DAVID E. AUNE

Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
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Collected Essays

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To Charlie

Preface

The twenty essays collected here were published from 1981 through 2006 and center, as the title indicates, on the themes of apocalypticism, prophecy and magic in early Christianity. The three essays on aspects of Christian prophecy ("Charismatic Exegesis in Early Judaism and Early Christianity," "Christian Prophecy and the Messianic Status of Jesus," and "The *Odes of Solomon* and Early Christian Prophecy," are all studies that discuss in detail some of the special problems and issues that arose in connection with my monograph, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), translated into Italian by Oscar Ianovitz as *La Profezia nel Primo Cristianesimo e il Mondo Mediterraneo Antico*, Biblioteca di storia e storiografia dei tempi biblici, 10 (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1996). My interest in early Christian prophecy was piqued while a member of the Seminar on Christian Prophecy of the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar, which met annually for a five-years during the mid-1970's, chaired first by Prof. M. Eugene Boring and later by myself. My initial interest in the Apocalypse of John was indeed sparked by an interest in the extent to which that Christian apocalyptic work was a witness to early Christian prophecy. The lion's share of the following essays, fifteen to be exact, center on aspects of my studies on the Apocalypse of John with some special forays into particular aspects of Jewish and Christian apocalypticism. Most of these essays were written in connection with a sixteen-year project that unexpectly grew into a three-volume commentary on the Greek text of the Apocalypse: *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52A (Waco: Word Books, 1997); *Revelation 6–19*, Word Biblical Commentary 52B, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Publishers, 1998), and *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary 52C (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Publishers, 1998). This work was dedicated to two of my mentors and their wives, Peter and Inger Borgen and Martin and Marianne Hengel. Research on the commentary on the Apocalypse began in earnest during 1982–83 (at that point I was a Professor of New Testament at Saint Xavier College, Chicago), when I was named a visiting Fulbright professor at the University of Trondheim in Norway (the land of my forbears). My host at the University of Trondeim was Professor Peder Borgen, whose friendship, scholarship and enthusiasm made our stay there both profitable and memorable. Toward the conclusion of the commentary project (while on the Faculty of Theology at Loyola University of Chicago), I was the happy recipient of an Alexander von Humboldt Forschungspreis, making it

possible to spend a year in Tübingen, Germany, in 1994–95, where my host was Professor Martin Hengel and his able wissenschaftliche Assistent, Jörg Frey (now a professor of New Testament on the Protestant faculty in Munich). The vast and detailed knowledge of Professor Hengel in the fields early Judaism and early Christianity, together with the impressive resources of the Theologicum at the University of Tübingen made this a very productive year indeed.

Oh yes, magic. Just two articles are devoted to the issue of magic and early Christianity ("The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic" and "Magic in Early Christianity"). While I'm not quite sure how my interest in ancient magic began, I have continued to maintain an interest in this arcane subject and have written a number of dictionary articles on related issues and have given a number of lectures on various aspects of the subject. A major current project closely related to this interest in ancient magic is a commentary on the *Testament of Solomon*, a second or third century CE Christian composition with strong links to early Judaism and loaded with magical traditions. This project is under contract to Verlag Walter de Gruyer (Berlin and New York) and will be part of their series called "Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature." While I have written many other pieces on aspects of ancient magic, many of these were for reference works and are too technical for this collection of essays (e.g., articles on "Jeu," "Iao," "Jesus im Zauber," and "Kreis" for the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*).

Each of the articles included in this volume have been published previously, with the exception of "Revelation 17: A Lesson in Remedial Reading," which I have given under various titles as a lecture. While the articles have all been reformatted to produce a homogeneous collection, and apart from the correction of a number of errors, they remain substantially unrevised. I have requested and received permission to republish the rest of the articles from the various publishing houses that own the copyrights to these articles. A list of the articles and their original sources follows.

"Understanding Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic" was first published by the Lutheran journal *Word & World* 25 (2005) 233–45 and the editor has granted me permission to republish the article.

"From the Ideal Past to the Imaginary Future: The Theme of Restoration in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," written with the assistance of Eric Stewart, appeared in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, ed. James Scott (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 147–177. Koninklijke Brill N.V. has granted permission to reprint this article.

"The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre" originally appeared in *Semeia*, 36 (1986), 65–96., and the Society of Biblical Literature have given me permission to republish this article.

"Following the Lamb: Discipleship in the Apocalypse" was first published on pp. 269–84 in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. R.N.

Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), and the W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company has granted permission to reprint this article.

"Qumran and the Book of Revelation" originally appeared in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, ed. P. W. Flint and J. C. Vanderkam (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 2.622–48, and Koninklijke Brill N. V. has granted permission to reprint this article.

"The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John" was published in *Biblical Research*, 18 (1983), 5–26, and the editor of that journal has granted permission to reprint the article.

"Apocalypse Renewed: An Intertextual Reading of the Apocalypse of John" appeared on pp. 43–70 in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation,* edited by David L. Barr (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), and the Society of Biblical Literature has granted me permission to reprint this article.

"The Apocalypse of John and Palestinian Jewish Apocalyptic" has just appeared in *Neotestamentica* 40 (2006) 1–33, and the editor, Jonathan Draper, has given his permission to reprint it.

"The Social Matrix of the Apocalypse of John" was initially published by *Biblical Research*, 26 (1981), 16–32, and the editor has granted permission to reprint it.

"Stories of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John" was published in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 292–319, and the W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company has granted permission to reprint the article.

"The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches (Rev 2–3)" appeared in *New Testament Studies*, 36 (1990), 182–204, and the current editor, Judith Lieu, has given permission to reprint this article, on behalf of the copyright holder, Cambridge University Press.

