THE APOCALYPTIC HOPE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Most Jewish apocalyptic writings can be dated from the mid-second century B.C. to the second century A.D. Their popularity and general circulation, particularly in the dispersion, bear testimony to the widespread interest in apocalyptic ideas at the time. Jesus, the early Christians, and the New Testament writers stand in the middle of this period or are at least contemporary with it. It is not surprising therefore, to find certain apocalyptic concepts and apocalyptic passages in the New Testament. There has been lively discussion among recent scholars with regard to the influence of Jewish apocalyptic concepts on the earliest Christian writings. A number of questions has been raised. For example, are apocalyptic concepts important, even fundamental in the New Testament or in the teaching of Jesus? Again, was early Christianity characteristically apocalyptic or only incidentally so? Or is it legitimate to speak of early Christian apocalyptic as a separate phenomenon from Jewish apocalyptic and highlight its distinctive features? These are matters which must now be addressed.

Approaches to New Testament Apocalyptic (1900-1960) - A Brief Survey.

At the beginning of the century J. Weiss and A. Schweitzer affirmed that Jesus was deeply influenced by Jewish apocalyptic. His proclamation of the kingdom of God and understanding of his mission were said to be constitutively stamped with the characteristics of apocalyptic.[1] This view was in contrast with the prevailing non-eschatological and spiritual understanding of the kingdom among earlier nineteenth-century Protestant theologians.[2]

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1 J. Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*, (Göttingen,1892) [ET., R.H. Heirs and D.L. Holland, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom" of God*,(London,1971)]. A. Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Leben - Jesu Forschung*, (1906) [ET., *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, (3rd Ed. 1954)]. See the final chapter.

2 Two examples of the spiritual understanding are Schleiermacher, *Der Christliche Glaube* [ET., H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart,

Weiss criticized Ritschl's understanding of the kingdom, with its emphasis on the activity of men in building that kingdom, rather than on the activity of God. Instead of being advanced by the work of men, Weiss understood the kingdom as involving the intervention of God as King into history. Contrary to Ritschl he did not see Jesus as intending to make a beginning of something that would develop into a moral organization of humanity, for this suggests a continuity of history in which the coming of Jesus marks the beginning of a new epoch. Rather, for Weiss, Jesus was conscious that he stood at the end of the world and history. What lay ahead was the consummation of all things, when God would be all in all. The background to Jesus' understanding was to be found in the teaching of prophetic and apocalyptic Judaism.

Following Weiss's contribution, Schweitzer gave to Jesus even a greater apocalyptic stamp or interpretation. The kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus was an apocalyptic concept and its coming was expected in the immediate future.[3] The ethical teaching of Jesus was only an *Interimsethik*, giving evidence of what was involved in true repentance and applied only to the short time before the kingdom arrived.[4]4 According to Schweitzer, Jesus knew himself to be the designated Messiah, the one who would be revealed as the Son of Man when the kingdom came. When this failed to happen Jesus was determined to force its coming. Therefore he went to Jerusalem to his death, seeking to fulfil the messianic woes in his

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Christian Faith (1929)]. For Schleiermacher the kingdom of God is the "corporate human God-consciousness, which is the existence of God in human nature and which comes into being as a result of Christ's God-consciousness" (164.1). A.Ritschl, *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* (1888) [ET., H.R.Mackintosh and A.B.Macaulay, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, (1902)]. Ritschl criticized Schleiermacher for not having done justice to the "theological nature of the kingdom of God as the Divine end". Arising out of redemption (the other focal point of Christianity) the "kingdom is the moral organization of humanity, through actions inspired by love".

3 Op.cit., p.238

4 Ibid., p.352.

own person, thus bringing in the kingdom and with it his manifestation as Son of Man.[5]

In the opinion of many scholars, Schweitzer's work was inferior to that of Weiss, but, because it involved a subject of particular interest at that time, i.e., the life of Christ, interpreting it in apocalyptic terms, it had an impact greater than that of Weiss, who had focussed on the teaching of Jesus. Thus it could not fail to reach a wide public and create an interest to which New Testament scholars must respond. Much of that response was an attempt "to escape from or at least to soften"[6]. Weiss and Schweitzer's presentation of the apocalyptic Jesus.

Perrin outlines the response particularly in the English-speaking world.[7] While at first many scholars had to bow before the force of Schweitzer's theory, they eventually came to terms with it by affirming that although Jesus had taken over certain elements from contemporary Jewish apocalyptic, he profoundly changed them and gave them a new spiritual meaning.[8] Subsequently this "transformation of apocalyptic" gave way for a period to the "denial" of apocalyptic[9] and then the eventual "triumph" of apocalyptic in the 1930's, which involved the recognition of the kingdom of God as an apocalyptic concept in the teaching of Jesus

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5 Ibid., p.386.

6 J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, (London, 1977) p. 316.

7 N. Perrin.*The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*,(London,1963 pp.33ff.

8 Perrin cites as one example, W.Sanday, *The Life of Christ in Recent Research*(1907) and "The Apocalyptic Element in the Gospels", *Hibbert Journal* 10(1911) pp.83-109.

9 Perrin makes reference to the "Symposium of Eschatology", written by a representative group of scholars and published in *JBL* 41 (1922) pp 1-204. Contributors were K.Fullerton, N. Schmidt, L.Ginzberg, E.F.Scott and B.W.Bacon. Scott maintained that underlying the apocalyptic element in the teaching of Jesus was a practical religious purpose, which meant more to him than the forms in which he articulated it. The function of the apocalyptic teaching "is to enforce a message which is not apocalyptic... his demand was for a new kind of life, a new relation to God..."p. 138.

and the attempt to go on from there to seek to establish its significance for him.[10] Perrin proceeds to highlight the great influence of one particular scholar in this discussion, namely C.H.Dodd.

