

THE APOCALYPTIC PATTERN

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What is an apocalypse; what are its distinguishing characteristics? This question is not readily answered, for as a rule the term has been defined so broadly and used so loosely that it has almost ceased to be distinctive. Indeed, even in those scholarly works where it has been defined somewhat adequately the writer usually applies it without too much reference to his own definition. As a result prophetic books like Joel and Zechariah 9-11 are commonly included with Daniel and Isaiah 24-27 as apocalypses; Jubilees and the Testament of Abraham with I Enoch and II Baruch; and the Shepherd of Hermas and the so-called Apocalypses of Peter and of Paul with Revelation. This lack of discrimination may also account for the attachment of the apocalyptic label to the concept of the Kingdom of God as proclaimed by John the Baptist and Jesus.

When the term "apocalyptic" is applied to works as different in character as these just mentioned the result is quite confusing. This confusion is unnecessary, for actually apocalypticism is a unique and distinctive concept. Since apocalypticism has had a prominent place in the Jewish-Christian tradition it is important to define and use the concept in such a way that it may be readily recognized and distinguished from other concepts like the prophetic hope, the Kingdom of God, and the general fate of the righteous and wicked in the next life.

It is with this need in mind that I propose to define and delimit the term "apocalypse" so that it will denote but one eschatological pattern, but this one distinctive and unmistakable. The definition which is to be given will not be arbitrary; instead it will be based upon a survey of the entire range of Jewish

and Christian apocalyptic writings. The list is long. It includes familiar works like Daniel, Revelation, IV Ezra, I Enoch, and II Baruch. But it also includes many more that are less well known, such as the Ascension of Isaiah, the Apocalypse of Elias, an old Armenian form of the Anti-Christ saga from a life of St. Nerses, the seventh book of Lactantius' "Divine Institutes," and the Apocalypse of Pseudo-John, to mention a few. Furthermore, definitions in dictionaries, encyclopedias, hand-books, and commentaries have been consulted with profit. However, the great variations provided by these definitions, as well as the difficulties encountered by some of the writers in applying their own definitions, indicate the need for further exploration.

As a result of this investigation, the following definition, which is somewhat clumsy since it has been thought best to limit it to a single sentence, is proposed: Apocalypticism is the eschatological belief that this present evil and corrupt world, now under the control of Satan, will soon be ended and destroyed, along with Satan and his demonic and human agents, by the direct intervention of God, heretofore transcendent; who thereupon will establish a new and perfect age and a new and perfect world, both under his immediate control, in which the righteous from among the living and the resurrected dead will enjoy a blessed, righteous existence without end.

This is the apocalyptic pattern; these are its primary parts. It is simple, distinctive, unmistakable; there is no other concept, eschatological or otherwise, which corresponds to it. Subtract one element from it, and the pattern is materially changed if not destroyed. Interweave secondary fea-

tures as you will, as has been done in all apocalypses to some extent, and with abandon in others, yet the underlying pattern, though overlaid and obscured, is not greatly affected or altered:

The apocalyptic pattern may become clearer if its component parts are considered separately. First of all, it should be noted that apocalypticism is always eschatological, that is, it is concerned with the last things, with death and the end of this world and with existence in the next life. Since this is true, it follows that all non-eschatological writings, including certain Old Testament prophecies like Joel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah 9-14, should be excluded from the apocalyptic category. Likewise, since the concept of the Kingdom of God, which is an outgrowth of prophecy, is essentially non-eschatological, is concerned with this life and not the next, with this present age and not the future, it too should no longer be called an apocalyptic expectation, as it all too frequently has been. While apocalypticism is always eschatological, not all eschatology is apocalyptic. For example, the so-called Apocalypses of Peter and of Paul are eschatological visions of the fate of the wicked in the next life, but this eschatological feature fails to justify us in listing these works, which differ so markedly from Daniel and Revelation, among the apocalypses.

