

Preface

Ancient apocalyptic, both in scrolls and imaginative strategy, emerges out of social upheaval. When pressed to explain social change, the ancient mind was often at a loss. Only a dramatic scenario could account for the loss of one's social world or the advent of a new one. Apocalyptic writing was a creative response to being thrown into the vortex of life. In the four following articles the authors demonstrate how the ancients could accommodate and even participate in the changed conditions of living. At the same time, applying a variety of modern critical approaches, the authors attempt to re-imagine the usual way in which the origins of Christianity are conceived. Lane C. McGaughy provides a tradition-history analysis on the origins of apocalyptic thought. Arthur J. Dewey demonstrates how Paul could use the tropes of apocalyptic to underscore the radically changed condition of his audiences. Through the analysis of freelance experts, Heidi Wendt demonstrates how telling changes in their work and perspective reveal the seismic shocks brought about by the Bar Kokhba revolt. John W. Marshall, through a contrast between apocalyptic texts and social inscriptions, traces the movement of apocalyptic thinking from a Jewish to a Christian embedding. In the lead article "God, ReTAlLiation, and the Apocalyptic Scenario," Lane C. McGaughy provides the historical and cultural overview necessary for understanding the phenomenon of apocalypticism in the first century CE. Drawing upon anthropological studies, McGaughy distinguishes between communities formed through kinship and those centered on story. Blood-ties, exclusivity, and escalating vendettas characterize the former groups, while diversity and the possibility of transcending tribal limits sustain the latter. Yet, even with story-based communities, McGaughy notes how they often imitate tribal groups when under social duress. They succumb to social scripts of martyrdom or revenge. It is from these "blood-feud roots" that McGaughy contends that the revenge narrative of apocalypticism emerged. The Christian tradition has from the first century been conflicted. Is it an inclusive community of forgiveness or a gated community longing for retribution?

For McGaughy the troubling matter begins with the earliest material from Near Eastern traditions where an ongoing cultural duel can be found in the perennial feuding between nomadic and urban life. This has ranged from *The Gilgamesh Epic* through the Joseph cycle in Genesis, from the Sumerian dynasties to the Egyptian expulsion of the Hyksos. McGaughy then deepens this cultural description by noting how that dueling contest, reflecting Sumerian and

Akkadian values and structures, comes into relief through the Mesopotamian creation myth, the *Enuma Elish*. This violent myth provides the “template for all subsequent epics in the ancient Near East.” It declares that, unless there is divine domination, order is not assured and catastrophe is ever at hand. Even the Hebrew Creation Epic (Gen 1:1–2:4) plays off of (and sometimes against) this story.

McGaughy then turns directly to apocalyptic texts. He sees that they combine a litany of disasters and suffering narrated as prophecies *ex eventu* and visions of seers about the catastrophic end of time. He argues that this combined material was a constructed response to social crisis. He points out that the apocalyptic material surfaces as one of a number of responses to the Babylonian exile. But it is in the crisis ensuing from Alexander’s conquering of the Near East that apocalyptic comes to full voice. The persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes IV (168–165 BCE) occasions the scroll of Daniel while the fall of the temple (70 CE) brings the apocalyptic strains out in full throat once again.

It is in the period between the time of the Maccabees and the temple’s destruction that Jesus and Paul are found. Both are often described as apocalyptic visionaries. McGaughy disputes these claims. Drawing upon the work of Marcus Borg and the Jesus Seminar, he maintains that the note of revenge is not to be found in the sayings of the historical Jesus. In fact, Jesus’ concern was for the Empire of God that was effectively breaking in—not a future apocalyptic scenario of revenge. McGaughy also contends that one cannot simply label Paul an apocalypticist. He argues that Paul also does not display any narratives of revenge. Instead, the faithfulness of Jesus, of his followers, and of God accents his letters. And when Paul uses apocalyptic language, it is only one of a number of shifting discourses used to communicate with his listeners. There is no simple seismic line to be drawn from Daniel to Jesus to Paul.

McGaughy ends by noting that much of the conversation about apocalyptic comes from a three-century span (from about 200 BCE to 100 CE). The texts from this period draw on the long-standing myth of conquest and domination. What sadly has been lost in this furious bombardment of images are the voices that speak in quite a different tone.

In “Switchback Codes: Paul, Apocalyptic, and the Art of Resistance,” Arthur J. Dewey continues one of the concerns of McGaughy by exploring the apocalyptic strategy of Paul. If Paul saw himself more as a Jewish prophet, then why does he use those apocalyptic tropes, especially when addressing what would have been non-Jewish audiences? Why is Paul sending such seismic signals to his listeners?

Dewey first of all remarks that the letters of Paul have often been read anachronistically. There is a marked tendency to read his letters as if they came from the dominant voice of society. Using the political insights of James Scott, Dewey points out that the letters of Paul would not have been part of the command performances of the Roman world; rather, Paul’s letters were transcripts hidden

from the public domain, an alternative voice that contradicted the dominant culture. Within these letters Paul was helping to carve out for his communities a social space where their dreams could grow and critical visions could find some breathing room.