Dodd[11] maintained that the concept of the kingdom of God was employed by Jesus in different ways.[12] It was used first of all in a way parallel to the usage of the rabbis, i.e., the kingdom of God is realised in human experience by submission to the divine will. Again, the term is found as in prophetic-apocalyptic use, i.e., in an eschatological sense. However,there are sayings which do not fall within either of these frameworks, sayings reflecting the prophetic-apocalyptic use of the kingdom, but with this difference, the 'eschatological' kingdom of God is proclaimed as a present fact which men must recognise, whether by their actions they accept or reject it. It is this last group of sayings which Dodd came to see as Jesus' unique contribution. The emphasis falls on the presence of the

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10 Perrin claims that the "triumph" of apocalyptic can be seen in papers presented to a conference of six English and six German theologians held at Canterbury in 1927, called to discuss the nature of the kingdom of God and its relation to human society. These papers were published in *Theology* 14 (1927) pp.249-95. Among the four scholars who concerned themselves particularly with the New Testament and the teaching of Jesus there was absolute unanimity in regarding the kingdom of God as an apocalyptic concept. One of these scholars was C.H.Dodd who subsequently was to develop this subject in new and exciting ways.

11 The numerous contributions of Dodd on the subject include: "The This-Worldly Kingdom of God in our Lord's Teaching", *Theology* 14 (1927), pp.258-260; "The Gospel Parables",*BJRL* 16, (1932), pp.396-412; *The Parables of the Kingdom*(1935); "The Kingdom of God has come", *Exp.T.*, 48 (1936-7), pp.138-142; *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, (London,1936), *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*(1953) and *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, 1963).

12 E.g., *Parables of the Kingdom*, pp.34-44.

kingdom in his own person and ministry, i.e., realized eschatology.[13] This approach has been very influential in Britain especially, and, according to Tupper[14], much of Anglo-American New Testament exegesis throughout the first half of the century can be summarized as resistance to the thorough-going apocalyptic Jesus of Schweitzer and attraction to the realized eschatology of Dodd.

As far as German New Testament scholarship was concerned, Koch[15] explains that in the years following Weiss and Schweitzer there appears to have been a greater readiness to admit an apocalyptic stamp for Paul and the early church than for Jesus. Around the time of the first world war, apocalyptic ceased to be of topical interest and the rabbinic writings pushed themselves more and more to the fore, in the search for the background to the New Testament. Where the special character of apocalyptic was admitted at all, it was declared to be the esoteric property of the scribes. For Jesus and primitive Christianity the result was a modified prophetic correction theory.[16] Even when in this period salvation history was discovered to be the centre of the New Testament faith, and Jesus

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13 In later years Dodd hinted at certain modifications to his view, See *The Coming of Christ*, (Cambridge,1951), pp.13f. Following J. Jeremias' *The Parables of Jesus*, (London,1954), Dodd appears to have agreed to the description of the emphasis of Jesus as, "an eschatology that is in process of realization", p.159. See *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* p.447, n.1.

14 E. F. Tupper,"The Revival of Apocalyptic in Biblical and Theological Studies", *Review and Expositor* Vol. LXXII No 3 (1975), p.286.

15 Op.cit., p.58f.

16 Koch explains that this involves Jesus and perhaps even John picking up where the great prophets left off without the influence of the apocalyptists, which was viewed as a disappointly regressive step. He points out that it is this conviction which lies behind Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, "a work which like no other moulded the understanding of the New Testament for whole generations of theologians and in which apocalyptic is hardly given separate treatment at any point", ibid., p.60. (There is a difference with articles which appear after 1960).

was seen to be at the centre of time, between creation and the end[17], "no one", according to Koch, "investigated a relationship to a possible understanding of history on the part of the preceding apocalyptic. On the contrary, importance was attached to the fact that the New Testament view is 'radically different' from that of Judaism in its global aspect".[18]

However, among many New Testament scholars who viewed apocalyptic with suspicion and mistrust, there were a few who continued to accept apocalyptic as having an importance of its own for the New Testament and for interpreting Jesus. One such was Bultmann, who was convinced through the earlier work of Weiss, of Jesus' apocalyptic conception of the coming of the kingdom of God. As Bultmann explains, the expected fulfilment of history in the arrival of the kingdom of God failed to appear. "History did not come to an end, and as every schoolboy knows, it will continue to run its course".[19] Tupper[20] has pointed out that Bultmann's convictions concerning Jesus' unfulfilled hope for the eschatological kingdom of God illuminated for him the mythological character of Jesus' apocalyptic eschatology and the mythical element in the New Testament's world view. This propelled Bultmann into the programme of demythologising, which attempted to uncover the deeper meaning behind the mythological conceptions of the New Testament, a meaning which called men to decision. Apocalyptic therefore played an important role for Bultmann as far as Jesus and the New Testament was concerned, but in a completely negative way.

Apocalyptic ... The Mother of all Christian Theology

In 1960 Ernst Käsemann published his essay "The Beginnings of Christian Theology"[21] which helped spark off a

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17 O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, (London,1951).

18 Op.cit., p.61.

19 R. Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology, *Kerygma and Myth* Vol.1 ed. by H.W.Bartsch and translated by R.H. Fuller, (London,1953) p. 5

20 Op.cit. p.288.

21 E. Käsemann, "The Beginnings of Christian Theology", *JTC* 6, (New York,1969) pp.40ff.

revived interest in apocalyptic.[22] According to Käsemann, Jesus' ministry was bracketed between the apocalyptic expectations of John the Baptist on the one hand and the eschatological hopes of the early Christians on the other; but while taking his start from the apocalyptically determined message of John, Jesus' own preaching "was not constitutively stamped by apocalyptic, but proclaimed the immediate nearness of God".[23] The apocalyptic statements on the lips of Jesus in the Synoptics reflect the reversion to apocalyptic by the early Christians, under the influence of the Easter-event and the coming of the Spirit. Therefore, "Apocalyptic - since the preaching of Jesus cannot really be described as theology - was the mother of all Christian theology".[24] In arriving at this position Käsemann focused his attention on certain texts in Matthew's gospel, and here found evidence of a vigorous Jewish-Christian group within the early church, led by prophets and marked by strong apocalyptic traits.[25] He claimed, "We block our own access to the earliest Easter kerygma if we disregard its apocalyptic context",[26] and concludes, "My own claim is that post-Easter apocalyptic is the oldest variation and interpretation of the kerygma".[27]

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22 See Koch, op.cit. p.40.