To turn to another basic feature, apocalypticism is always dualistic. Its dualism is not that of spirit and matter, soul and flesh, such as characterized Orphic and Gnostic speculation, although to be sure Paul did combine this type with his apocalypticism. Instead, apocalyptic dualism is posited, in the first instance, upon a belief in two opposing supernatural forces, both personal and cosmic in character, the one good, the other evil. In Jewish and Christian apocalypses the good force is called God, whereas the evil is called

Satan or by some equivalent term. Satan is not merely an agent of God, and the tempter of man, as in earlier Jewish thought. Instead, he is the active opponent of God and with his demonic and human agents is the enemy and oppressor of the righteous. In Persian speculation (apparently the ultimate source of this type of dualism) Ahri-man, the god of evil, was equal in power to Ormazd, the good god, as darkness opposes but equals light. However, in both Jewish and Christian apocalypses Satan is clearly inferior to God, who permits him to hold sway for a limited period of time. In some apocalypses this dualism is more marked than in others; nevertheless it is basic to them all, being assumed when it is not stated explicitly.

This dualism of two supernatural powers extends to a belief in two ages, the present one under the control of Satan, and consequently evil, temporal, and limited, and the future under God's control and therefore perfectly righteous, timeless, and eternal. It is either stated or assumed that the first age was initially good and under the governance of God (as was supposedly the case at the beginning of human history in the Garden of Eden), but for some reason, usually not explained but sometimes related to the Fall, God abandoned it to Satan and his evil agents. Under their rule it became progressively more and more evil and corrupt, until at the present time it has reached the very depths of evil, corruption, and wickedness.

Intimately associated with this concept of two ages is that of two worlds, the present and the world to come; indeed, the Greek word *aion* (aeon) may connote both age and world. The present world is the visible cosmos, the earth and the skies above. It, like the present age, was originally good (cf. the Garden of Eden), but coming under the control of Satan, with God transcendent dwelling in glory in the

highest heaven, it too became thoroughly permeated with evil, wickedness, and corruption. However, in the future age it will be replaced by a perfect world which has pre-existed in heaven in keeping with astrological speculation. Or, in some apocalypses the next world will be this present one thoroughly purged and purified of all evil and corruption. In still others the concept of a new world is combined with that of a renewed one. But in any case, in the new and perfect age the world will be perfect and free from all evil, far different from the present.

It will be seen by now, if not before, that apocalypticism is the result of an earnest attempt to explain the age-long problem of evil. As a result of the temporary abdication of God who for the present is supra-mundane, leaving this age and this world under the control of Satan, the righteous are sorely afflicted and suffer most grievously. Foremost among their afflictions, they are oppressed, persecuted, and even killed by the unrighteous, that is, by the heathen, the human followers and worshipers of Satan, who with his demons inspires and aids them in their evil works. Since both this age and this world are under Satan's domination there is little that the righteous can do, of themselves, to improve or to alleviate their desperate situation. In so far as the present evil age and world are concerned they are powerless and their condition is quite hopeless. There is but one thing that they can do, and that is to be faithful to God and loyal to their religion, awaiting his divine pleasure.

At this point it is important to note that in apocalypticism the criterion of righteousness is not ethical and moral behavior, which is seldom mentioned or referred to. To be sure, a highly ethical section is included in II Enoch, but this is a noticeable departure from the norm. Like-wise, Paul combines ethical teaching with his apocalypticism,

but this, too, is exceptional. Instead, apocalyptic righteousness consists in loyalty to God and to the ritualistic requirements of the cultus. For example, in Daniel the test of righteousness is complete conformity to the dietary laws and absolute refusal to participate in idolatrous practices; similarly, in Revelation the criterion is unquestioned loyalty to Christ, which is proven by refusal to worship the emperor. There is a minimum of ethical and moral teaching in either of these works, a feature that is characteristic of most apocalypses.

But to return to the plight of the righteous, hopeless as their situation in this age and in this world appears to be, actually they are not bereft of hope. On the contrary, they are promised that God, now transcendent in the highest heaven, will come to their rescue in the very near future. Trusting in his power and justice, and, we must admit, in his wrath and vengeance as well, they eagerly look forward to the time when he will intervene in their behalf. Clinging to this hope they are able to endure their sufferings and afflictions with patience and fortitude. Indeed, it is this belief in the direct intervention of God in the immediate future which gives apocalypticism its hold upon people in times of distress, crisis, and persecution.