"Revelation 5 as an Ancient Egyptian Enthronement Scene? The Origin and Development of a Scholarly Myth" was published on pp. 85–91 in *Kropp og Sjel: Festkrift til Olav Hognestad.* (ed. Theodor Jørgensen, Dagfinn Rian and Ole Gunnar Winsnes; Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2000), and permission was obtained from Tapir Akademisk Forlag to reprint this article.

"The Prophetic Circle of John of Patmos and the Exegesis of Revelation 22:16" was originally published in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 37 (1989), 103–116, and reprinted in S. E. Porter and C. A. Evans (eds.), *The Johannine Writings*, Biblical Seminar 32 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). Permission is granted by Sage Publications Ltd. to reprint this article for non-exclusive world rights in the English language only.

"God and Time in the Apocalypse of John" originally appeared in *The Forgotten God: The God of Jesus Christ in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of Paul J. Achtemeier on the Occasion of his Seventy-fifth Birthday*, ed. Frank J.

Matera and A. Andrew Das (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), © 2002 Westminster John Knox Press. Used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press.

"Charismatic Exegesis in Early Judaism and Early Christianity" first appeared on pp. 126–150 in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation*, ed. J.H. Charlesworth and C.A. Evans (Sheffield: Sheffield University, 1993) and permission to reprint this article was granted by the copyright holder, Continuum International.

"Christian Prophecy and the Messianic Status of Jesus" was first printed in J.H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 404–422. Fortress Press, the copyright holder, granted permission to reprint this article.

"The Odes of Solomon and Early Christian Prophecy" first appeared in *New Testament Studies*, 28 (1982), 435–60, and permission to reprint the article was given by Dr. Judith Lieu, the current editor on behalf of the copyright holder, Cambridge University Press.

"The Apocalypse of John and Graeco-Roman Revelatory Magic" initially published in *New Testament Studies*, 33 (1987), 481–501, is reprinted by permission of the current editor, Dr. Judith Lieu, on behalf of Cambridge University Press, the copyright holder.

"Magic in Early Christianity" was published in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, edited by H. Temporini and W. Haase, Part II, 23/2 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), pp. 1507–1557, and is reprinted by permission.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to a number of people who have made the present collection of essays possible. Two graduate assistants in the PhD program in Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity at the University of Notre Dame, Ardea Caviggiola Russo and Matthew Gordley scanned and corrected earlier articles for which I had no computer files. Prof. Dr. Jörg Frey, editor of Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, has been encouraging me for several years to produce a collection of my essays on apocalypticism and the Apocalypticism, and I think him for his encouragement and friendship.

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Table of Contents

Understanding Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic

1. Defining Apocalyptic

Francis Ford Coppola's disturbing film "Apocalypse Now" (1979), re-released in 2001 under the title "Apocalypse Now Redux" (with previously cut footage restored) is a frightening, surrealistic epic enabling viewers to experience the obscene violence that characterized the war in Vietnam. Coppola's juxtaposition of the term "apocalypse" with the adverb "now" is what Biblical scholars have called "realized eschatology," that is, events properly belonging to the *end* of the world are paradoxically experienced as *present*. "Apocalypse Now" implies that the appalling and obscene horrors experienced by those caught up in the conflict in Vietnam were at least a partially realization of the even more cataclysmic and violent eschatological events narrated (for example) in the Apocalypse (or Revelation) of John. Recently, journalists have repeatedly characterized the Tsunami disaster in the countries surrounding the Indian Ocean as "a catastrophe of *Biblical* proportions." Here the adjective "Biblical" (meaning "awesome"), is clearly a surrogate for "apocalyptic," alluding to the kind of massive destruction predicted by the Hebrew prophets and narrated in the eschatological visions of the Revelation of John.

The term "apocalyptic," an adjective functioning as a noun, is synonymous with the noun "apocalypticism," and both are transliterated forms of the Greek adjective ἀποκαλύπτικος, meaning "revelatory," while "apocalypse" is a transliteration of the Greek noun ἀποκάλυψις, "unveiling, revelation." The English words "reveal" and "revelation" are transliterations of the Latin verb *revelare* and noun *revelatio*. Apocalyptic or apocalypticism is a slippery term used in at least three different ways: (1) as a type of literature, (2) as a type of eschatology, and (3) as a type of collective behavior. Each of these categories needs some explanation.

Apocalyptic as Literature

The term "apocalypse" has become a common designation for a type of supernatural visionary literature depicting the imminent and catastrophic end of the world. "Apocalypse" was borrowed from the opening verse of the Revelation of John: "The revelation [the Greek term is ἀποκάλυψις or "apocalypse"] of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take

place." This opening sentence, intended by the author to describe his work, was later shortened into the title found in modern Bibles: "The Revelation of John," or "The Apocalypse of John." Even though John the Apocalyptist used the term "apocalypse" to refer to the *content* of his book, i.e., what God had revealed to him, by the mid-19th century, German scholars such as Friedrich Lücke (1832) used the term "apocalypse" as a designation for an ancient type or genre of early Jewish and early Christian literature similar to Daniel and the Revelation of John. The book of Daniel (actually, only Dan 7–12) is the only apocalypse found in the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible, but many apocalypses were written in early Judaism, including *1 Enoch* (really a composite of five separate apocalyptic works), *2 Enoch*, *2 Baruch*, the *Sibylline Oracles* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (to name a few of the more important ones).[1] In addition to the Revelation of John, early Christians wrote several other apocalypses, including Hermas' *The Shepherd* (early 2nd cent. CE), the *Apocalypse of Peter* (before 150 CE), the *Ascension of Isaiah* (late 2nd cent. CE) and the *Apocalypse of Paul* (mid-3rd cent.CE).[2]

How can we describe the literary form of the typical apocalypse? New Testament scholars have debated this question endlessly during the last generation. With David Hellholm, it is helpful to think in terms of a literary form or genre under three aspects: form, content and function (e.g., form: a chair has four legs a seat and a back; content: it is typically made of wood or metal; function: it is used for sitting).[3] In *form*, an apocalypse is a first-person recital of revelatory visions or dreams, framed by a description of the circumstances of the revelatory experience, and structured to emphasize the central revelatory message. In *content*, an apocalypse involves the communication of a transcendent, often eschatological perspective on human experience. Finally, apocalypses typically have a threefold *function*: they legitimate the message through the appeal to transcendent authority by the author (i.e., it is from God), they create a literary surrogate of the author's revelatory experience for readers or hearers (i.e., God speaks to the modern reader just as he spoke to John), and they motivate the recipients to modify their views and behaviors in conformity with transcendent perspectives (i.e., they demand changed behavior).[4]

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[1] Convenient English translations of nearly all the extant Jewish apocalypses can be found in the first volume of James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1983–85).