23 Ibid. p.40

24 Ibid. p.40.

25 See Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future of Man*, (Leicester,1980), p.42ff. Travis has helpfully summarized these as follows: (1) A theology of history which sees the history of salvation andthe history of damnation running parallel to each other, and which divides history into "clearly distinguishable epochs". (2) Ethical exhortations which appeal to an eschatological *ius talionis* (i.e., the principle of "an eye for an eye"). (3) Expectation of a transformation of values in the last days. (4) Re-establishment of the twelve tribes at the parousia. (5) Confirmation of the Mosaic law and opposition to the Gentile mission. (6) Hope of the epiphany of the Son of Man coming to His enthronement and near expectation of the parousia.

26 "On the Topic of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic" *JTC* 6 (1969) p. 106

27 Ibid. p.107 n.5.

What of this 'oldest form' and 'variation' as time passed? Käsemann[28] claimed the the apocalyptic theology collapsed when the expected parousia failed to happen, and as Christianity spread beyond Palestine, Hellenistic enthusiasm so transformed apocalyptic that it abandoned any kind of future hope. For example, the Corinthian enthusiasts with whom Paul contends believed that the goal of redemption had already been reached with baptism and the redeemed were already risen and enthroned with Christ in heavenly existence. An expectation of the parousia was meaningless, because everything that apocalyptic still hoped for appeared to them to have been realized. According to Käsemann, Paul represents a mid-point between post-Easter apocalyptic and Hellenistic enthusiasm. The apostle sought to maintain a futurist eschatology and his anti-enthusiastic battle was "in the last and deepest analysis fought out under the banner of apocalyptic".[29] Paul understands that those who are Christians,"already deliver over to Christ in bodily obedience the piece of world which they themselves are, they testify to his lordship as that of the cosmocrator and thereby provide an anticipatory sign of the ultimate future, of the reality of the resurrection and the unrestricted *regnum Christi*".[30] Käsemann maintained that even Paul's central doctrine of justification was derived from apocalyptic, for ultimately it is concerned with the rule of God and his triumph in the world. "Pauline eschatology ... centres round the question whether God is indeed God and when He will fully assert himself as such. (Pauline theology) proclaims the sovereignty of God in apocalyptic".[31]

So Käsemann argued that Christian theology was profoundly indebted to post-Easter apocalyptic. At its centre was the hope of the epiphany of the Son of Man coming to his enthronement, and he maintained "it is a question whether Christian theology can ever

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28 Ibid. p.119.

29 Ibid. p.127.

30 Ibid. p.133.

31 "An Apologia for Primitive Christian Eschatology", *Essays on New Testament Themes*, (London,1964), p.182.

make do or be legitimate without this motive, which arose from the expectation of Easter and determined Easter faith".[32]

Response to Käsemann.

Käsemann's understanding aroused a great deal of attention and debate. As Koch has explained,

> "Up to then apocalyptic had been for biblical scholarship something on the periphery of the Old and New Testament - something bordering on heresy. Käsemann had suddenly declared that a tributary was the main stream, from which everything else at the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New was allegedly fed".[33]

It is important to note some of the early criticisms which were made of Käsemann's view. Ebeling,[34] in a critique published a year after Käsemann, claimed that if primitive Christianity was as indebted to Jewish apocalyptic as Käsemann maintains, it is surprising that the Christian production of apocalypses was a late development. "It is no accident that the characteristic literary form of Christianity was the gospel and not the apocalypse".[35] In his view, Käsemann has not taken enough account of the way apocalyptic ideas have themselves been changed through their link with Jesus. We should not "merely interpret Jesus in the light of apocalyptic, but also and above all interpret apocalyptic in the light of Jesus".[36] In addition, how could the supposedly non-apocalyptic preaching of Jesus be followed by the apocalyptic preaching of the early church, as a response to his life and message? Again, Fuchs maintains that Käsemann has minimised the element of 'realized' eschatology in primitive Christianity[37] and Conzelmann claims that theology has always to do with concrete sober doctrine and not with the apocalyptic enthusiasm, which Käsesmann ascribes to the

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32 *JTC* 6, p.46.

33 Op.cit. p.14.

34 G. Ebeling, "The Ground of Christian Theology", in *JTC* 6, (New York,1969), pp.47ff.

35 Ibid., p.53

36 Ibid.,p.58.

37 E. Fuchs, "On the Task of a Christian Theology", *JTC* 6, (New York,1969).

members of the primitive church. Conzelmann finds a lack of evidence for this enthusiasm in the texts. Instead, he finds credal formulations like the ancient tradition in 1Cor.15, which clearly pass on the faith in the form of doctrine. "These, not apocalyptic fantasies or spiritual experience... are the well-spring of Christian theology".[38]

Finally, in an important article, Rollins[39] maintains that Käsemann's use of texts from Matthew is arbitrary. Nowhere does he really justify his claim that these texts reflect a theological tension existing in the early church. Evidence e.g.,from ICor.15 suggests that the earliest forms of the kerygma were not concerned with apocalyptic concepts like Son of Man or parousia. For Rollins, even if the texts cited by Käsemann indicate the existence of an apocalyptic 'strand' or apocalyptic groups in the primitive church, they do not mean that apocalyptic was the controlling theological emphasis of the earliest church. It was "not the mother of all Christian theology, but at best one of many brothers, whose particular brand of theology would have stood in obvious tension with the teaching of Jesus and the theology of the earliest church".[40] Using another metaphor, Rollins suggests that apocalyptic was not mother but midwife. The Christ-event itself was what produced the theologies of the first Christians. Jewish apocalyptic supplied only the mode through which the Christ-event was conceptualized.[41] Furthermore, by proclaiming Jesus as the expected Messiah the church reclaimed history and the world as the realm of God's self-disclosure, thus displacing the pessimism of Jewish apocalypticism, which considered God as absent from history during this evil age. Rollins interprets this as "a tacit rejection of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology and a return to prophetic *Heilsgeschichte*".[42] From its earliest beginnings Rollins sees the church as opposed to apocalyptic. We should not be surprised to find apocalyptic material in the New

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38 H. Conzelmann, "Zur Analyse der Bekenntnisformel I Cor.15:3-5", *Ev.Th.* 25 (1965) p.9.

