

The Study of Apocalypticism from H. H. Rowley to the Society of Biblical Literature

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My purpose in this fool's errand of a paper is to highlight some instances and aspects of the study of Jewish apocalypticism that led to the formation of the Society's group on Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism and Early Christianity. Of necessity I must be selective and that means omitting the names of a number of accomplished scholars who have contributed substantially to the study of this ancient religious phenomenon. For doing so, at the outset I beg their pardon. At the same time, I shall focus—though not exclusively—on the work of some members of this Society, because they have collaborated actively in the research and publications that led to the formation of this Group in the Society. For the most part, I limit myself to books and articles that focus on apocalypticism as a topic in its own right and not on discussions of particular texts.

1. *British Scholarship from 1913 - 1964*

I begin autobiographically. When I was a graduate student, three books—all by British scholars—shaped my entrance into this field. The first was volume 2 of R. H. Charles's *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, first published in 1913, but in 1963 newly available for each of us to put on our shelves at a bargain price.¹ Thus, as we studied for our doctoral exams, we had at our elbows the biblical scholar's most important tool—a collection of texts. And texts are one of the major aspects that I shall highlight here.

The second book was the revised edition of H. H. Rowley's *The Relevance of Apocalyptic: A Study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to the Revelation*.² Its title reflects the two points I wish to make about the book. First, Rowley writes as a theologian. The first edition of the book was a collection of lectures given in 1942 during the dark days of World War II. For Rowley “the enduring message of apocalyptic” (one of his chapter heads) spoke perennially to humans living in troubled times. Secondly, Rowley argued at considerable length, against R. H. Charles, that the Book of Daniel, and not the early parts of 1 Enoch, are the earliest extant examples of apocalyptic literature.

In 1964 D. S. Russell produced what was for a couple of decades “the best comprehensive treatment” of the apocalyptic literature,³ *The Method and Message of Apocalyptic*.⁴ Its four hundred pages treat the creative milieu of the apocalyptic literature, rooting it primarily in troubled times and seeing it as a development of prophecy, which had declined. Like Rowley, he identifies Daniel as the earliest apocalypse, but he dates parts of 1 Enoch shortly thereafter. The heart of Russell's exposition is a detailed discussion of the “Characteristics of the Apocalyptic Writings (esoteric in character, literary in form, symbolic in language, and pseudonymous in authorship.); and a catalogue of the elements that constitute “The Message of Jewish Apocalyptic” (Human History and Divine Control; Angels and Demons; The Time of the End; The Messianic Kingdom; The Traditional Messiah; The Son of Man; Life after Death). Different from Rowley, Russell writes from start to finish as a historian—interested in the theological content of the literature he describes, but not highlighting its relevance.⁵ The book was a valuable resource, and I would have loved to have had it to prepare for the doctoral exams I had written the year before it appeared. The weakness of the

book lay in its structure and to some extent its category formation. Although, Russell did provide brief summaries of the respective apocalyptic writings, his treatment of their *content* was synthetic. One never stood inside the individual apocalypses and understood them as literary products with shape and structure, set in time and place. In effect they were repositories of religious or theological conceptions, which could be summarized synthetically. While this synthesis was useful in its own way for providing a broad picture of a religious and intellectual phenomenon, one saw a vast woods without ever getting to climb any of its trees. In this sense, though he set out to write as a historian, he did not really do a satisfactory job of the history he sought to recount. The texts and their contexts were at a remove.

2. *The 1970's: From Synthesis to Analysis: The Rope Begins to Unravel*

In the decade and a half after the publication of Russell's handbook, old orthodoxies began to be questioned as scholars looked more closely at the apocalyptic phenomenon. The point of the phalanx—to mix our metaphors—was Klaus Koch's unabashedly polemical book of 1970, *Ratlos vor der Apokalypik*, which we might paraphrase as “at our wits end in the presence of apocalyptic,” but which was translated into the flat English title *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*.⁶ This rich book deserves more discussion than I can provide here. I note only the following points. The German title reads like a challenge to Rowley's title: Rather than finding apocalyptic literature relevant for our times, theology has lost its way. Koch writes as a theologian, but he is much less self-assured about what the thing is and what to do with it. And this applies not simply to the Jewish phenomenon, but also to its implications for the Christian theology. Koch calls his colleagues back to the drawing boards—again to mix our metaphors. What is important for our purposes here—though he devotes little space to it—lies in his chapter “What is Apocalyptic.”⁷ He makes three points: 1) We are at a definitional impasse; 2) “Apocalypse is a literary type,” and it is by looking at a corpus of literary works most would agree are apocalypses that we need to begin the task of redefinition. 3) We must remember that these texts are production of “a historical movement.”