Accordingly, the righteous ardently expect that God and his angelic hosts soon will engage Satan and his demonic forces in a cosmic struggle. This conflict will begin in the heavens, but will culminate on the earth. During the course of this struggle the righteous will be interested spectators, indeed, they may at times suffer greatly, but at no time will they be active participants. In the end, which will be marked by cosmic and terrestrial disasters and calamities, God and his forces will triumph over and conquer Satan with his demons and his heathen followers.

They will all be taken captive, punished, and destroyed.

With the defeat of Satan his age will come to a sudden and catastrophic end, to be succeeded by the new age in which there will be no evil, no corruption, for God and his righteousness will rule eternally. Furthermore, this present evil world, permeated as it is with evil and corruption, will be destroyed, to make way for the new and perfect world, the New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven. Or, in some cases, this world will be thoroughly purged of all Satanic influences and restored to its original righteousness and goodness. In the new age God will no longer be transcendent in heaven; on the contrary he will be immanent, directly in control of this world and dwelling with men upon the earth. Quite fittingly, the righteous who survive the catastrophic end of this age, together with the righteous resurrected from the dead, will live in eternal blessedness, joy, peace, and righteousness in the new age upon the new or renewed earth. This will be their perfect and timeless reward for their loyalty to God.

This, then, is the apocalyptic pattern, the apocalyptic hope. With the righteous who are in distress, oppressed, and persecuted as the point of reference, it combines a popular explanation for the existence of evil with a dramatic and highly satisfactory solution. Although relatively simple, the pattern is unique and distinctive. It should be readily distinguished from the prophetic expectations of the Old Testament, from the Day of Jahveh, from the Messianic hope, or from the Kingdom of God, despite superficial similarities. Furthermore, there should be little difficulty in differentiating it from eschatological descriptions of the fate of the righteous and the wicked in the next life.

In connection with this pattern it is important to note that no one element in its composition is of itself neces-

sarily apocalyptic. For example, the dualism in which two supernatural forces, one good and the other evil, are in opposition to each other may be found in areas of religious thinking which are decidedly non-apocalyptic. The same may be said of the other component parts of the pattern: the dualism of two ages and of two worlds, the cosmic triumph in which the powers of right triumph over the forces of evil, and the resurrection of the righteous to a blessed existence. Not one of these singly is "per se" apocalyptic; in fact each is frequently found in non-apocalyptic sources and some in sources which are not even eschatological. It is only when these various elements are combined in the distinctive pattern described above that the term apocalyptic may be applied to them, if the word is to possess any distinctiveness and meaning. And, to repeat an earlier observation, if one of these primary elements is subtracted from the pattern it is materially changed, if not, indeed, destroyed.

Up to now we have been discussing the essential elements of the pattern. The reader may be wondering why no mention has been made of the visionary feature which gives the concept its name, for the word "apocalypse" is but the transliteration of a Greek word for vision or revelation. The accepted terminology reflects the widespread view, both ancient and modern, that an apocalypse is of necessity a vision or series of visionary experiences. However, this is not always the case, for there are some apocalypses, like the seventh book of Lactantius' "Divine Institutes" and the old Armenian Anti-Christ saga, which are not presented in visionary form. Likewise, although Paul is a confessed visionary, it is significant that he at no time attributes his apocalyptic predictions to any visionary experience.

Nevertheless, the belief that an apocalypse is of necessity a vision is so

widely held that a number of purported visions predicting the future, or describing the heavenly regions and their inhabitants, or depicting the fate of the righteous and wicked in the next life are mistakenly called apocalypses. Among these so called are Ezekiel; the Testament of Abraham; Paul's vision of the third heaven (II Cor. 12:1-4); the Shepherd of Hermas; the Apocalypse of Peter and the Apocalypse of Paul; the Orphic vision of Er in Plato's "Republic;" and the similar vision of Thespesius related by Plutarch. These and other visions have been termed apocalyptic, even by careful students, despite their marked divergence from the true apocalyptic pattern in most particulars.