39 W.G.Rollins, "The New Testament and Apocalyptic", *NTS* 17 (1970 1971) pp. 454ff.

40 Ibid., p.468.

41 Ibid., p.472.

42 Ibid., p.473.

Testament, but should note that we find so little of it. Even within the apocalyptic sections there are some 'anti-apocalyptic elements' such as the rejection of the calculation of the end by means of signs (Mk.13:32; Lk.17:20f). Therefore Rollins claims, "one can speak of the apocalypticism of the New Testament only with extreme caution".[43]

Criticisms like these are impressive and must be given serious consideration. Yet we may still feel that apocalyptic has a more influential place in early Christianity than some of these scholars are willing to allow. Recent works on Judaism and Jewish background[44] have lent support to the view that apocalyptic was highly influential in the intertestamental and early New Testament period. If it had such a place at the turn of the century, it is difficult to isolate the early Christians or even Jesus from it. Most scholars would agree that Jesus understood himself within the prophetic tradition. If apocalyptic can be said to find its roots and be an heir to prophecy, as Hanson has maintained,[45] the possibility of Jesus identifying himself with the prophetic-apocalyptic expectations proves viable. The situation appears to be as Audet has explained, "Le problème n'est donc pas de se demander s'il y a eu influence, mais d'essayer d'apprécier l'importance et les limites de cette influence".[46]

Both Käsemann's arguments and that of his critics betray certain weaknesses. For Travis, Käsemann's position is weak when he presents a non-apocalyptic Jesus, sandwiched between an apocalyptically fired John the Baptist and early church. "It is hard to

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43 Ibid., p.475.

44 E.g., see M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, I, (London, 1974), pp.252-254. He surveys the development of Jewish thought in the controversy with the Hellenistic spirit of the time. While there are gaps in our knowledge, he believes it probable that between the Maccabean revolt and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70, the piety of Palestinian Judaism was shaped to a considerable extent by apocalyptic expectation of the end.

45 See P.D.Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*,(Philadelphia, 1975).

46 L. Audet, "L'influence de l'apocalyptique sur les pensées de Jésus et de l'Eglise primitive", *Science et Esprit*, XXV, (1973), p.

imagine anything more improbable".[47] There are other scholars who find numerous apocalyptic features in Jesus' teaching. For example, Dunn [48] discusses the following: (a) Jesus, like the apocalyptists, saw the present age as deeply influenced by demonic powers. (b) He probably used the language of the two ages (e.g. Mk.3:29; 10:30). The discontinuity between the two ages is marked in various ways, particularly by the fact that the final judgment will mark the beginning of the age of the kingdom (Mt.19:28). (c) Jesus anticipated the time of eschatological trial prior to the end (e.g., Mt.5:11f; 6:13). Dunn believes that Jesus probably saw his own death as part of the sufferings that would preceed the coming of the kingdom (Mk.3:22-25), and the resurrection as part of the beginning of the resurrection of the dead in ushering in the new age. (d) Jesus seems to have thought of the end as imminent (e.g., Mk.1:15, 9:1,13:30), for Dunn, within the lifetime of his own generation, before the disciples had completed the round of preaching to Israel (Mt.10:23). (e) He probably saw the climax of the end events as the coming from heaven of (himself as) the Son of Man, deliberately echoing the apocalyptic language of Dan.7 (e.g., Mk.8:38). (f) Jesus' technical term 'the kingdom of God' underlines the belief both in its transcendent character and in God's sovereign control of events leading to its full establishment. Dunn claims that even if questions are raised by some scholars about the authenticity of a number of Jesus' sayings, it appears that many of them express ideas which are widespread, deep-rooted and "pervasive in the Jesus tradition". He therefore finds it difficult to avoid the conclusion that apocalyptic ideas were vitally important for Jesus' understanding of his message and that his vision of the future kingdom was apocalyptic in character.[49]

Dunn does see two features which mark off Jesus' apocalypticism from contemporary apocalyptic. First of all, there is a cautionary note in his teaching about the future. Jesus seems to have comtemplated an interval of time before the end, during which several decisive events had still to take, place, i.e., his own death and vindication, his disciples' final appeal to Israel, their persecution

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47 *Christian Hope*, p.47.

48 Op.cit., pp.318ff.

49 Ibid., p.321.

and end-time tribulation. Also he did not follow typical apocalyptic practice in drawing up a calendar of the end. Secondly, there is a clear note of realized eschatology in Jesus' teaching. The eschatological kingdom is in some sense already present and active in and through his ministry and this forms a decisive break with the apocalypticism of his time. Dunn explains that this note of realized eschatology was what led Käsemann to place Jesus wholly apart from the framework of apocalyptic thought. Käsemann considered this so much the distinctive feature of Jesus' teaching that the passages in the Synoptic tradition which speak of an imminent end belong not to the message of Jesus, but to the preaching of the primitive Christian community, when in post-Easter enthusiasm they resorted again to apocalyptic terms. Dunn's conviction is that Käsemann has over-stated his case. He has failed to grasp the nature of the present-future tension in Jesus' preaching. "The 'immediate nearness of God' is not something other than the presence of the kingdom in eschatological blessing, and the presence of the kingdom was precisely the end-time power already entering the present age and prestageing the imminent coming of the kingdom in eschatological finality".[50]

