moment enable me to sympathize with Beisly's 'conviction that metaphysical concepts are not enlargements of criticism but constrictions inimical to it'.

Koch on Apocalyptic

by Bernard Robinson

'(Jesus' audience) thought that the Kingdom would be a place like the old kingdom of David, with armies and a king's throne. Jesus knew that it was not a place, but the action of God ruling over our hearts.' So John Hargreaves,[1] though it is perhaps unfair to pick on him, for similar pronouncements can be found in hundreds of popular, and indeed scholarly,[2] theological writings. It is the way most of us were brought up to think. Perhaps it is the right way of thinking, but there are, I think, increasingly good reasons for feeling unsure about that. When the Jews talked about 'the kingdom' (without further qualification) they certainly were not thinking of some invisible operation: they meant the Roman Empire. The 'Kingdom of God' on the lips of Jesus may well have referred to something equally tangible—to a world order, not a concept. He may well have been speaking not of the invisible activity of 'grace' in the 'soul', but of a kingdom, however spiritual, with visible, material attributes. A recent writer on the Fourth Gospel, for instance, has interpreted the scene before Pilate in these terms:

> Jesus' kingship is not 'unworldly'. Instead one of the characteristics of the Johannine treatment of the trial and of the events that lead up to it is that the *political* implications are emphasized. In 11, 48 a specifically political motivation is injected into the plotting of the Jewish authorities. John alone mentions the presence of the Roman soldiers (*he spaira kai ho chiliarchos*) at the arrest of Jesus. In the trial itself, the political-realistic element is introduced by the Jews at 19, 12: 'If you release this man you are not Caesar's friend; anyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar'. The climactic rejection of Jesus by the Jews is the statement 'We have no king but Caesar', in which the 'religious' and 'political'

[1]John Hargreaves: *A Guide to St Mark's Gospel* (T.E.F. Study Guide, 2), London, S.P.C.K., 1969, p. 18.

[2]See, for instance, Rudolph Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom*, 1963, p. 95: God's sovereignty is 'purely religious in character', without political connotations. Such a spiritualizing tendency may stem, Klaus Koch suggests, from the 'disappointment' of German scholars with the German Reich.

> questions are shown to be inextricably merged. Hence, while the Christian community's precarious relation to the Empire at the end of the first century has doubtless influenced the Johannine form of the trial, it is not quite accurate to call the narrative apologetic. It is certainly not true that the trial scene provides a model by which the Christians can readily show 'that they are not seditious' (Hoskyns). On the contrary, what the trial suggests is that the disciple will always have to decide *vis-à-vis* the Empire whether Jesus is his king or whether Caesar is.[1]

If there is one branch of theological study which is most likely in the long run to throw further light on the relationship of religion and politics in the New Testament concept of the Kingdom, it is, I think, the investigation of the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic movement. It is not least for this reason that I much welcome the appearance of an English translation of Klaus Koch's *Ratlos ver der Apokalyptik* (1970).[2] This book must rank, along with Rowley's *The relevance of apocalyptic* (3rd ed., 1963) and D. S. Russell's *The method and message of Jewish apocalyptic* (1964) as one of the more useful of the comparatively small number of contributions to the study of apocalyptic available in English. Koch would not claim to be able to define with any assurance the meaning of 'Kingdom' in the New Testament, but he would, I think, say that if Jesus was thinking along apocalyptic lines when he spoke of the Kingdom (we have not yet reached the stage where this can be asserted with very much confidence), then it is more likely than not that in fact he was talking of the reshaping of the world rather than of the justification of the individual soul (although, of course, the concept of the future kingdom does not preclude the notion that in a limited sense the kingdom is already present, in some germinal form).

The movement which, between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D., generated hundreds of apocalypses Jewish and Christian, two of which won acceptance as canonical books of the Bible, has never been taken very seriously by Christians, who have been put off by the eagles with twelve wings and three heads (4 Ezra 11), the leopards with four wings and four heads (Dan. 7, 6), and the locusts wearing crowns and breastplates (Rev. 9) that meet us face to face on every other page. We find it hard, perhaps, to believe of ancient writers (though not, sadly, of modern) that those who make a virtue of obscurity can have anything valuable to communicate, even though scholars should patiently explain that, originally at least, the obscurity was

[1]Wayne A. Meeks: *The Prophet-King, Moses traditions and the Johannine Christology* (*Novum Testamentum suppl. XIV*), Leiden, 1967, p. 64. Of course, even if Meeks' interpretation is correct, it is by no means self-evident, far from it, that the view of the fourth evangelist on the Kingdom faithfully represents the view of Jesus. I can only say, speaking for myself, that I am becoming ever more convinced of the truth of Dodd's remark, 'It is in the Fourth Gospel which in form and expression, as probably in date, stands farthest from the original tradition of the teaching [of Jesus] that we have the most penetrating exposition of its central meaning' (*The Apostolic Preaching*, lecture III).