The planter of the next landmark, again to mix our metaphors, was Paul Hanson. In a 1969 dissertation, published in 1975 (*The Dawn of Apocalyptic*),⁸ Hanson singles out one major aspect of the discussion of apocalyptic and builds on it. Apocalyptic is an extension of late prophecy, specifically Trito-Isaiah and Deutero-Zechariah. Thus, the heart of apocalyptic lies in its eschatology. The first strength of the book lies in its detailed form-critical exegesis of the biblical texts. The second strength is Hanson's recognition that we must place literary texts in their social contexts, and to this end he relies on the work of Karl Mannheim. Since Hanson's dissertation was completed before Koch's book appeared and the book form of the dissertation makes no reference to Koch, it is worth comparing the two on two issues. First similar to Koch, Hanson emphasizes the importance of reading texts in their *historical context*—although, different from Koch, he relies on sociological theory. Second, Hanson employs the term “apocalyptic” in a way that does not contribute to the clarification of definition that Koch calls for.

In an important step beyond his dissertation, Hanson published two articles in the *Interpreter's Bible Supplement Volume* (1976) that laid out some of the important distinctions that still inform the study of apocalyptic literature.⁹ In so doing, he both built on his own work and attended to Koch's programmatic study and his call for clearer definition. As if in answer to Koch, he first devotes a separate article to the genre apocalypse, in which he includes as examples Daniel 7-12, 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch. Thus the literary phenomenon as such

was on the table, although space allowed little opportunity for analysis. His second article on “apocalypticism” described “a system of thought produced by visionary movements.”¹⁰ In this section of the article, he distinguishes the literary genre apocalypse, “apocalyptic eschatology,” and the world view of “apocalypticism” that informed and provided the dynamic for apocalyptic movements, and he went on to provide a “Historical-sociological sketch of apocalypticism.” Thus, while extending his own earlier work, Hanson responded to the issues laid out by Koch: attention to literary genre, recognition of the historical contexts of the literary works, and a move toward definitional clarity. Moreover, in a final section he takes up the issue central to Rowley and the *raison d’être* for Koch’s book: the “theological significance” of apocalypticism.

In 1976, the same year that Hanson’s articles appeared, Michael Stone published an article in the G. Ernest Wright *Festschrift*, entitled “Lists of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature.”¹¹ It, too, was a landmark in the discussion, and it pointed to a glaring omission in Hanson’s articles. The apocalyptic writings had to be seen not simply in a stream of tradition that flowed from the prophets; they bore some of the characteristics of Israelite wisdom literature. The point had been made in 1960 by Gerhard von Rad,¹² whom Hanson cites only once in his book and not at all in his articles. Stone’s article, which was written before the appearance of Hanson’s book, contains a postscript that enters into explicit debate with Hanson’s almost exclusive focus on “apocalyptic eschatology.”¹³ The article itself discusses lists of revealed things found in 2 Baruch, 1 Enoch, and 4 Ezra and traces them back to similar lists in the sapiential literature. Two years later, in 1978, Stone followed through with another important article entitled “The Book of Enoch and Judaism in the Third Century B.C.E.”¹⁴ Drawing on the newly published Qumran Enoch fragments, and opposing almost consensual wisdom, Stone dated large parts of 1 Enoch prior to the Book of Daniel. Thus the definition of apocalypticism had to begin with not with Daniel, but with 1 Enoch, and one had to take seriously the sapiential character of much of the material in 1 Enoch.. That is, apocalyptic eschatology and its prophetic roots could no longer be privileged in discussions and definitions of apocalypticism. Cosmology, for one thing, had to be incorporated into the discussion. Moreover, with the early dating of parts of 1 Enoch, one had to completely rethink the shape of Jewish religious and intellectual life in the third century B.C.E. To change the metaphor yet another time, it was a new ball game. Of course it should not have been a *new* ball game, because the stirring had already begun at least with von Rad in 1960, and Jonathan Smith had written on “Wisdom and Apocalyptic” in a 1975 article that took a cross-cultural look at the social setting of the phenomenon.¹⁵ But then the mills of the gods grind slow.

As was appropriate, the 1970s closed with two other major events. The first was the publication of volume 14 of the journal *Semeia*, subtitled “Apocalypse: the Morphology of a Genre.”¹⁶ Under the general editorship of John Collins, who wrote its introduction, it presented the report of the Apocalypse Group of the SBL Genres Project. It was part of an answer to Klaus Koch’s polemical prayer. Sweeping across the range of apocalypses in antiquity, which included works of Jewish, Early Christian, Gnostic, Greek and Latin, Rabbinic and Mystical, and Persian origin, it created a “master paradigm” within which one could view the literary shape, and to some extent, the content of these works. It defined apocalypse as “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”¹⁷ After decades in which the noun/adjective “apocalyptic/k” was tossed about with all

manner of ill-defined theological and non-theological connotations, it was refreshing to learn that this entity actually had something to do with revelation, and it was methodologically comforting to see the term tied to specific texts. As an inductive, empirical study, the group's report was, and still is, a firm point from which to develop a definition of the apocalyptic phenomenon. From the footprints one could begin to describe the animal that made them.