There are some controversal points in Dunn's presentation of an apocalyptic Jesus, and the picture will need to be tempered somewhat later, but his view of an apocalyptic emphasis in Jesus' preaching and his criticisms of Käsemann appear to be convincing. Not only is Käsemann's position weak, but the position of his critics in certain respects is weak also. For example, Rollins referred to the sense of the meaninglessness of history in Jewish apocalyptic which he then contrasted with the positive evaluation of history and of the world which one finds in the early church's realized eschatology. Travis is helpful here when he maintains that the method of unfavourably comparing apocalyptic with Old Testament prophecy on the one hand and New Testament realized eschatology on the other, misconstrues the true relationship between them. What Rollins calls the 'post-apocalypticism' of the New Testament "does not arise from a rejection of apocalyptic and a reversion to a prophetic attitude, but rather from a recognition that the expectation

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50 Ibid., p.322.

of the apocalyptists have begun to find their fulfilment in Jesus" [51]. Support for this viewpoint is outlined in a separate article by Travis on apocalyptic[52] and the following examples are given: (a) Whilst it would be linguistically impossible for Jesus to say that 'the age to come' had already dawned, he does say that about his equivalent phrase, 'kingdom of God'. "If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt.12 :28). In a host of images he declares that the salvation of the new age is already available. Jesus' disciples see what prophets and kings long to see. (b) Although Jesus saw people as subject to the power of Satan, he also declared that his coming meant the beginning of victory over Satan (Mt.12:28; Mk.3:22-27). The single reference to what looks like an apocalyptic vision experienced by Jesus, is a vision about this victory (Lk.10:18). Thus, Jesus' ability to take a less pessimistic view of the present course of history was not due to a rejection of apocalyptic and a reversion to the prophetic attitude. It arises from the conviction that in him apocalyptic hopes are reaching fulfilment. His world-affirming attitude is motivated by his sense that the eschatological time of salvation has dawned. His table-fellowship anticipates the messianic banquet. (c) His ministry to Gentiles, despite his declaration that the primary target of his mission is Israel, is another indication that the eschatological time of salvation has begun to find fulfilment (Mk.7:24-30; Mt.8:5-13). (d) His self-designation as Son of Man brings into focus his acceptance of apocalyptic hopes and his conviction that those hopes were entering the stage of fulfilment through his own mission of suffering, which would lead to vindication by God (following the pattern of Dan.7). For Travis therefore, as for Dunn, the basic structure of Jesus' thinking owes much to Jewish apocalyptic, more than either Käsemann or many of his critics allow.

Going on from Jesus, Dunn looks at the primitive Christian community and finds here also a high degree of apocalyptic fervency.[53] Firstly, they found it necessary to use the apocalyptic category of resurrection to express their new faith. They believed

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51 *Christian Hope*, p.49.

52 "The Value of Apocalyptic", *TynB* 30. (1979), pp.69ff.

53 Op.cit., pp.322ff.

that they stood in 'the last days', leading up to the last day as predicted by Joel (Acts 2:17f; Joel 2:28-32), and Jesus resurrection was the beginning of the resurrection of the dead (Rom.1:3f; ICor.15:20,23; cf.Mt.27:52f). They were the eschatological Israel, the people of the new covenant, inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus (Mk.14:27-25 and parallels; ICor.11:23ff); their representatives 'the twelve', reconstituted with the election of Matthias in Judas' place (Acts.1:15-26), would soon take up their role as judges of Israel in the final judgment itself (cf. Mt. 19:28/Lk. 22:29). Evidently, too, they lived in daily expectation of the parousia of Jesus (Acts 3:17-21).[54] Finally, their common life revolved around the temple, expressing the hope of eschatological renewal centred on Mt. Zion, with a renewed or rebuilt temple. For Dunn this is the significance attached to Jesus 'cleansing of the temple' (Mk.11:17) and why during the first few months they did not stir from Jerusalem. So Dunn maintains, "In short, the perspective of the earliest Christian church(es) seems to have been very narrow indeed: they were already in the last days leading up to the last day, they stood in the final climactic period of history, at the edge of the end, the final swing of the pendulum had already begun... the cautionary note also present in Jesus' teaching seems to have been almost wholly swamped by the apocalyptic fervour for the imminent end".[55]

In the light of this analysis of the earliest church, Dunn sees Christianity begun as an apocalyptic sect within Judaism, a sect which in its apocalypticism was in substantial continuity with the message both of John the Baptist and of Jesus. Thus he concludes, "Since this is where Christianity all began, to that extent Käsemann is correct, apocalyptic was 'the mother of all Christian theology'".[56]

Finally, in his survey Dunn turns his attention to the apocalyptic literature of the New Testament. It occasions no surprise for him that I and II Thessalonians (probably the earliest New Testament documents) are distinctly ,while not entirely,

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54 Dunn maintains that it is within the context of eschatological enthusiasm that we have to understand the so-called 'community of goods'. (Acts.2:44f;4:32-37).

55 Ibid., p.324.

56 Ibid., p.325.

apocalyptic in tone and content. The expectation of the imminent parousia was a prominent feature (I Thess.1:9,4:15,17,5:23) and this is described in explicitly apocalyptic language, "as a descending from heaven, with archangels and clouds, with loud shouts and trumpet blasts and the resurrection of the dead".[57] It would come without warning, bringing destruction for the unprepared, sudden and terrible, the birth-pangs of the new age "and there will be no escape" (I Thess.5:2f). Thus apocalyptic was an integral part of the early Christian expansion beyond the confines of Palestine.[58] Dunn also sees II Thessalonians as Pauline. Here again Paul reaffirms his expectations of an imminent parousia and paints it in apocalyptic colours (II Thess.1:4-10). In ch.2:1-12 one sees the strong influence of classical Jewish apocalyptic imagery in the concept ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, [59] and in the desecration of the temple (cf. Dan.9:27, 11:31,12:11; Macc.1:54). "Here then is Christian apocalyptic already spread into Europe, but still depicting the final rebellion in terms of the Jerusalem temple".[60] Dunn particularly notes the esoteric nature of the passage; ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, τὸ κατέχον and ὁ κατέχων are deliberately veiled references - a typically apocalyptic stylistic feature. Thus we have Christian documents almost twenty years after Christ, with the Gentile mission already well under way, in which the hope of an imminent end still burns brightly and is expressed in language and imagery typical of Jewish apocalyptic. However, it is clear that distinctively Christian features are present, i.e., the divine agent who will bring in the end is Jesus, and the cautionary note in Jesus' preaching also reoccurs (τὸ κατέχον is

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57 Ibid., p.325.