[2] Convenient English translations of many early Christian apocalypses can be found in J.K. Elliott (ed.), *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation based on M.R. James* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), and in the second volume of Wilhelm Schneemelcher (ed.), *New Testament Apocrypha*, translated by R. McL. Wilson (2 vols.; Cambridge: James Clark; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991–92).

[3] David Hellholm, "The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John," *Semeia* 36 (1986) 13–64.

[4] David E. Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre," *Semeia* 36 (1986) 65–96 Reprinted below, pp. 39–65.

All extant Jewish apocalypses are pseudonymous, that is, they were written by unknown Jewish authors using the names of ancient Israelite or Jewish worthies as pen names, attributing them to such figures as Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Ezra and Baruch. Only the two earliest Christian apocalypses, the Revelation of the John and *The Shepherd* by Hermas were written using the names of the actual authors. Later Christian apocalypses, such as the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Apocalypse of Paul* reverted to the earlier Jewish practice of pseudonymity. Why use pseudonyms? Some have suggested that the authors borrowed the credentials of ancient Israelite figures in order to insure that people would read their books at a time (2nd cent. BCE through the 1st cent. CE) when there was stiff competition from the books that wound up in the Hebrew canon of Scripture. Others have suggested that they identified themselves in an almost mystical way with the ancient Israelite whose identity they assumed.

Finally, apocalypses can be broadly characterized as *protest literature*. That is, they typically represent the perspective of an oppressed minority. It is difficult to reconstruct the social situations within which many apocalypses were produced because the use of pseudonyms and symbolism masked the specific social and political setting within which they wrote. With the Revelation of John and *The Shepherd* of Hermas, however, interpreters have an easier task, since both were written by specific named authors addressing specific situations. The language of persecution pervades the Revelation of John, suggesting to many that it was written either in the late 60's (during the Neronian persecution), or during the late 90's (during the Domitianic persecution). Research carried out during the last thirty years, however, has suggested a radically different understanding of the persecution issue. The persecution under Nero, terrible as it was, was restricted to Rome during the aftermath of the great fire of 64 CE, for which Christians were blamed (Tacitus *Annals* 15.44). The persecution under Domitian, under closer historical scrutiny, turned out to have been a myth fanned much later by retrospective Christian imagination.[5] Adela Yarbro Collins argued convincingly that the social situation in which the Revelation of John was written was that of a *perceived* (in contrast to a *real*) crisis.[6] Pressure exerted against Christians in Roman Asia toward the end of the 1st and the beginning of the 2nd cent. CE, is now recognized as having been random, local and sporadic (i.e., they were victims of terrorism), but not an official persecution of the type that occurred much later under the emperor Decius (249–51 CE). However, Christians in Roman Asia can be forgiven if they thought that the roof was about to fall in on them. The Revelation of John reflects that fear, linked to powerful symbols of the past used as types of the imminent eschatological persecution (e.g., the

[5] Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[6] Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 84–110.

figure of Antichrist was based in part on tyrants of the past such as Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid ruler responsible for the religious persecution of Jews in the 160's BCE).

Apocalyptic Eschatology

"Apocalyptic eschatology" is the narrative theology characteristic of apocalypses, centering in the belief that (1) the present world order, regarded as both evil and oppressive, is under the temporary control of Satan and his human accomplices, and (2) that this present evil world order will shortly be destroyed by God and replaced by a new and perfect order corresponding to Eden before the fall. During the present evil age, the people of God are an oppressed minority who fervently expect God, or his specially chosen agent the Messiah, to rescue them. The transition between the old and the new ages will be introduced with a final series of battles fought by the people of God against the human allies of Satan. The outcome is never in question, however, for the enemies of God are predestined for defeat and destruction. The inauguration of the new age will begin with the arrival of God or his accredited agent to judge the wicked and reward the righteous, and will be concluded by the re-creation or transformation of the earth and the heavens. This theological narrative characterized segments of early Judaism from ca. 200 BCE to ca. 200 CE, a period when they were oppressed by foreign occupations, including the Greek kingdom of the Seleucids and then by the Romans. Knowledge of cosmic secrets and the imminent eschatological plans of God were thought to be revealed to apocalyptists through dreams and visions, some real, some fictional and some a combination of both. The apocalypses they wrote were primarily accounts of these visions, with the meaning made clear to the readers through use of the literary device of an "interpreting angel," who explained everything to the seer through a question-and-answer dialogue.

"Eschatology" has frequently been distinguished from "apocalyptic," and this distinction needs explanation. Eschatology is a term that began to be used in the 19th century as a label for that aspect of systematic theology which dealt with the future of the individual (death, resurrection, judgment, eternal life, heaven and hell), and topics relating to corporate or national eschatology, that is the future of the Jewish people (i.e., the coming of the Messiah, the great tribulation, the resurrection, the final judgment, the temporary Messianic kingdom, the re-creation of the universe) or the Christian church (all of these topics were adopted, yet at the same time subordinated to the hope of the Parousia or Second Coming of Christ).