Beginning with an analysis of Gal 1:12–16, Dewey indicates that, in describing his breakthrough experience in prophetic terms, Paul utilizes apocalyptic notes to declare that what has occurred has turned the world upside down. In mixing prophetic and apocalyptic language Paul intimates that the paradigm shift he experienced indeed runs counter to the dominant voices of Rome. Dewey then works chronologically through three sections of Paul's correspondence. In contrast to the Roman "gospel" indicated by the Gemma Augustea, where order is proclaimed through the use of controlled violence, where those who refuse to submit are brought to a shameful end, 1 Thessalonians provides evidence that Paul was fostering the Thessalonians' grass roots experiment in trust. His use of apocalyptic language was employed to energize the community, to give hope even for those who have been lost in death. He intertwined wisdom and apocalyptic categories (1 Thess 5:1–11) to throw light on how the future is at work within this community of nobodies. Their lives are already part of what today we would call active resistance.

In his analysis of 2 Cor 5:16–21 Dewey argues that Paul continues to subvert the dominant paradigms. In speaking of a "new world order" Paul does not call for a return to the usual order of things but to a radically new situation. Through a sensitive contextualization of Paul's terms Dewey argues that Paul was calling his listeners to participate in a radical transformation. Using language usually found in the dominating public transcript, Paul inverted its meaning and invited his listeners to participate in the re-imagining of the conditions of human existence. This radical re-imagining continues full bore in Rom 8:18–23. Contrasting the scene of abundance and vitality found in the *Ara Pacis* with Rom 8:18–23, Dewey shows how the apocalyptic trope of a woman in labor (mentioned in 1 Thess 5:3) becomes the fundamental metaphor in his last apocalyptic envisioning. Paul re-reads Genesis 1. Creation for Paul did not happen long ago; it was finally becoming realized in the very midst of the listening communities. Paul did not call his listeners to return to a golden age. Rather, he urged his listeners to recognize that all of their existence, including their pains and unspoken dreams, was part of the cosmic labor. Thus, Paul strategically used apocalyptic tropes and terms to provide space for these communities to breathe, to shore them up against the dominant voices of the empire and to underscore that transformation and change were already underway and in play. With the delivery of these hidden transcripts those fledgling communities of trust could begin to rehearse what could be imagined as a cosmic revolution.

In her article "From the Herodians to Hadrian: The Shifting Status of Judean Religion in Post-Flavian Rome," Heidi Wendt explores the recent scholarly attempts to interpret the key historical developments from the Judean War to the

Bar Kokhba revolt. Wendt particularly focuses on how the Bar Kokhba revolt precipitated a shift in the status of Judean religion among Roman audiences. She asks why more adversarial positions towards Judeans surfaced, especially in "Christian" writings, and how we are to understand such dramatic changes.

In order to get some critical traction on the fragmentary evidence and to avoid apologetic or anachronistic explanations, Wendt begins with a slice of social analysis in reprising her understanding of freelance experts. She argues that within the first two centuries of the Roman empire there were numerous self-authorized purveyors of specialized skills who competed for recognition and offered services exceeding ordinary religious benefits. Within the spectrum of such experts were philosophers, doctors of law and medicine, rhetoricians, as well as experts in matters of religion. It is crucial, in her judgment, to see that experts on matters of wisdom, rites, and interpretation of sacred texts were visible and varied throughout the culture. Hence, Judean freelancers were part of this overall competitive world. Indeed, at least in the first century, the ethnic dimension of the freelancer's activity had a distinctive appeal. Wendt locates the career of Paul within this social category. Paul would draw upon his ethnic background, just as his opponents would. While he claims a distinctive perspective, he does not renounce his ethnic embedding. His interpretation of Torah, use of prophecies and revelations, and exegeses of mythic figures would not be idiosyncratic. Further, the Jewish revolt did not diminish this ethnic attraction; in fact, the Flavian victory might actually have focused attention on Judean intellectualizing religious experts and their offerings. Josephus serves as an example. Even the reputation of Jewish writings for their oracular character increased in the post-bellum period as they were considered on par with the Sibylline books. Despite the Flavian blows against particular forms of the civic institutions of Judean religion, the interest in Judean oracles and freelancers did not diminish.

However, by the middle of the second century there was a palpable shift regarding Judean experts. In fact, this shift seems to have been occurring on a number of fronts. Arguments that once were embedded in ethnic coding were now encased in more universal, philosophical discourse. Even Judean writings used as oracles were now interpreted by different experts, not located in a distinctive ethnic background. Christians who no longer identified with their Judean roots edited and interpreted the sacred writings. Moreover, when gentile Christians identified as "Israel," they had begun a radical reconfiguration of cultural boundaries. In this shift in focus from Judean and Christian groups to individual experts, we see that it is in the second century that the no man's land of religious identities emerges. There are still freelance experts but now they are generating boundaries from their interpretations of sacred texts and prophecies.

