geographically. The invasion of Gog is the final one which the people of God must endure, after the restoration from exile, and then Gog and his hordes will be utterly destroyed by the power of Yahweh. It is interesting that the details within these chapters are much used by later apocalypticists, and especially by the author of *The Revelation*. Other commentators, if they will not concede that Ezekiel xxxviii. is apocalyptic, will at least concede that it is the prolegomenon of apocalyptic.

Another text which should be called in in this discussion is Isaiah ii. 2-4, paralleled by Micah iv. 1-5. Certainly one of the reasons that has persuaded many of the critics to assign a late date to this passage is its eschatological colouring and its apocalyptic tone. In a reign of universal peace the nations of the world assemble at Zion, now raised above the mountains of the earth, from whose temple comes forth the Law of the Lord. Those who defend the authenticity of the passage usually ascribe it to Micah rather than Isaiah, or think of a common source upon which both have drawn.<sup>26</sup> Without the necessity here of entering into the question of authorship, it is difficult to see why the passage should not be ascribed to an eighth-century writer; if we think of Isaiah in this connection it is probably only because we have more of his material to serve for comparative purposes. Isaiah knows otherwise of a coming reign of universal

<sup>25</sup> Cf. H. L. Ellison, *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message*, pp. 133ff. who links the forward-looking view of these chapters with Rev. xx.

<sup>26</sup> So J. Bright, 'Isaiah I' in *The New Peak*, p. 491, and D. Winton Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 632. Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, p. 386, n. 4 favours Isaianic authorship as the stronger possibility of the two.

peace, (cf. xi. 6-8), and if Yahweh in Isaiah fills all the earth with his glory, (vi. 3) his instruction can likewise go out from Jerusalem, from the temple of Isaiah's vision, even as it did in the mind of Amos, (cf. i. 2). The symbol of the mountain of the Lord, as the goal of all nations, a conception not so distant from Ezekiel's 'nether world', is ancient in Israel, possibly taken up from the Jebusite Jerusalem-cult. Only a determination to deny to a pre-exilic prophet any 'eschatological' would appear to stand in the way of acknowledging the authenticity of this passage.

We may now come to a tentative formulation of the distinctive character of apocalyptic, and to determining its relation to prophecy. First, it seems not improbable that the position adopted by the *religionsgeschichtliche* school, that eschatology in Israel is anterior to both prophecy and apocalyptic, has much to commend it. This eschatology knew both of salvation and judgement. Without wishing to over-simplify, we may add that prophecy moralized this eschatology, whilst apocalyptic did not noticeably do so. Pre-exilic prophecy was much concerned with mitigating popular salvation-eschatology, but it did not exclude eschatology altogether in the process.

But alongside this suggestion it may be added that apocalyptic commences as salvation-prophecy. It achieves its most noticeable characteristics more clearly as it dispenses with those qualifications which the pre-exilic prophets required of Israel. These would have, in fact, been dispensed with as a result of historical development, with the growing conviction that Israel had fulfilled the trials allotted to her and the remnant had emerged. Thus post-exilic prophecy would incline to apocalyptic in the nature of the case.

What may have been a weakness of the *religionsgeschichtliche* school, however, was not its insistence on the antiquity of the pervading quality of myth in Israelite cult and prophecy, but rather in the origins it ascribed to this influence. Comparative materials that have now come into our hands, especially the Ugaritic literature, have enabled us to make good our understanding of this influence in Israel.<sup>27</sup> The prevalence of myth

<sup>27</sup> Cf. W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (1953), ch. 2.

(or symbol) in apocalyptic literature is not due to a change of direction in Israelite religion, but to the nature of the form itself. As the prophetic vision lengthened, the portrayal of the future became more and more blurred.<sup>28</sup> But doubtless not all foreign influence is to be excluded. Though there is nothing comparable to apocalyptic outside Israel, and though all the characteristics of apocalyptic can be found, at least in germ, in prior Israelite writing, apocalyptic nevertheless came more into its own when Judaism came into contact with the Gentile world, which doubtless exercised its influence.<sup>29</sup> Foreign influence, however, should not be exaggerated. The apocalypticists did not write like the rabbis, but they wrote ideas which were altogether within the confines of Judaism. The unfolding of Israelite ideas, as for example the development of the doctrine of resurrection, was always the chief factor in the variations of apocalyptic.

Therefore apocalyptic was left the heir of prophecy when the latter had disappeared. Apocalyptic became a literary form in its own right. It may be said to have retained the prophetic message but without the orthodox prophetic vision. It is usually on this basis that the characteristic of pseudonymity is explained.<sup>30</sup> Other characteristics picked up by apocalyptic writers are similarly explained as more or less accidental, from the time of composition and other circumstances. The spiritual exclusivism of the Scribes certainly played some part in provoking as a reaction the exuberant and lavish display of imaginative writing in apocalyptic.<sup>31</sup> The esotericism which became one of the chief hallmarks in apocalyptic is probably to be explained

<sup>28</sup> This is the important point which is made by H. L. Ellison, *Men Spoke From God*, p. 115f. as distinct from others who are content to say that the vision of the future became increasingly mythical. This, I am convinced, is the wrong way of expressing it.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. D. S. Russell, *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Rowley, *op. cit.* pp. 37-40, thinks of apocalyptic pseudonymity as a slavish imitation of the second part of Daniel, which was made pseudonymous by its author in order to link it with the first (anonymous) half of the book.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. R. H. Charles, 'Apocalyptic Literature' in *Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible*, I, p. 109f. A. Oepke in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Eng. trans by G. W. Bromiley) Vol. III, p. 578ff.

by the fact that, for example, in the Book of Daniel, literature of its kind assumed the role of 'resistance literature' keeping up the nationalist spirit, while hiding its meaning and significance from the occupying authorities. Whether it is permissible, with Charles, to conclude from this that subsequent apocalyptic writers, (e.g. the author of *The Revelation*) imitated their predecessors so that certain conventions arose, is doubtful.

There is no reason to qualify John's claim to be a prophet at the same time as recognizing the literary form of *The Revelation* as apocalyptic. The circumstances under which this book was written were in almost every way comparable to those in which the Old Testament and Inter-testamental apocalyptic books came into existence. The New Testament offers more than ample evidence of the functions of the prophet in the charismatic direction of the primitive Church, (cf. I Cor. xii. 28; Eph. ii. 20; iv. 11) nor need there be much doubt that their function included prediction as it had been with the prophets of the Old Testament, (cf. Acts xx. 23; xxi. 10). As has often been remarked, the apocalyptic visions of *The Revelation* give every sign of real experiences, not merely of doctrinal conclusions dressed up in visionary form.<sup>32</sup> *The Revelation* marks a turn back of apocalyptic to its prophetic origins.<sup>33</sup> The author indicates this return by his clear dependence on Old Testament prophecy, almost to the complete exclusion of post-biblical apocalyptic. This was not done in order to minimize the spiritual value of the apocalyptic visions of the Old Testament. It means that the prophecy of the Old Testament had now been expressed in the opening up of an ultimate and more glorious vision of hope. We may not altogether concur with A.M. Farrer<sup>34</sup> that John's task was an 'artificial' one in the writing of *The Revelation*, but few will feel inclined to disagree with the sentiment that John's finished work had been 'to make a whole prophetic collection a dramatic masterpiece.'<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Cf. A. M. Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*;

<sup>33</sup> Cf. F. C. Burkitt, *Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Schweich Lectures, 1913), p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> *op. cit.* p. 29

<sup>35</sup> *op. cit.* p. 29f.