A distinction has often been made between "prophetic eschatology" and "apocalyptic eschatology," underscoring continuities as well as changes in Israelite-Jewish eschatological expectation. "Prophetic eschatology" is regarded as an optimistic perspective anticipating God's eventual restoration of the original

pristine conditions of human history by acting through historical processes. This view is well represented by Isa 2:4b (NRSV): "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not life up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Prophecy sees the future as arising from the present, while apocalyptic eschatology regards the future as breaking into the present; the former is essentially optimistic, while the latter is pessimistic. "Apocalyptic eschatology" is pessimistic about the fate of the righteous in the present world order, and anticipates a cataclysmic divine intervention into the human world bringing history to an end, but thereafter a renewal of the world in which Edenic conditions will be restored.

Apocalypticism or Millenarian Movements

"Apocalypticism," or millennialism (a term derived from the thousand year reign of Christ described in Rev 20) is a form of collective religious behavior inspired by the belief that the world as we know it is about to end and drastic steps must be taken by an oppressed minority to prepare for an imminent catastrophe. Millennial or millenarian movements in third world societies have been studied extensively by anthropologists and sociologists, and the results of these studies have made it possible to understand the structure, function and motivations of ancient millennial movements.[7] Millenarian movements typically crystallize around a charismatic leader regarded as supernaturally endowed to lead his followers to accomplish group goals. The leaders of millenarian movements in ancient Palestine were typically labeled "prophets" and "messiahs" because they were thought by their followers (and themselves) to have been chosen by God and endowed with supernatural powers, like the prophets of old, to pave the way for the full realization of God's eschatological rule. Palestinian millenarian movements were "revitalistic movements," whose purpose was the revival of ancient Israelite religious and nationalistic ideals within an eschatological framework. Millennarian movements within first century Judaism were not uncommon, since the oppressive conditions of the Roman occupation provided a seedbed for religious revolt. Examples include the movement led by John the Baptist (who proclaimed the necessity of repentance in preparation for the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God) and the revolts of Theudas reported in Acts 5:36 and Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.5.1), and the unnamed Egyptian (mentioned in Acts 21:38 and Josephus *Antiquities* 20.169–72 and *Jewish War* 2.261–63). A showcase example of an early Jewish millenarian movement is the Qumran Community, who lived in expectation of the near end of the world, and whose library, the Dead Sea Scrolls, contains many texts produced by the community

[7] Bryan R. Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium: A Sociological Study of Movements of Protest among Tribal and Third-World Peoples* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (revised edition; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

that testify to their preoccupation with the end of days. Apocalypses themselves, however, which present themselves as esoteric wisdom, do not appear to have had any *direct* connection with the millenarian movements roughly contemporaneous with them (Dan 7–12 may be an exception). This view is strengthened by the fact that, although the Qumran Community has an obvious apocalyptic orientation, no member of the community appears to have written an apocalypse.

2. The Origins of Apocalyptic

The origins of apocalypticism in Judaism are disputed. Many have argued for a continuity between prophecy and apocalyptic, suggesting that apocalyptic was a logical historical development of Old Testament prophecy, perhaps as a result of national disillusionment associated with the post-exilic period (beginning ca. 538 BCE, with the return of some exiled Judahites from Babylon narrated in Ezra 1–2). In the post-exilic period, the returned Judeans were subject to foreign nations (Persia, followed by the Greek Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires, and eventually by the Romans), and tensions existed also within the Jewish community both in the eastern diaspora (where a sizable Jewish community remained until the rise of Islam in the 7th cent. CE) and in Judah.

Toward the end of the last century it became increasingly evident that prophecy and apocalyptic exhibit both continuity and discontinuity. The sharp contrast often thought to exist between them can be moderated by recognizing the fact that prophecy was not a stable phenomenon and exhibits development and change throughout the history of Israel and then in the postexilic period in Judah. Some sections of later prophetic books, such as Zech 1–6 (where an interpreting angel explains the meaning of visions to Zechariah), Isa 24–27, 56–66, Joel and Zach 9–14, have been aptly described as "proto-apocalyptic" works. A description of how proto-apocalyptic sections of the Old Testament served as a transition to Jewish apocalypses is convincingly presented by Old Testament scholar Paul D. Hanson.[8]

Others have argued that there was a fundamental break between prophecy and apocalyptic. The German scholar Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971), for example, rejected the view that the primary roots of apocalypticism were to be found in Israelite prophecy.[9] Describing apocalypticism as consisting in a belief in cosmic dualism, radical transcendence of God, esotericism and gnosticism, he proposed that apocalypticism arose out of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Considerably less popular is the minority view that apocalypticism was essen-

[8] Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (revised edition; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

[9] Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom and Apocalyptic* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972).

tially alien to Judaism and that it originated in Iran and had penetrated Jewish thought from the outside during the Hellenistic period (ca. 400–200 BCE).

3. Was Jesus an Apocalyptist?

Toward the end of the 19th century, liberal Protestant Biblical scholars in Europe and America tended to regard Jesus as a religious genius who taught such timeless truths as the universal fatherhood of God, the fact that all humankind were sisters and brothers, and the worth and potential of the individual. Wilhelm Hermann (1841–1905) and Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) regarded Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God as the rule of God in the hearts of humankind, while the great Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) and the social gospel movement he mentored saw it as the realization of an ideal society on earth. Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), in a critical review of scores of 18th and 19th century lives of Jesus, exposed the extent to which well-meaning liberal scholars had projected their own theological views back into their reconstructions of the historical Jesus.[10] The liberal quest for the historical Jesus was carried out at a time when a negative attitude toward early Judaism as a legalistic and decadent religion was widely assumed, and Jewish apocalyptic literature was considered a particularly appalling development within Judaism. At the close of the 19th century, Johannes Weiss (1863–1914), a German Protestant New Testament scholar, took seriously the apocalyptic features of Jesus' proclamation of the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God, and wrote an influential monograph arguing that Jesus himself held an apocalyptic world view strikingly at odds with modern views.[11] In Schweitzer's critique of lives of Jesus, written a few years after the appearance of Weiss' book, he criticized the liberal quest for the historical Jesus as a bankrupt enterprise. However, he understood Jesus as a kind of wild-eyed apocalyptist who willingly died in a last-ditch attempt to force God to inaugurate his kingdom. "The historical Jesus," concluded Schweitzer, "will be to our time a stranger and an enigma."[12] Schweitzer's devastating critique coupled with the depiction of Jesus as an apocalyptic fanatic brought down the curtain on the writing of lives of Jesus on the Continent for nearly a generation.