[2]Klaus Koch: *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* (*Studies in biblical theology, 2nd ser. 22*) London, S.C.M., 1972 (Translated by Margaret Kohl), 157 pp. £2.25.

but a form of literary camouflage adopted by the apocalyptists, who were *personae non gratae* with those in power. This neglect of apocalyptic is reflected in the fact that Eichrodt and Köhler could each write a theology of the Old Testament which contained no chapter on apocalyptic, and in the further fact that even a decade after the 'rediscovery' of which he writes, Koch can remark that apocalyptic is nowhere an examination subject (he writes presumably of Germany; happily this would not be quite true of British universities).

The 'rediscovery of apocalyptic' began in 1959 when Wolfhart Pannenberg in his essay 'Redemptive event and history' sought, as Koch puts it, 'to revive the apocalyptic interpretation of history and bring it to bear on the self-understanding of historical scholarship'. Rather more of a stir was caused in the following year by the appearance of an essay by a then better-known scholar, a disciple of Bultmann, Ernst Käsemann, in which he made the very provocative statement: 'Apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology'. As a result of these two essays, few scholars in the 1960's merely ignored apocalyptic. Which way did they jump? Most merely reiterated the opinion of earlier generations that the apocalyptic movement was a sort of Judeo-Christian fringe sectarianism; some reacted violently against Pannenberg and Käsemann, virtually echoing the claim of Harnack that apocalyptic was 'an evil inheritance which the Christians took over from the Jews'[1] and the claim of Kierkegaard that 'the believer is the nearest of all to the Eternal one, whereas an apocalyptist is furthest of all from him';[2] some few reacted favourably. The debate will, one hopes, be continued. Further, those who, like Koch, believe that we have much to learn from the study of the apocalyptic movement will share his hope that the high level of critical scholarship which we have grown to look for in biblical scholarship will at long last be extended also to the apocalyptic texts.

The bulk of Koch's book is devoted to a valuable chronicle of the attitudes of Continental and English-speaking scholars, both exegetes and systematic theologians, to apocalyptic before and after the Pannenberg/Käsemann 'renaissance', but I myself find most interesting the chapter in which he attempts a 'preliminary definition' of apocalyptic. It is difficult, he shows, to find a sociological Sitz im Leben which the various apocalyptists shared. As for, first, the Jewish apocalyptists, Bousset thought they were simple, obscure folk living on the fringes of society; von Rad thought they were highly sophisticated Jewish sages who were in touch also with non-Israelite culture; Ploeger saw them as Hasidim, Hilgenfield as Essenes; R. H. Charles believed them to be Pharisees; Travers Herford, on the contrary, thought the whole spirit of apocalyptic was repugnant to the Pharisees—the apocalyptists were in fact extreme Zealots;

[1]Koch, p. 91. [2]Koch, p. 80.

D. S. Russell thinks they were to be found among all Jewish groups (except presumably the Rabbis, who would have no truck with apocalyptic at all). The sociological background of the Christian apocalyptists is equally obscure. Fortunately it is not quite so difficult to say what the apocalyptic writings have in common as it is to say what is common to the apocalyptic writers. Koch finds in the apocalypses the following characteristics: (1) They contain lengthy accounts of visions or messages, conveyed to the writer by a heavenly mediator, in which are revealed secrets of great moment about cosmic events shortly to occur; (2) the seer experiences some sort of trance, seizure or inspiration; (3) the seer calls upon his readers to take comfort from his revelations; (4) the apocalypses are mainly pseudonymous, purporting to emanate from an Enoch, perhaps, an Ezra, a Peter or a Paul; (5) the books are pervaded by 'mythical images rich in symbolism'; (6) all apocalypses are composite, in that no apocalypse is the work of one man, or at least not written as one unit; (7) they contain 'an urgent expectation of the impending overthrow of all earthly conditions in the immediate future'; (8) this overthrow will amount to a cosmic catastrophe, which is described in horrific language (e.g. 4 Ezra 5, 4f speaks of the sun shining suddenly by night and the moon by day, of wood oozing with blood and stones crying aloud); (9) the history of mankind is divided into eras according to a divine plan which directs the actions of nations and epochs (but not of individuals). 'It is a matter of dispute', Koch says, 'whether the apocalypses intend with their doctrine of time to depict world, or even cosmic, history as a meaningful process', p. 30;[1] (10) an important role is played in apocalyptic books by angels and demons; angelic beings are given a place as overseers of particular nations, whose history they shape by their interventions; (11) the cosmic catastrophe past, a paradisal age will dawn, not for the whole of Israel, but for the godly element in the nation;[2] (12) God will then reascend his throne, and God's

[1]See Bertil Albrektson, *History and the Gods*, Lund, 1967, for an interesting discussion of this question of a divine plan in history. The view is frequently encountered that history as a meaningful process is a biblical commonplace. Thus Johannes Lindblom can speak of 'the prophetic idea of the history of Israel as the realization of a fixed divine plan from its beginning to its end'. That God acts in history is certainly good Israelite theology (also good Mesopotamian, Moabite and Hittite theology, as Albrektson shows), but this is not, Albrektson argues, the same thing as 'a divine plan in history': 'there is a great difference between a plan in a limited sequence of occurrences and a plan in History with a capital H: the view that Yhwh acts purposefully in what happens is not necessarily identical with the view that history as a whole is heading for a definite goal along a road laid out according to a fixed plan'. An examination of the relevant Old Testament texts leads him to the conclusion that Daniel alone proclaims a divine plan in history ('the books' of Daniel 7, 10 are reminiscent of the 'tables of destiny' in Mesopotamian texts, which *do* seem to know of some notion of a divine governance of world history). The doctrine would seem in Israel, on this showing, to be a peculiarity of apocalyptic thinking.