In the same year, in August 1979, building on the scholarly business of the past decade, the University of Uppsala in Sweden hosted an International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, whose 800 page proceedings would be published in 1983 under the title *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*.¹⁸ Its purpose was to bring together a wide range of scholars who had written on the topic as it pertained to all parts of the Mediterranean World and the Middle East and as it crossed religious and cultural lines. The papers divided into three groups: "The Phenomenon of Apocalypticism," "The Literary genre of Apocalypses," and "The Sociology of Apocalypticism and the 'Sitz im Leben' of Apocalypses." The bulky volume remains an important resource for anyone venturing into this mine-laden territory, and the papers continue to be cited. While the sessions catalyzed a great deal of fertile discussion, in one interesting respect the Colloquium stumbled. The conveners had hoped that the group could arrive at a consensual definition of apocalypticism analogous to the one generated at the 1966 Messina Colloquium on Gnosticism.¹⁹ Alas, reflecting the complexity of the topic, no such consensus developed. Klaus Koch's plea for definitional clarity was heard, but in spite of the impressive array of seasoned scholars, or maybe because of it, the plea went unanswered.

3. The 1980's: Two New Handbooks

The early 1980's saw the publication of two new introductions to the apocalyptic literature and apocalypticism that complemented one another and supplanted Russell's 1964 book. The first of these by Christopher Rowland, entitled *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity*, appeared in 1982.²⁰ Although the book deserves detailed comment, I note only two points of relevance here. The first thing that struck me when I read it was the fact that Rowland devoted one chapter to "Apocalyptic and Eschatology," but a whole section of four chapters to "The Content of the Heavenly Mysteries." Along with this, in the first section "What is Apocalyptic?" the first chapter is entitled "Knowledge of the Divine Mysteries through Revelation." That is, for Rowland the heart of the apocalyptic phenomenon lay in its claims to revelation, and a good deal of this revelation was unrelated to eschatology. In keeping with this, Rowland spent a few pages comparing Daniel 7 and 1 Enoch 14 and coming to the conclusion that "it is difficult to continue to put Daniel at the forefront of the study of apocalyptic origins."²¹ A comparison of Russell's and Rowland's books indicates that some important progress had been made in the previous decade and a half.

Complementing Rowland's handbook was a book half its size, published two years later by the same press. Inevitably, John Collins would follow through on the genre study he had edited. Its title was *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*.²² Although its title suggests that like Rowland, he would cover the territory from Judaism to Christianity, in fact he provides only an eleven-page Epilogue compared to Rowland's two chapters adding up to one hundred pages. There is another important difference, which leads me to describe the books as complementary. As one might suppose, Collins begins with a chapter on the apocalyptic genre. The rest of the book, different from Rowland, is not synthetic and theoretical in character. Rather it is a text-by-text study of the apocalyptic

literature discussed in historical sequence, with a final chapter of the “Apocalyptic literature from the Diaspora in the Roman Period.” From start to finish, it is a textually oriented book about apocalypses, though indeed one can glean from it a good deal about the mentality that created the apocalypses. He describes the footprints but extrapolates from them some important information about the animals that made them. The plural is important here. To return to my earlier metaphor, his text-by-text treatment allows one to think historically about the trees and not be lost in the ill-defined expanse of the forest.

4. Summary

It’s time now to summarize and add an epilogue. The 1970s and 1980s witnesses the generating of a mass of scholarship on topics relating to apocalypticism. Perhaps the major catalyst for this was Klaus Koch’s battle cry for clarity. Two of his major points run like a thread through the discussion. (1) A focus on text led to one point of clarification. He had asked “What is Apocalyptic?” and we got some clarity on “what is an apocalypse.” (2) His emphasis on the historical setting of apocalypticism has been almost a *sine qua non* in the study of the apocalypses, not least in the many books and articles on individual texts—a topic I have not touched here. A second innovator—almost—was Michael Stone, who forced us to recognize that apocalypticism could not be reduced to eschatology, and that the apocalypses drew from the well of Israelite sapiential literature—something von Rad had argued a decade and a half earlier. Stone reinforced his point by telling us what we should have known, The Enoch materials, with their mix of prophetic/eschatological elements and wisdom forms, *topoi*, and traditions, had to take priority over Daniel in attempts to track the history of the apocalyptic literature.