Following the two world wars, interest in the historical Jesus picked up again in Germany, though interest had never really flagged in the United States and England. Scholars such as W.G. Kümmel argued convincingly that, unlike the typical apocalyptic emphasis on the future, Jesus taught that the Kingdom of

[10] Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1961; German original 1906).

[11] Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, translated by Richard Hiers and David L. Holland (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971; German original 1892).

[12] Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 399.

God was both present as well as future.[13] Though some English scholars (notably C.H. Dodd) tended to emphasize the presence of the Kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus to the virtual exclusion of the future,[14] many if not most New Testament scholars in the 1960's and 1970's (some representative names include Joachim Jeremias, Norman Perrin and George Ladd) understood that Jesus saw a tension between present realization and future fulfillment of the Kingdom of God, making him far from a typical apocalyptist..

By the 1980's, the so-called Third Quest of the historical Jesus began to pick up steam.[15] This concern with the historical Jesus by a motley collection of scholars with widely different perspectives, has tended to focus on the critical importance of understanding Jesus in light of his Jewish context, regarded much more positively than it had been during the 19th century. Scholars who are associated with the Third Quest, such as John Meier, a professor of New Testament at the University of Notre Dame, tend to take the Jewish setting of eschatological message of Jesus very seriously, while at the same time recognizing that Jesus had his own very distinct message.[16] At the same time that the Third Quest began to crystallize into a trend, the Jesus Seminar, a group of critical scholars led by Robert Funk became active in a distinctive research program intended to recover the historical Jesus. Members of the Jesus Seminar (which includes such influential scholars as Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan) discounted the apocalyptic elements of the teachings of Jesus as a later development in early Christianity that obscured the earlier more historical character of Jesus as a non-eschatological teacher of wisdom. At the beginning of the 21st century then, two very different approaches to understanding the mission and message of Jesus are in play: Jesus the apocalyptic prophet vs. Jesus the Jewish sage. Those who regard Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet tend to view his teachings from the standpoint of the eschatological material found in the Gospels, while those who consider Jesus as a Jewish sage tend to make the ethical and proverbial teachings of Jesus the key to understanding his message.

4. Paul the Apocalyptist

One of the debated issues in modern the modern study of Paul is the extent to which it is appropriate to characterize Pauline thought as "apocalyptic." While there is widespread agreement that Paul was influenced by apocalyptic eschatol-

[13] W.G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1957).

[14] C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961).

[15] The Third Quest is chronicled by Ben Witherington, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (2nd edition; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

[16] John Paul Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (3 volumes and counting; New York: Doubleday, 1991–2001).

ogy, the extent to which he modified apocalypticism in light of his faith in Christ is still debated. Rudolf Bultmann eliminated apocalyptic features from Paul's thought using what he called "critical theological interpretation" (*Sachkritik*). He argued, for example, that in 1 Cor 15:1–15, where Paul proposes a historical argument for the resurrection of Jesus, he has violated his own theological standards by embracing a motif of apocalyptic myth that he elsewhere demythologizes.[17] Following this same tack, Baumgarten suggested that Paul has demythologized apocalyptic traditions by consistently applying them to the present life of the community.[18]

The authors of Jewish apocalypses, though they typically concealed their identities behind pseudonyms, claimed to receive divine revelations through visions and they therefore structured the apocalypses they wrote as series of vision narratives. While there is no evidence that Paul himself wrote an apocalypse, he does claim to have received revelatory visions and had ecstatic experiences.[19] In Gal 1:12, in fact, he refers to his Damascus Road experience as an ἀποχάλυψις ("revelation") from Jesus Christ, and in 2 Cor 12:1 he speaks of "visions and revelations of the Lord," presumably describing his own experiences.

Again, though Paul probably did not write an apocalypse, he does include four relatively extensive apocalyptic scenarios (i.e., sequences of events that Paul expects to transpire in the eschaton) in his letters. Three of these scenarios center on the Parousia or Second Coming of Jesus (1 Thess 4:13–18; 2 Thess 1:5–12; 1 Cor 15:57–58). The fourth scenario, sometimes referred to as the "Pauline apocalypse," is found in 2 Thess 2:1–12, centering on the coming of the eschatological antagonist or Antichrist. Since 2 Thessalonians is widely considered to be pseudepigraphical, the two passages mentioned above found in that letter may reflect the apocalyptic eschatology of the Pauline school or circle rather than of Paul himself.

Like the Jewish apocalyptists, Paul holds a form of temporal dualism that contrasts the present evil age with the coming age of salvation (Gal 1:4; Rom 8:18; 1 Cor 1:26). Yet it is also apparent that Paul has considerably modified the sharp distinction usually made in apocalyptic thought between the present evil age and the age to come. Paul understood the death and resurrection of Jesus in the past as the cosmic eschatological event that separated "this age" (Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 1:20; 2:6) or "this present evil age" (Gal 1:4) from "the age to come." This means that though Paul regards himself as living in the present age, dominated by demonic powers, nevertheless because of the death and resurrection of Jesus

[17] Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951–55) I.295–96, 305.

[18] Jörg Baumgarten, *Paulus und die Apokalyptik* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975).

[19] Gal 1:11–17; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8; see also Acts 9:1–9; 16:9; 18:9–10; 22:6–11, 17–21; 26:12–18; 27:23–24.

these evil powers have been defeated and are therefore doomed to pass away (1 Cor 2:6–7).