Admittedly, despite the exceptions already noted, most apocalypses are purported visionary experiences. This characteristic, however, should not cause us to include visions as an essential element of the apocalyptic pattern. For actually the vision forms no part of the religious concept called apocalyptic; it is merely the form in which this concept is usually expressed, a device by which the apocalyptic predictions are given supernatural authority. Other forms of expression, such as prophecy apart from visionary experiences, or history in the guise of prophecy, have also been used. Accordingly, the **content** of the apocalyptic concept is essential to the pattern; but the **form** by which it is given expression is not to be considered as an element in the pattern.

Likewise, most apocalypses are pseudonymous, that is, they claim to be written by someone other than the actual writer himself, being attributed to some patriarch, prophet, or saint from the past. However, some exceptions, notably the seventh book of Lactantius' "Divine Institutes" which is written in his own name and presented on his own authority, might be mentioned. Pseudepigraphy is an old but

effective literary device for obtaining sanction and authority for an apocalyptic prediction. Like the purported visions, it is a form for expressing the apocalyptic concept which should not be mistaken for an element of the pattern itself.

In this connection, the pseudonymous nature of most apocalypses has a direct bearing upon the purported visions in these writings which has apparently escaped notice. It is a fact that the visionary experiences described in most of the apocalypses have caused many students to assume that their authors were visionaries and ecstasies. For example, Charles, an acknowledged authority, affirms that the knowledge which the apocalyptic writer obtained, like that of the prophet, came "through visions, trances, and through spiritual and yet not unconscious communion with God—the highest form of inspiration." Actually the reality of these purported visions may be questioned on various grounds. For one, the visions frequently show dependence upon literary and traditional sources, as is so obviously the case with some in the book of Revelation. Further, the apocalypses containing these visions are usually conscious literary productions, revealing considerable skill and artistry on the part of the writer.

To these objections I wish to add still another, based upon the pseudonymous character of these apocalypses: Why would a true visionary or ecstatic assign his own visions to someone else rather than presenting them on his own authority as an inspired individual? To be explicit, why did the writer of Daniel, if he were indeed a visionary, attribute the visions described in his book to someone else, instead of describing them as his own experiences? The answer, I believe, is rather obvious: the writer of Daniel, whoever and whatever he was, was not a visionary—otherwise he would have claimed the marvelous visions in his book for him-

self, thereby receiving the prestige which was accorded a visionary in ancient times. His use of the literary device of pseudepigraphy in presenting the visions in his apocalypse clearly indicates that these visions were not actual experiences, but were themselves a literary device which proved to be quite effective in gaining sanction for the apocalyptic message.

In passing it should be emphasized that even if these apocalyptic visions were actual experiences — and quite possibly there have been ecstasies who had apocalyptic visions — this would be no testimony to their divine nature and supernatural authority; for psychological studies of visions by Morton Prince and other scientists have demonstrated that visions have a wholly human, psychological (and at times pathological) origin, and are not at all the result of divine or supernatural inspiration.

To resume the discussion of the apocalyptic pattern itself, while it is basically simple, most of the apocalypses seem to be quite complex; for their writers have usually interwoven a number of secondary elements into the basic pattern and have overlaid it with other features. This has served to make most apocalypses appear quite complicated in their structure; it has also added variety, color, mystery, and vividness to the whole, without altering materially, if at all, the underlying pattern. Unfortunately, however, these secondary features which are not an essential element of the apocalyptic pattern are frequently called apocalyptic through association. It may be well to note that their presence in apocalypses does not make them apocalyptic in character; in fact, a number of these added features are more frequently found in non-apocalyptic writings than in apocalypses.