5. Epilogue: Wisdom and Apocalypticism—a Topic for Concentrated Research

The currents of research that I have been tracking continued to blossom in the 1980's and early 1990's. In 1984 James VanderKam published his volume *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition*.²³ The book is remarkable for its balance in treating not only the eschatological, but also the cosmological material in 1 Enoch and for its discussion of the Mesopotamian roots of the Enochic tradition, which have their own sapiential dimensions. In 1993 John Collins, with his eye ever on you-know-what, wrote “Wisdom, Apocalypticism, and Generic Compatibility,” a contribution to the memorial volume for John Gammie.²⁴ A year earlier Randal Argall has defended his Iowa dissertation on *1 Enoch and Sirach: A Comparative Literary and Conceptual Analysis of the Themes of Revelation, Creation and Judgment*.²⁵ As he worked on that dissertation I had urged him to compare these two texts not as an apocalypse and a sapiential text, but as two wisdom texts.

To return to the autobiographical, it was Argall’s results in particular that led me to huddle at the 1993 Annual Meeting with Argall, Patrick Tiller—who had written his own dissertation on 1 Enoch²⁶—and Richard Horsley, the ever-ready protagonist for the study of social settings, in order to plan a request to establish an SBL consultation of Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism and Early Christianity. And thus we arrive at the endpoint toward which this presentation was aimed. In my paper for the first session of the consultation, I laid out “some points for discussion as they related to Wisdom and apocalypticism.”²⁷ The thesis of the paper was that the entities usually defined as sapiential and apocalyptic often cannot be separated from one another because both are the products of “wisdom circles” that are becoming

increasingly diverse in the Greco-Roman period. Thus apocalyptic texts contain elements that are at home in wisdom literature, and wisdom texts reflect growing interest in eschatology. Moreover, claims to revelation, inspiration, or divine enlightenment can be found in both "sets" of texts. In the paper I sketched out the issues as they relate to Tobit, Ben Sira, Baruch, 1 Enoch, Daniel, 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, indicating where there are different emphases in so-called "wisdom" and "apocalyptic" texts; pointed out some texts that complicate the categories (Wisdom of Solomon, and some Qumran scrolls); and I underscored the importance of placing the texts in their institutional and social settings.

So there you have it: two of the major threads of our narratives: wisdom in apocalypticism and the historical settings of the texts refined to include institutional and social settings. As to genre, we decided that since the term "apocalyptic" had been used so frequently to refer to the content of texts that were not apocalypses, we would investigate these non-apocalypses (mainly) to see whether they contained elements that were at home in apocalypses and, of course, texts that were generally agreed to be sapiential.

To what extent we have succeeded in our venture is a matter for all of you to decide when you read the collection of papers presently being edited by Lawrence Wills and Benjamin Wright.

1. R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913/1963).

2. H.H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic: A Study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to the Revelation* (.).

3. John J. Collins, "Apocalyptic Literature," in Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters* (Philadelphia: Fortress/Atlanta: Scholars Press) 349.

4. D. S. Russell, *The Method & Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM/Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964).

5. See, however, his comment on p. 9, where he sees apocalyptic as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments.

6. Klaus Koch, *Ratlos vor der Apokalyptik* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1970; *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* (SBT 2/22; Naperville: Allenson, 1972).

7. *Rediscovery*, 18-35.

8. Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

9. Paul D. Hanson, "Apocalypse, Genre," "Apocalypticism," *IBDSup* (1976) 27-34.

10. Ibid., 28.

11. Michael E. Stone, "Lists of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature," in Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and Patrick D. Miller, eds., *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976) 414-52.

12. See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols; New York: Harper and Row, 1965, translation of his 1960 work) 303-8.

13. Stone, Lists," 441-42.

14. Michael Edward Stone, "The Book of Enoch and Judaism in the Third Century B.C.E., *CBQ* 40 (1978) 479-92.

15. Jonathan Z. Smith, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic," in Birger A. Pearson, ed., *Religious Syncretism in Antiquity: Essays in Conversation with Geo Widengren* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975) 131-56, reprinted in Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion* (SJLA 23; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 66-87.

16. John J. Collins, ed., *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, *Semeia* 14 (1979).

17. Ibid., 9.

18. David Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983).

19. Ugo Bianchi, ed., *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo* (SHR12; Leiden: Brill, 1967).

20. Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

21. Ibid., 255-58.

22. John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984).

23. James C. VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition* (CBQMS; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1984).

24. John J. Collins, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism, and Generic Compatibility," in Leo G. Perdue, Bernard B. Scott, and William J. Wiseman, eds., *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).

25. Randal A. Argall, *1 Enoch and Sirach: A Comparative Literary and Conceptual Analysis of the Themes of Revelation, Creation and Judgment* (SBLEJL 8; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

26. Patrick A. Tiller, *A Commentary on the Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch* (SBLEJL 4; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

27. George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism: Some Points for Discussion," *SBLSP* 33 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994) 715-32, reprinted in Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck, *George W. E. Nickelsburg in Perspective: An Ongoing Dialogue of Learning* (JSJSup 80; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 267-87.