Paul's belief in the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, convinced him that eschatological events had begun to take place within history, and that the resurrection of Jesus was part of the traditional Jewish expectation of the resurrection of the righteous (1 Cor 15:20–23). For Paul, the present time is just a temporary period between the death and resurrection of Christ on the one hand, and his return in glory on the other, in which those who believe in the gospel will share in the salvific benefits of the age to come (Gal 1:4; 2 Cor 5:17). This temporary period is characterized by the eschatological gift of the Spirit of God, experienced as present within the Christian community as well as individual believers (Rom 8:9–11; 1 Cor 6:19; 12:4–11; 1 Thess 4:8). While Paul did not explicitly use the phrase "the age to come," in 2 Cor 5:17 and Gal 6:15 he does use the phrase "new creation," which has apocalyptic associations (see Isa 65:17; 66:22; Rev 21:1). Though the final consummation is still future for Paul, the new age was present for Christians because the Messiah had come.

5. Apocalypse Now and Then

The strange, even bizarre, world of apocalypses and apocalypticism seems light years away from the world that most of us inhabit. The two Biblical apocalypses, Daniel and Revelation, have been influential throughout the history of the church particularly during periods of social unrest, dislocation and war. The lavishly illuminated commentary on Revelation compiled by Beatus of Liebana, Spain (8th cent. CE), saw the Arab invasion of Spain as anticipated in Biblical prophecy, and the enormously influential philosophy of history of Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1132–1202 CE), based in part on the Revelation of John, was a response to conflicts between the poor and the rich, the worldly and the spiritual, which tested the church of his day. More recently, the Revelation of John has had renewed influence when read by liberation theologians, with their fundamental concern for social justice. The works by Pablo Richard, Catherine and Justo González, and Jean-Pierre Ruiz, are just a few of many possible examples.[20] In the apposite words of Catherine and Justo González:[21]

> We are also part of a worldwide church that in many areas is living under circumstances similar to those of the first century. Injustice and idolatry are still rampant both in our

[20] Pablo Richard, *Apocalypse: A People's Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995);Catherine Gunsalus González and Justo L. González, *Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "Biblical Interpretation from a US Hispanic American Perspective: A Reading of the Apocalpse," *El Cuerpo de Cristo: The Hispanic Presence in the US Catholic Church*, edited by Peter J. Cassarella and Raul Gomez (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 78–105.

[21] González and González, *Revelation*, 3.

Index of Sources

Bible

Old Testament

New Testament

Early Christian Literature

Origen

Comm. in Joh.

Contra Celsum

Nag Hammadi Library

Early Jewish Literature

Dead Sea Scrolls

Josephus

Philo of Alexandria

Greek and Latin Sources

Papyri and Inscriptions

Egyptian Literature

Index of Authors

Index of Subjects

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Alphabetical Index of the First and Second Series

Bøe, Sverre: Gog and Magog. 2001. *Volume II/135.*
Böhlig, Alexander: Gnosis und Synkretismus. Volume 1 1989. *Volume 47* – Volume 2 1989. *Volume 48.*
Böhm, Martina: Samarien und die Samaritai bei Lukas. 1999. *Volume II/111.*
Böttrich, Christfried: Weltweisheit – Menschheitsethik – Urkult. 1992. *Volume II/50.*
Bolyki, János: Jesu Tischgemeinschaften. 1997. *Volume II/96.*
Bosman, Philip: Conscience in Philo and Paul. 2003. *Volume II/166.*
Bovon, François: Studies in Early Christianity. 2003. *Volume 161.*
Brocke, Christoph vom: Thessaloniki – Stadt des Kassander und Gemeinde des Paulus. 2001. *Volume II/125.*
Brunson, Andrew: Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John. 2003. *Volume II/158.*
Büchli, Jörg: Der Poimandres – ein paganisiertes Evangelium. 1987. *Volume II/27.*
Bühner, Jan A.: Der Gesandte und sein Weg im 4. Evangelium. 1977. *Volume II/2.*
Burchard, Christoph: Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth. 1965. *Volume 8.*
– Studien zur Theologie, Sprache und Umwelt des Neuen Testaments. Ed. by D. Sänger. 1998. *Volume 107.*
Burnett, Richard: Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis. 2001. *Volume II/145.*
Byron, John: Slavery Metaphors in Early Judaism and Pauline Christianity. 2003. *Volume II/162.*
Byrskog, Samuel: Story as History – History as Story. 2000. *Volume 123.*
Cancik, Hubert (Ed.): Markus-Philologie. 1984. *Volume 33.*
Capes, David B.: Old Testament Yaweh Texts in Paul's Christology. 1992. *Volume II/47.*
Caragounis, Chrys C.: The Development of Greek and the New Testament. 2004. *Volume 167.*
– The Son of Man. 1986. *Volume 38.*
– see *Fridrichsen, Anton.*
Carleton Paget, James: The Epistle of Barnabas. 1994. *Volume II/64.*
Carson, D.A., O'Brien, Peter T. and *Mark Seifrid* (Ed.): Justification and Variegated Nomism.
Volume 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism. 2001. *Volume II/140.*
Volume 2: The Paradoxes of Paul. 2004. *Volume II/181.*
Chae, Young Sam: Jesus as the Eschatological Davidic Shepherd. 2006. *Volume II/216.*
Ciampa, Roy E.: The Presence and Function of Scripture in Galatians 1 and 2. 1998. *Volume II/102.*
Classen, Carl Joachim: Rhetorical Criticsm of the New Testament. 2000. *Volume 128.*
Colpe, Carsten: Iranier – Aramäer – Hebräer – Hellenen. 2003. *Volume 154.*
Crump, David: Jesus the Intercessor. 1992. *Volume II/49.*
Dahl, Nils Alstrup: Studies in Ephesians. 2000. *Volume 131.*
Deines, Roland: Die Gerechtigkeit der Tora im Reich des Messias. 2004. *Volume 177.*
– Jüdische Steingefäße und pharisäische Frömmigkeit. 1993. *Volume II/52.*
– Die Pharisäer. 1997. *Volume 101.*
Deines, Roland and *Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr* (Ed.): Philo und das Neue Testament. 2004. *Volume 172.*
Dennis, John A.: Jesus' Death and the Gathering of True Israel. 2006. *Volume 217.*
Dettwiler, Andreas and *Jean Zumstein* (Ed.): Kreuzestheologie im Neuen Testament. 2002. *Volume 151.*
Dickson, John P.: Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities. 2003. *Volume II/159.*
Dietzfelbinger, Christian: Der Abschied des Kommenden. 1997. *Volume 95.*
Dimitrov, Ivan Z., James D.G. Dunn, Ulrich Luz and *Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr* (Ed.): Das Alte Testament als christliche Bibel in orthodoxer und westlicher Sicht. 2004. *Volume 174.*
Dobbeler, Axel von: Glaube als Teilhabe. 1987. *Volume II/22.*
Dryden, J. de Waal: Theology and Ethics in 1 Peter. 2006. *Volume II/209.*
Du Toit, David S.: Theios Anthropos. 1997. *Volume II/91.*
Dübbers, Michael: Christologie und Existenz im Kolosserbrief. 2005. *Volume II/191.*
Dunn, James D.G.: The New Perspective on Paul. 2005. *Volume 185.*
Dunn, James D.G. (Ed.): Jews and Christians. 1992. *Volume 66.*
– Paul and the Mosaic Law. 1996. *Volume 89.*
– see *Dimitrov, Ivan Z.*
–, *Hans Klein, Ulrich Luz* and *Vasile Mihoc* (Ed.): Auslegung der Bibel in orthodoxer und westlicher Perspektive. 2000. *Volume 130.*
Ebel, Eva: Die Attraktivität früher christlicher Gemeinden. 2004. *Volume II/178.*
Ebertz, Michael N.: Das Charisma des Gekreuzigten. 1987. *Volume 45.*
Eckstein, Hans-Joachim: Der Begriff Syneidesis bei Paulus. 1983. *Volume II/10.*
– Verheißung und Gesetz. 1996. *Volume 86.*
Ego, Beate: Im Himmel wie auf Erden. 1989. *Volume II/34.*
Ego, Beate, Armin Lange and *Peter Pilhofer (Ed.):* Gemeinde ohne Tempel – Community without Temple. 1999. *Volume 118.*
– and *Helmut Merkel* (Ed.): Religiöses Lernen in der biblischen, frühjüdischen und früh-christlichen Überlieferung. 2005. *Volume 180.*