58 Ibid., p.326.

59 Dunn claims this concept "comes straight out of Jewish apocalyptic, where the eschatological opposition to God was often represented by a single figure - Satan or a dragon, or in human form as a tyrant or prophet hostile to God" p.327. (See *Sib Or.* III63-70). Dunn asks us to notice that the man of lawlessness is not, properly speaking, an anti-Christ figure but one who opposes God. Here Christian thought has taken over the Jewish concept, but has not yet developed it into the more distinctly Christian idea of Antichrist.

60 Ibid.,p.327.

still operative). Paul however, has not met the Thessalonian 'abuse of apocalyptic' by abandoning apocalyptic but simply by spelling out the apocalyptic hope more fully. "At this stage anyway (nearly twenty years after his conversion) apocalyptic remained an integral part of his message and hope".[61]

For Dunn, Mark 13 also, however it found its form[62] is marked by typical apocalyptic elements[63]. Mark evidently saw the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple as part of the messianic woes, the beginning of the end. Again for Dunn, after the fall of Jerusalem, when Luke relates the eschatological discourse, he does not abandon the apocalyptic expectation, but separates a single complex of events, (the destruction of Jerusalem and the parousia), claiming for the first a fulfilment in A.D.70 and reaffirming the apocalyptic hope afresh.

Revelation for Dunn, obviously stands within the tradition of apocalyptic literature with its cosmic dualism, visions and fantastic imagery. John is writing against the backcloth of mounting persecution, which he believed was building up to the final climax of evil and tribulation. Thus, "how little the fires of apocalyptic expectancy have faded in the latter decades of the first century".[64]

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61 Ibid., p.328.

62 Some have seen a Jewish document, namely a 'Little Apocalypse' lying behind the eschatological discourse.

63 These include: συντελεῖσθαι (v4). Its equivalent noun phrase συντελείας (τοῦ αἰῶνος) in Mt.24:3 is a technical term in apocalyptic, particularly in Daniel and Test. of the Twelve to denote the end; world-wide turmoil, wars and natural disasters (vs7-8); the beginning of the birth-pangs of the new age, i.e., the messianic woes; persecution, including the characteristic apocalyptic foreboding of internecine family strife (vs9-13); the esoteric sign, the desolating sacrilege (v14); the urgency and unprecedented anguish of the final tribulation (vs14-20); the cosmic dimensions of the messianic woes, the whole of creation in labour to bring the new age to birth, including the coming of the Son of Man (vs24-27); the imminence of these events of the end, "at the very gates",(vs28-30).

64 Op.cit., p.335.

In the light of all this evidence, Dunn is convinced that no one can dispute the fact that apocalyptic had an integral part in first century Christianity, and as fundamental a part in its diversity as the Christianity of Matthew and James, or the Christianity of Corinth and John. Therefore, he finds himself once again at this point in agreement with Käsemann that to seek to remove apocalyptic is to distort the historical reality of Christianity's beginnings.[65]

Apocalyptic in the New Testament-Its Characteristics

How are we to assess the influence of apocalyptic in the New Testament and particularly the picture of an apocalyptic Jesus and an apocalyptic early church which Dunn and to some extent Travis have given us? Firstly, concerning Dunn's claim that Jesus probably thought the end was imminent, within the lifetime of his own generation. Dunn dismisses too easily the counter emphasis of Mk.13:10 with the claim that it "is about as clear an example of an interpretative addition in the light of a changed perspective as we could expect to find in the Synoptic tradition".[66] The problem of imminence in the message of Jesus is the problem which is found right throughout biblical prophecy and biblical apocalyptic. For Jesus there was an element of unknowability and therefore of uncertainty about the end (Mk.13:32). Since it was clear that God could shorten the period of eschatological distress (Mk.13:30; Lk.18:7f), it was also conceivable that he could lengthen the time of respite, the final period of grace, the last opportunity to repent (Lk.13:6-9).

One necessary modification to the stark presentation of an apocalyptic Jesus given to us by Dunn, is to remember that apocalyptic thought was not the only background to the teaching and mission of Jesus. There are many elements from other currents.[67] In his teaching for example, one finds elements from the wisdom tradition of Judaism. Some of his teaching reflects the style and interests of the rabbis, some the popular pietism of Palestine. All of

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65 Ibid.,p.335.

66 Ibid., p.335.

67 See Travis, "The Value of Apocalyptic", p.69, Audet, op. Cit., p. 64.

it is pervaded by the influence of many parts of Scripture, including particularly the Psalms and Deuteronomy. Even Travis makes the point that when Jesus took up apocalyptic he did not simply take it over unchanged but often modified it and charged it with new meaning.[68]

It also should be acknowledged that when we talk about New Testament apocalyptic, we are affirming not only its continuity with Jewish apocalyptic, but also the fact that it is something new. From a history of religions point of view, apparently no such phenomenon as early Christian apocalyptic exists, but all the early Christian apocalyptic texts are considered to be expressions of Jewish apocalyptic and not therefore constitutive of an independent phenomenon which is recognised as 'early Christian apocalyptic'. Often this has led to the adoption of 'husk theories', which involved the attempt to distinguish between the apocalyptic form and spiritual content, the cultural expression and the abiding message, as scholars have attempted to distil 'the essence' from the sociological setting and language. It was Betz [69] who challenged this research consensus of lumping together Jewish and Christian apocalyptic, by demanding that both should be "seen and presented as peculiar expressions within the entire development of Hellenistic syncreticism", and that "Christian apocalypticism is doubtless something new compared with Jewish apocalypticism and it is the new which needs to be determined".[70]

Faced with Betz's challenge and the presentation of apocalyptic in Jesus and the primitive church by Dunn already in this chapter, what are the distinctive features of Christian apocalyptic when compared with Jewish apocalypticism?