For example, we may say that the presence or absence of the Messiah in an apocalypse is not a determinant. To be sure, the Messiah (i. e., Christ) is

found in all Christian apocalypses, but he does not always appear in Jewish apocalypses. Thus, in one major source used in II Baruch there is a Messiah, but in another important source included in the same work he is wholly absent. This inconsistency did not disturb the author, but it serves to make II Baruch difficult reading. Actually, the concept of the Messiah entered Jewish expectations before the introduction of apocalypticism — and was at times associated with prophetic hopes and with the concept of the Kingdom of God, although not a necessary adjunct of either. The Christology of the Christians made the introduction of Christ into the apocalypses imperative, but unless we make the Christian apocalypses the norm it is necessary to exclude the Messiah from consideration as an essential element of the apocalyptic pattern. Accordingly, the Messianic kingdom, although found in a few works like IV Ezra and Revelation, cannot be included as a necessary part of the pattern. This concept existed apart from apocalypticism, but in time was introduced into some apocalypses along with the Messiah.

A similar observation should be made concerning the Anti-Christ, or Anti-Messiah as this demonic personage should be called since he is present in some non-Christian apocalypses. Although the belief in the Anti-Messiah developed in areas or speculation that were non-apocalyptic, indeed not even eschatological, as a foil or anti-type of the Messiah, he, too, was superimposed upon the apocalyptic pattern without becoming a part of it. A similar situation developed with the legend of Gog and Magog, which at times is conflated with the Anti-Messiah myth. As is well known, it originated in the account of Gog of Magog in Ezekiel 39, a prophecy it will be noted, and not an apocalypse. It was developed in non-apocalyptic sources, such as the Aramaic Targums and the Samaritan Asatir, but it also

found its way into a number of apocalypses, so that it has been customary to refer to this legend as apocalyptic. However, it, too, is a secondary feature which has been added to the pattern.

Other secondary features found in some apocalypses but missing from others are: the judgment scene, in which the righteous are acquitted and the wicked convicted; detailed descriptions of the punishment of the wicked in the next life; the conversion of the Gentiles; strange and bizarre symbolism; elaborate angelology; and stereotyped lists of the so-called Messianic woes. These are all to be found in non-apocalyptic sources — indeed all but the first two are frequently included in works which are not even eschatological. Unlike the primary elements, they may be added to or subtracted from an apocalypse without affecting the basic pattern.

To summarize, there is an apocalyptic pattern which is unique and unmistakable. It is composed of a number of elements, not one of which by itself can be termed apocalyptic. In fact, some of these are not even eschatological in their character. However, in combination they are both eschatological and apocalyptic. First of all, apocalypticism is an eschatological concept. Basic to it is a dualism of two opposing forces, one the power of good, called God, and the other the power of evil usually termed Satan. Likewise there is the dualism of two ages. The first, originally good, is now evil, since it has come under the control of Satan. The second or future age will be wholly good, since it will be completely subject to God. Likewise, there is another dualism of two worlds, the first evil since it is subject to Satan, but the second perfectly good, for it will be governed by God. Both this age and this world have become progressively evil until at present they have reached the very nadir of evil and corruption.

Consequently, the righteous are suffering most grievously, for they are oppressed, tormented, tried, and persecuted by Satan and his followers, both supernatural and human. However, the righteous are encouraged to remain faithful and loyal to God, for they ardently believe that he will intervene in their behalf and come to their aid very soon. For following a cosmic conflict ending upon the earth in which he and his hosts will defeat and destroy Satan and his armies, both demonic and human, God will bring this evil age and this corrupt world to a sudden and catastrophic end. Thereupon he will inaugurate a new age and a new world, both of them perfect and free from evil, since they will be under his direct and immediate control. Finally, the righteous, both those who survive and have been resurrected from the dead, will enjoy a blessed, perfect, and timeless existence as a reward for their faithfulness and patience.

In conclusion, apocalypticism depends upon a theology of transcendence, upon a dualistic belief, and upon a supernaturalistic world view. However, the apocalypticist believes that in the next age and in the next world God will be immanent — that he will no longer be transcendent and supra-mundane. This is the "summum bonum" for the apocalyptic writer, this the glorious prospect which he envisions. For as the writer of Revelation promises, in the new age God's dwelling will be on the new earth with men and he will live with them. But do we need to wait for a new age for this to occur? Why may we not believe that God is immanent here and now, that he is in and of this world in which we ourselves are living? This seems to be the most reasonable, most logical, most scientific alternative to the dualism which is basic to apocalypticism, which in this period of crisis is in the ascendancy.