Eisen, Ute E.: see *Paulsen, Henning.*
Elledge, C.D.: Life after Death in Early Judaism. 2006. *Volume II/208.*
Ellis, E. Earle: Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity. 1978. *Volume 18.*
– The Old Testament in Early Christianity. 1991. *Volume 54.*
Endo, Masanobu: Creation and Christology. 2002. *Volume 149.*
Ennulat, Andreas: Die 'Minor Agreements'. 1994. *Volume II/62.*
Ensor, Peter W.: Jesus and His 'Works'. 1996. *Volume II/85.*
Eskola, Timo: Messiah and the Throne. 2001. *Volume II/142.*
– Theodicy and Predestination in Pauline Soteriology. 1998. *Volume II/100.*
Fatehi, Mehrdad: The Spirit's Relation to the Risen Lord in Paul. 2000. *Volume II/128.*
Feldmeier, Reinhard: Die Krisis des Gottessohnes. 1987. *Volume II/21.*
– Die Christen als Fremde. 1992. *Volume 64.*
Feldmeier, Reinhard and *Ulrich Heckel* (Ed.): Die Heiden. 1994. *Volume 70.*
Fletcher-Louis, Crispin H.T.: Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology. 1997. *Volume II/94.*
Förster, Niclas: Marcus Magus. 1999. *Volume 114.*
Forbes, Christopher Brian: Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment. 1995. *Volume II/75.*
Fornberg, Tord: see *Fridrichsen, Anton.*
Fossum, Jarl E.: The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord. 1985. *Volume 36.*
Foster, Paul: Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel. *Volume II/177.*
Fotopoulos, John: Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth. 2003. *Volume II/151.*
Frenschkowski, Marco: Offenbarung und Epiphanie. Volume 1 1995. *Volume II/79* – Volume 2 1997. *Volume II/80.*
Frey, Jörg: Eugen Drewermann und die biblische Exegese. 1995. *Volume II/71.*
– Die johanneische Eschatologie. Volume I. 1997. *Volume 96.* – Volume II. 1998. *Volume 110.* – Volume III. 2000. *Volume 117.*
Frey, Jörg and *Udo Schnelle (Ed.):* Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums. 2004. *Volume 175.*
– and *Jens Schröter* (Ed.): Deutungen des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament. 2005. *Volume 181.*
Freyne, Sean: Galilee and Gospel. 2000. *Volume 125.*
Fridrichsen, Anton: Exegetical Writings. Edited by C.C. Caragounis and T. Fornberg. 1994. *Volume 76.*
Gäbel, Georg: Die Kulttheologie des Hebräerbriefes. 2006. *Volume II/212.*
Gäckle, Volker: Die Starken und die Schwachen in Korinth und in Rom. 2005. *Volume 200.*
Garlington, Don B.: 'The Obedience of Faith'. 1991. *Volume II/38.*
– Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance. 1994. *Volume 79.*
Garnet, Paul: Salvation and Atonement in the Qumran Scrolls. 1977. *Volume II/3.*
Gemünden, Petra von (Ed.): see *Weissenrieder, Annette.*
Gese, Michael: Das Vermächtnis des Apostels. 1997. *Volume II/99.*
Gheorghita, Radu: The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews. 2003. *Volume II/160.*
Gräbe, Petrus J.: The Power of God in Paul's Letters. 2000. *Volume II/123.*
Gräßer, Erich: Der Alte Bund im Neuen. 1985. *Volume 35.*
– Forschungen zur Apostelgeschichte. 2001. *Volume 137.*
Green, Joel B.: The Death of Jesus. 1988. *Volume II/33.*
Gregg, Brian Han: The Historical Jesus and the Final Judgment Sayings in Q. 2005. *Volume II/207.*
Gregory, Andrew: The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period before Irenaeus. 2003. *Volume II/169.*
Grindheim, Sigurd: The Crux of Election. 2005. *Volume II/202.*
Gundry, Robert H.: The Old is Better. 2005. *Volume 178.*
Gundry Volf, Judith M.: Paul and Perseverance. 1990. *Volume II/37.*
Häußer, Detlef: Christusbekenntnis und Jesusüberlieferung bei Paulus. 2006. *Volume 210.*
Hafemann, Scott J.: Suffering and the Spirit. 1986. *Volume II/19.*
– Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel. 1995. *Volume 81.*
Hahn, Ferdinand: Studien zum Neuen Testament. Volume I: Grundsatzfragen, Jesusforschung, Evangelien. 2006. *Volume 191.* – Volume II: Bekenntnisbildung und Theologie in urchristlicher Zeit. 2006. *Volume 192.*
Hahn, Johannes (Ed.): Zerstörungen des Jerusalemer Tempels. 2002. *Volume 147.*
Hamid-Khani, Saeed: Relevation and Concealment of Christ. 2000. *Volume II/120.*
Hannah, Darrel D.: Michael and Christ. 1999. *Volume II/109.*
Harrison; James R.: Paul's Language of Grace in Its Graeco-Roman Context. 2003. *Volume II/172.*
Hartman, Lars: Text-Centered New Testament Studies. Ed. von D. Hellholm. 1997. *Volume 102.*
Hartog, Paul: Polycarp and the New Testament. 2001. *Volume II/134.*
Heckel, Theo K.: Der Innere Mensch. 1993. *Volume II/53.*