First of all, it is clear that in the New Testament the use of Jewish apocalyptic literature and apocalyptic language is restrained. In the gospels and letters of Paul there is not a single quotation from the non-canonical books, and in the rest of the New Testament only in the brief letter of Jude (:l4-l5; cf.,I En.l:9). In addition, writings

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68 Ibid., p.70.

69 H.D.Betz, "On the Problem of the Religio-Historical Understanding of Apocalypticism" *JTC* 6 (1969), pp. 134ff.

70 Ibid., p.156.

with a marked apocalyptic identity are significantly few in number and even the few sizeable contributions (Mk.13 and parallels; I Thess.4:13-5:11; II Thess.2:1-12) outside the Book of the Revelation have marked differences when compared with other contemporary apocalyptic works. The various works in the New Testament also reflect an authorship which is steeped in, and recognizes the authority of, the books of the Old Testament, rather than the apocalyptic writings.[71] Ebeling's assessment appears to be sound when he insists that what we have in the New Testament is "not apocalyptic systems of ideas, but individual sayings with an apocalyptic background, not a disclosure of apocalyptic mysteries, but concrete, apocalyptically grounded instructions for the present, not a code language of dreams and visions, but one that is universally understandable".[72] This is demonstrated clearly, for example, in the Marcan eschatological discourse where, although Dunn can list typical apocalyptic elements, apocalyptic actually serves a paraenetic purpose. Cranfield claims that the discourse is in fact "exhortative more than revelatory" and "its purpose is not to impart esoteric information but to sustain faith and obedience".[73] Again, as far as Paul is concerned, although the apostle was, as Dunn stressed, clearly influenced by the apocalyptic current, he was very reticent towards apocalyptic speculations. Moreover, he has transformed several apocalyptic schemata into a soteriology where realised eschatology holds an important place.[74] Certainly Paul has used several apocalyptic expressions or concepts, particularly in his description of the eschatological crisis. It is no less certain, on the other hand, that he has reduced the apocalyptic material. What really matters for Paul is not the place of the parousia, not the circumstances, not the cosmic phenomena, but the assurance that all, living or dead, "will be with the Lord forever" (I Thess.4:14-17). Paul is not interested in elaborating an apocalypse. He uses the

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71 Cf.,T.F.Glasson, "What is Apocalyptic?", *NTS*, 27 (1980) pp.98-105.

72 Op.cit., p.53.

73 C.E.B.Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St.Mark* (Cambridge, 1963), p.388.

74 See Audet, op.cit., pp. 69ff.

apocalyptic schema for Christological, soteriological or pastoral purposes. Furthermore, faced with apocalyptic enthusiasm in several primitive communities, Paul played a role of control and of orientation, in the simplification and purification of apocalyptic material. He has endeavoured to keep the Christian faith in its original purity with, at its core, the capital event of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is clear that in Paul's writings, the resurrection of Christ is seen in an apocalyptic way in some occurrences, i.e., it pledges the general resurrection. But this is not the only interpretation. In many texts, the resurrection is related to the present Christian life. The Christian life appears as a mystical participation in the death-resurrection of Christ. Other texts present the resurrection as the foundation of the presence of Christ in the community. Thus apocalyptic was for Paul a means, among many others, which he used to express one side of the mystery of the resurrection of Christ.

Morris [75] explains that it is not surprising that we do not find apocalyptic dominant in the New Testament. In the apocalyptic literature the emphasis is always on the last judgment and the events associated with it. Where the New Testament authors were concerned about the last things, they used apocalyptic vividly and forcefully. But these concerns are not the whole of Christianity. The really central thing for Christians, the 'crucial' thing, is the cross and what Christ has done for man's salvation. Therefore at the heart of Christianity is the gospel, the good news of forgiveness and salvation from sin. As Morris maintains, "The apocalyptists were not proclaiming a gospel. Their only interest in guilty men was that they should be punished. They divided all mankind into the good and the bad. The good, they thought, God would vindicate and deliver from the oppression of their enemies. The bad He would overthrow and utterly destroy... The dominant idea (in apocalyptic) was that God would save good men from trouble, not that He will save bad men from sin".[76] He concludes, "Since Christ's atoning work is the central doctrine of New Testament Christianity, apocalyptic fails us

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75 Morris, *Apocalyptic*, pp. 96ff.

76 Ibid., p. 98.

at the heart of the faith... At base Christianity is the gospel. And 'Gospel' is not an apocalyptic term".[77]

The second feature of New Testament apocalyptic to be noted is that the Jewish apocalyptic world-view has undoubtedly been modified, even, it could be claimed, transformed. The apocalyptic hope looked for vindication and deliverance at the last day. But the kingdom, which the apocalyptists looked for at the end of the age, is proclaimed as already present and active in Jesus' person and work, even if its total realisation is still future. In Matt.12:28/Lk.11:20, the kingdom of God is said to have ἔφθασεν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς. The kingly and saving power of God has drawn near to the hearers and is there for them to grasp, the proof being that its power has been evidenced in the lives of others, i.e.,in the exorcisms.[78] It is also so present that it can be "taken away" by God from Israel and given to another nation who will produce its fruits (Mt.21:43). Again, in Mt.11:12/Lk.16:16 it is claimed that the kingdom "suffers violence". It is uncertain whether this means the kingdom itself suffers violence, or the kingdom comes violently . Marshall opts for the second, i.e.,the powerful coming of the kingdom and the effort required to enter it.[79] Whatever view is accepted, there can be no doubt that the kingdom is considered to be present. Again, in Lk.17:20-21 the kingdom is said to be ἐντὸς ὑμῶν . ἐντὸς is a rare word, which probably here means "in the midst" - present among men and within their grasp.[80] As Audet has claimed, this juxtaposition of present and future breaks the apocalyptic schema of the two aeons or ages.[81] Jesus also, in the emphasis of his preaching, changed the meaning of the waiting for the eschatological kingdom. It is a time of conversion, which is itself the means of entry into the kingdom.