[2]'The members of non-Israelite nations', Koch adds (p. 30), 'will also partake of the coming salvation . . . a tendency to universalism is . . . unmistakeable'. I note that he quotes no text in support of this from Daniel, a book from which universalism would seem to be completely absent. 'The apocalypses', C. K. Barrett remarks (*New Testament Background*, 1957, p. 238), 'differ widely regarding the fate of the Gentiles'. (Cf. 2 Baruch 72, 4-6 and 1 Enoch 90, 28-42 with, e.g., 4 Ezra 13, 37, 38, 49).

kingdom, present already in a concealed form, will become visible on earth 'replacing all earthly empires for ever';[1] (13) in the establishment of the Kingdom, a place is commonly given to a kingly figure who in some books appears to be human, in others angelic. He is given such names as Messiah, Son of Man, the Chosen One; (14) whereas the prophets looked to a restoration and reform of existing structures (e.g. Is. 1, 26; Jer. 30, 18-24; 31, 10-14), the apocalyptists taught that the present order would be swept away to be replaced by a society that is commonly characterized as 'glorious'. The glorious kingdom is sometimes described in rather etherial, some would say utopian, language (e.g. Rev. 21, 1f), but there are indications that this may be just poetical exuberance and what was really expected was the 'transformation of every social structure'.[2]

Koch does not attempt to reach any conclusions about the role of apocalyptic in New Testament thinking (thus he is content to leave as very uncertain the relationship of Jesus himself to apocalyptic thinking), but he does (on p. 70) very aptly quote some words of M. Werner:

> It may fairly be asked what should the words of Jesus about a future 'entering into the kingdom' and a future 'sitting at a table in the kingdom', etc., mean, if the Kingdom of God did not signify a world-order and a form of material existence, but only the 'sovereignty' of God, that is, 'God acting in a kingly way'.

Of this much Koch is sure, that 'in the sphere of biblical language . . . there is little which is so significant as apocalyptic' (p. 131). He is convinced that an exclusive concern with individual salvation is a

[1]It is not clear whether the Kingdom would be established by God single-handed, so to say, or whether he would employ men to manage the technicalities of the revolution for him. Harvey Cox favours the former position: 'Apocalypticism and politics are inherently incompatible. . . . (For apocalypticism) rational action is useless because powers outside history and beyond human control will quickly bring the whole thing to a blazing end. . . . Apocalypticism is at work wherever people simply decide to opt out of a political process and seek personal salvation or wait for the deluge' (*On Not Leaving it to the Snake*, 1968, p. 38f; quoted, Koch p. 153). For the opposite view it may be urged that favourable references to the Maccabees in Daniel (e.g. 11, 34) suggest that the author of that apocalypse at least was either a political activist or, at any rate, a sympathizer. If the author of Daniel believed that the Kingdom would be established through the divine initiative prompting men to political and military resistance to existing power structures, other apocalyptists may have thought likewise, though given the uncertainty mentioned above as to whether all the apocalyptists came from the same background, it would be rash to make any assumptions on this score. Perhaps some apocalyptists believed in human intervention in the revolution and others not. There is no presumption that if someone (e.g. perhaps Jesus) was sympathetic to apocalyptic thinking, he was therefore a political activist. Again, even if Jesus, say, were well disposed to political activism, that does not mean he was well disposed to a particular form of activism such as Zealotism (one could still be a political activist and believe the Zealots were fighting with the wrong manifesto, or at an inopportune time).

[2]Koch (p. 136) quotes a passage from the Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel which suggests that one apocalyptist at least was in no doubt that the Kingdom would be a real, earthly paradise (of a sort that William Morris would perhaps have been pleased to hail as the fulfilment of his socialist aspirations) rather than an insubstantial never-never land: 'The son shall speak to his father and say "Thou art not my father". And the servant shall make himself equal to his lord. The maid shall be seated and the mistress shall serve. The youth shall lie down at table before him that is old.'

betrayal of the actual history of Christianity 'in the late ancient world and in the European middle ages, and also in the mission fields of the nineteenth century' (p. 128).[1] The rediscovery of apocalyptic thinking, of the belief that 'the world is constantly being shaped and reshaped by God', and that a divine revolution is to take place leading to a society 'in which the rule of man over man has . . . been set aside for ever' (p. 131), can, Koch believes (and I for one would agree), be very salutary for the Church. The further progress of studies in the apocalyptic literature will be followed with interest by all who are concerned, as are most of the readers of this magazine, with the relationship of Christianity and politics.

[1]Earlier, on page 77, he quotes with implied approval the words of Ernst Käsemann: 'According to the New Testament, God's aim is not the salvation of the individual; it is the justification of the world.'