Tolmie, D. Francois: Persuading the Galatians. 2005. *Volume II/190.*
Tomson, Peter J. and *Doris Lambers-Petry* (Ed.): The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature. 2003. *Volume 158.*
Trebilco, Paul: The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius. 2004. *Volume 166.*
Treloar, Geoffrey R.: Lightfoot the Historian. 1998. *Volume II/103.*
Tsuji, Manabu: Glaube zwischen Vollkommenheit und Verweltlichung. 1997. *Volume II/93.*
Twelftree, Graham H.: Jesus the Exorcist. 1993. *Volume II/54.*
Urban, Christina: Das Menschenbild nach dem Johannesevangelium. 2001. *Volume II/137.*
Visotzky, Burton L.: Fathers of the World. 1995. *Volume 80.*
Vollenweider, Samuel: Horizonte neutestamentlicher Christologie. 2002. *Volume 144.*
Vos, Johan S.: Die Kunst der Argumentation bei Paulus. 2002. *Volume 149.*
Wagener, Ulrike: Die Ordnung des „Hauses Gottes". 1994. *Volume II/65.*
Wahlen, Clinton: Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Synoptic Gospels. 2004. *Volume II/185.*
Walker, Donald D.: Paul's Offer of Leniency (2 Cor 10:1). 2002. *Volume II/152.*
Walter, Nikolaus: Praeparatio Evangelica. Ed. von Wolfgang Kraus und Florian Wilk. 1997. *Volume 98.*
Wander, Bernd: Gottesfürchtige und Sympathisanten. 1998. *Volume 104.*
Watts, Rikki: Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark. 1997. *Volume II/88.*
Wedderburn, A.J.M.: Baptism and Resurrection. 1987. *Volume 44.*
Wegner, Uwe: Der Hauptmann von Kafarnaum. 1985. *Volume II/14.*
Weissenrieder, Annette: Images of Illness in the Gospel of Luke. 2003. Volume II/164.
–, *Friederike Wendt* and *Petra von Gemünden* (Ed.): Picturing the New Testament. 2005. *Volume II/193.*
Welck, Christian: Erzählte ‚Zeichen'. 1994. *Volume II/69.*
Wendt, Friederike (Ed.): see *Weissenrieder, Annette.*
Wiarda, Timothy: Peter in the Gospels. 2000. *Volume II/127.*
Wifstrand, Albert: Epochs and Styles. 2005. *Volume 179.*
Wilk, Florian: see *Walter, Nikolaus.*
Williams, Catrin H.: I am He. 2000. *Volume II/113.*
Wilson, Walter T.: Love without Pretense. 1991. *Volume II/46.*
Wischmeyer, Oda: Von Ben Sira zu Paulus. 2004. *Volume 173.*
Wisdom, Jeffrey: Blessing for the Nations and the Curse of the Law. 2001. *Volume II/133.*
Wold, Benjamin G.: Women, Men, and Angels. 2005. *Volume II/2001.*
Wright, Archie T.: The Origin of Evil Spirits. 2005. *Volume II/198.*
Wucherpfennig, Ansgar: Heracleon Philologus. 2002. *Volume 142.*
Yeung, Maureen: Faith in Jesus and Paul. 2002. *Volume II/147.*
Zimmermann, Alfred E.: Die urchristlichen Lehrer. 1984, ²1988. *Volume II/12.*
Zimmermann, Johannes: Messianische Texte aus Qumran. 1998. *Volume II/104.*
Zimmermann, Ruben: Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium. 2004. *Volume 171.*
– Geschlechtermetaphorik und Gottesverhältnis. 2001. *Volume II/122.*
Zumstein, Jean: see *Dettwiler, Andreas*
Zwiep, Arie W.: Judas and the Choice of Matthias. 2004. *Volume II/187.*

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