As far as the primitive church and the first preachers of the kerygma are concerned, while it is now clear that the resurrection of the dead drew its origins from the apocalyptic tradition, as Dunn

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77 Ibid., p. 101.

78 I.H.Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Exeter, 1978), p. 476.

79 Ibid., p. 629.

80 Ibid., p.655.

81 Op.cit.,p.58.

maintained, by Jesus' time it was already diffused outside apocalyptic circles in most of the Jewish population, the Sadduccees excepted. Therefore, in announcing that God raised Jesus from the dead, the first preachers were not necessarily reflecting the apocalyptic tradition; they were rather situated in the general circle of the eschatology of the time. However, by proclaiming not only the resurrection, but also the death of Jesus as the central point of the Christian gospel, the first preachers separated themselves from the general scheme of the apocalyptic waiting. To announce that a crucified man had become the Lord and Saviour of humanity, was, in a sense, to break the apocalyptic hope.[82] We should also remember the note of realized eschatology in Paul. Christians are presented as already part of the new creation(II Cor.5:7) and share in the blessings of the age to come, i.e., eternal life, justification and the gift of the Spirit. The reference to the man of sin sitting in the temple(II Thess.2:4), which Dunn claims is to be taken literally, may rather be a case of an apocalyptic theme which Paul has taken over, intending it to be interpreted as a symbol of opposition to God, or the assumption of authority over God's people.[83] In conclusion, it is clear that primitive Christianity never became imprisoned in any current of thought of its time. Having its own originality and conscious of the richness of the mystery it was announcing, it went its own way.

A third feature of the New Testament apocalyptic hope is that it is also Christ-centred. Here we do find ourselves in full agreement with Dunn, when he asserts that it is not only the realized character Jesus stamped on Jewish apocalyptic, but also his centrality, which distinguishes Christian apocalyptic from its Jewish counterpart. While often the hope of Jewish apocalyptic was undefined, or had to be left to purely symbolic language, the Christian apocalyptic hope crystallized round a particular man already encountered in history. That hope came to classical expression in the expectation of the parousia of the Jesus now

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82 Ibid.,p.67.

83 For a discussion of the various possibilities see E.Best, *Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, (London,1972), pp. 286-287.

exalted. We should note also that the apocalyptic blessings, since they are received 'in Christ', are also church-orientated. They are fulfilled among the New People of God, both Israelites and Gentiles who believe.

Fourthly, it should be noted that in the New Testament apocalyptic imagery is ennobled and enriched. Sometimes the Jewish apocalyptists expressed themselves crudely, engaged in unfruitful speculation, or adopted attitudes unworthy of the worshippers of the God of Israel. Jesus has taken elements from the apocalyptists which were of value and filled them with positive theological significance. Terms like 'kingdom of God' and 'Son of Man' have been taken up creatively and given a new and richer content. France points out, "His kingdom-language was a launching pad from which he has taken off to explore new ideas and conclusions which his Jewish counterparts would not have thought of and to which their traditional understanding of the phrase would have presented some resistance".[84] The title Son of Man was apparently not yet a current Messianic title. Therefore Jesus could use it without being liable to be misunderstood and even to fuse it with the prophecies of the Suffering Servant of The Lord (Mk.8:31, 9:12, 10:33).

Finally, it must be acknowledged that although there is a uniqueness about New Testament apocalyptic when compared with its Jewish counterpart, yet the apocalyptic hope is still retained in the New Testament. It appears that apocalyptic thought has been the foundation of a certain current of thought in the primitive church, which used some of the apocalyptic material, particularly when they wished to talk about the future and the Christian hope. Jewish apocalyptic has brought a conceptualisation to the Christ-event, in line with that hope. While it is clear that the Jewish apocalyptic outlook has been transformed or modified, we must again, with Travis, reaffirm that all these modifications are not because of the rejection of apocalyptic but rather through a sense of present, if yet partial, fulfilment. Therefore, it is not correct, as some scholars have done, just to ascribe to apocalyptic simply a negative role in the New

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[84] R.T.France "The Church and the Kingdom of God", in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church*, Ed. D.A.Carson, (Exeter, 1984), p. 36.

Testament. For example, in Mark's eschatological discourse, the evangelist certainly is concerned, not to encourage apocalyptic speculation and excitement, but to suppress it. One remembers the type of thinking mentioned in Lk.19:11, where, as Jesus drew near to Jerusalem, there were some who "supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately". As Hooker has claimed, the message is, "Do not get overexcited, the end is near, but not as near as all that".[85] However, while apocalyptic excitement is suppressed, we must recognise that the ultimate fulfilment of the apocalyptic hope is not denied. It can be affirmed that the coming of the kingdom in Jesus has only set in motion the process of fulfilment on which the apocalyptic hope is set.

In conclusion, it is obvious that apocalyptic has had a profound influence on the New Testament message. Primitive Christianity did use modes of expression in keeping with the cultural and religious milieu of its time, but not without modifying very often the content of that expression, in order to express better its new faith and personal experience. To articulate its hope and its confidence in the future, the primitive community, as Dunn claimed, did often use the elements of the apocalyptic tradition. But, as Audet[86] has maintained, it was never impressed by the 'fever' of the future, nor by the utopia of big dreams, nor by the flight from the realities of this present world. If the waiting for the parousia has constituted one pole of the Christian hope, the event of the death-resurrection of Christ has constituted another pole. But the 'already' of the salvation brought by the death-resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee of the 'not yet', to be entirely revealed at the parousia of Christ. Therefore,

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85 M.D.Hooker, "Trial and Tribulation in Mark 13", *BJRL*, Vol. 65 (1982), pp. 78ff. Also, concerning Matt.24, see D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (London,1972), p. 318.

86 Op.cit., p.73.

because it had an apocalyptic tone, the Christian hope is orientated towards the future, towards the Lord who will realise a full eschatological fulfilment.

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