Was this development simply a process of social differentiation? Wendt sees in the Bar Kokhba revolt and its aftermath a probable cause. This second revolt

may well have soured many towards the Judean religion. Simon's legitimization as the messiah by Rabbi Akiba and his ambition to restore the temple and its priesthood may have been seen as a refusal to accept the inevitability of Rome's domination. The plight of Jesus followers in Judea who refused to acknowledge Simon as the messiah may also have had a major part in this. Certainly the writings of Justin would suggest that these matters were not forgotten. At the same time the arguments of Justin demonstrate another freelance expert, who now utilizes philosophical discourse rather than ethnic attraction to interpret sacred oracles.

In the final section of her paper, Wendt builds upon the shift in regard to the status of Judean religion between the Flavian period and the rule of Hadrian. Just as she sees shifts in how the freelance experts distance themselves from things Judean, Wendt asks whether this movement can be detected in the gospel material. Already strong cases for the re-dating of Luke-Acts have been advanced. The influence of Marcion on NT material has also been strongly argued. The question then becomes whether the Bar Kokhba revolt can be a plausible historical context for the composition and content of the canonical gospels. This means that the synoptic apocalypse (Mark 13, Matthew 24, Luke 21) needs reinvestigation. Does the warning about false prophets and messiahs allude to Bar Kokhba? Is 70 CE the only reliable *terminus a quo* for these texts? Tellingly, scholars are hardly concerned that non-canonical texts (such as the *Apocalypse of Peter*) are relegated to the second century. What prevents a reconsideration of the canonical books? Is it simply the assumption that such texts must be as close as possible to the time of Jesus to be reliable? These questions will only be answered if scholars are willing to locate the evidence within a richer historical description of the first two centuries.

The final article, "Judean Diaspora, Judean War: Class and Networks," continues the social examination of late first-century Judaism. John W. Marshall throws light upon diaspora Judaism as he explores the book of Revelation and 6 Ezra along with what can be gleaned about social networking from relevant inscriptions.

Marshall makes a cogent case that both the book of Revelation and 6 Ezra are Jewish apocalyptic texts coming from Asia Minor. He notes that the term "Christian" comes no earlier than 1 Peter and the Acts of the Apostles, both of which can be dated no earlier than the late first century and may quite likely be located in the early second. Moreover, the concerns of the writer of Revelation come from fundamentally Jewish issues. It deals with "those who say they are Jews and are not (Rev 2:9; 3:9)." The identity of the 144,000 from Israel (Rev 7:4-8; 14:1-5), the keeping of the commandments (Rev 12:17), as well as the contrast of Rome with the heavenly Jerusalem, all argue for a Jewish hand. As for 6 Ezra, the case for its being Christian is derived from its connection to the book of Revelation. But if Revelation is a Jewish text, then that argument falls.

Moreover, Marshall points out that the “Anointed” is never mentioned, nor are there any Christian ideas. In sum, this too is a Jewish text. We thus have two Jewish texts within the diaspora.

Marshall then raises the question of the situation of Jews within the Diaspora during and after the Jewish War against Rome. He cites Agrippa’s speech in Josephus (*J.W.* 2.398–400), declaring that such a revolution will have bloody consequences for those Jews who live outside of Israel. Josephus notes specific conflicts in Caesarea and Syria. There had also been issues in Alexandria and Damascus. It would seem from what Josephus intimates that the situation could only get worse if the Jews in Israel took the path towards rebellion. Marshall points out that Roman troop movement in Anatolia, Syria, and parts of Asia could suggest that some hostile situations might be in the offing. But he notes that Paul Trebilco is convinced that there was no effect on Jews in Asia Minor from either the Jewish War or the revolt of Bar Kokhba.

In order to throw some light on the situation in Asia Minor during and after the Jewish War, Marshall returns to the book of Revelation and points out that in addressing the seven assemblies as well as in the critique of the empire, the writer is assuming the presence of a rich network of social interactions. We can see that Revelation 17–18 presents a major critique of those embedded in the network of trade (indeed, slave trade). He also can make the case that 6 Ezra 16:47–48 envisages a critique of those who conduct business as usual with the expected social networks.

At the same time Marshall presents evidence that Jews were very much part of the interconnected web of society within Asia Minor. Distinguishing inscriptions prior to the Jewish War from those after, Marshall notes that there is significant evidence that Jews continued after the war to participate in the networks that rule their cities. Indeed, the mounting evidence is that the Jews continued to be embedded in their social world. Thus, Marshall sees two conflicting lines of evidence. The apocalyptic texts seem to be quite opposed to the inscriptional evidence. It would seem, despite these texts, that Jews found a *modus vivendi* within the empire. What then happens to those who shared the convictions of Revelation and 6 Ezra? Marshall suggests that these two writings represent a movement that would find itself more agreeably in the developing apocalyptic Jesus communities. The strident valorization of martyrdom in the third and fourth centuries would carry forward those apocalyptic critiques. Thus, the trajectory of Jewish apocalyptic may well have carried forward into specifically Christian communities, who saw themselves over against the empire.

—A. J. Dewey