THE APOCALYPTIC MYTH AND THE DEATH OF CHRIST

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I

THIS lecture is concerned with the problem of continuity between Jesus Christ himself and the earliest preaching about him in the primitive church. Between these two there is the decisive intervention of his death on the cross. Obviously the way in which this is understood is a matter of crucial importance for the problem of continuity. W. G. Kümmel has referred to the death on the cross as "the most puzzling event" in the life of Jesus, and if it was a puzzle for the first Christians, it still remains a puzzle for us today. The death of Christ is interpreted in a number of ways in the New Testament. Some of these can certainly be connected with later strands in the development of doctrine. The difficulty is to find the right point of departure. It is generally held that the disciples' conviction of the resurrection forced them to see that the death of Jesus, so far from thwarting God's will, was part of the divine plan. The earliest formulations, on this view, are found in 1 Corinthians xv. 3, where Jesus is said to have died "for our sins" and "according to the scriptures". Fuller maintains that these two phrases are to be taken separately, and that the second gives the more primitive view. Scriptural fulfilment is enough to show that the passion was not contrary to God's plan. On the other hand this begs the question why it should be necessary for God's plan, and some kind of answer to this question must have been implicit from the first. But then, it seems, groping towards an answer, the disciples eventually brought to expression what was in any case the meaning which Jesus himself saw in his death when the crucifixion became

1 The Manson Memorial Lecture delivered in the University of Manchester on the 12th of November 1974.
imminent and inevitable. It was that the death had soteriological significance. It was "for our sins".

This view presupposes that Jesus faced the prospect of death in the spirit of the Maccabean martyrs, as presented in the roughly contemporary Hellenistic work, 4 Maccabees, especially vi. 28: "Be merciful unto thy people, and let our punishment be a satisfaction in their behalf. Make my blood their purification, and take my soul to ransom their souls." Three points may be urged in favour of this view. Firstly, the passion predictions imply that Jesus could see a divine purpose in his death. Secondly, he actually refers to his death as a ransom in Mark x. 45. Thirdly, in the eucharistic words at the Last Supper he speaks of his blood as something that is to be poured out "for many" (Mark xiv. 24; cf. the words over the bread in 1 Cor. xi. 24: "for you"). Against these points it may be said in reply that the passion predictions do not in fact introduce the notion of a sacrifice for sins; that the authenticity of Mark x. 45 is doubted by the majority of scholars today, as reference to any standard commentary on Mark will show; and that the various forms of the eucharistic words have been influenced by liturgical usage, so that it is by no means certain that the relevant phrase goes back to Jesus himself. In fact all these three points may well be the fruit of subsequent reflection on the passion, when the death of Christ is thought of as a sacrifice. This paper will proceed on the assumption that it cannot be proved that Jesus gave teaching to the disciples along these lines.

In the light of this uncertainty it may be doubted whether the motif of atonement gives the right starting-point even for the disciples themselves. This motif is absent from the christological hymn of Philippians ii. 5-11 and from most references to the passion in the Lukan writings. Are we to think of a gradual disappearance of the motif as the church moves out into the Hellenistic world? But it is also absent from Acts iii. 20 f.:


"... that [God] may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old." This statement appears to be intrusive in its present context, is certainly Palestinian in its fundamental conceptions, and has been claimed by J. A. T. Robinson to be "the most primitive christology of all". Of course the theme of atonement is well attested in a number of later writings of widely divergent provenance, John, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation, so that its prominence in the New Testament cannot be ascribed solely to the dominating influence of Paul. But it is at least arguable that it arises from reflection on the death of Christ considered in itself, and not as a constituent part of the primitive kerygma. If Acts iii. 20 f. is to be trusted, the central item of the kerygma is the declaration of the exaltation of Jesus, and the insertion of these verses immediately after a call to repentance (verse 19) may well reflect the essence of the primitive preaching. For the call to repent in preparation for the coming kingdom is the fundamental item of the preaching of Jesus himself (Mark i. 15), and appears to be the burden of the apostles when he sends them out on mission (Mark vi. 12, cf. Matt. x. 7; Luke x. 9). It may thus be legitimate to conjecture that the post-resurrection preaching, reduced to its barest essentials, ran something like this: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and God has raised up Jesus." From this point of view the resurrection, or rather the exaltation which the resurrection attests, reinforces the urgency of the message of the nearness of the kingdom, and indeed provides assurance that this message cannot be mistaken. This pattern, consisting of the substance of the preaching of Jesus himself coupled with a declaration of the personal position of Jesus in the post-Easter situation, forms the core of the apostolic preaching in Luke-Acts (Luke xxiv. 46 f.; Acts ii. 36, 38; iii. 26; v. 31; x. 42 f.; xiii. 30, 38; xvii. 30 f.).

1 "The Most Primitive Christology of All?", J.T.S., n.s. vii (1956), 177-89 (= J. A. T. Robinson, Twelve New Testament Studies (London, 1962), pp. 139-53). But it is unlikely that the text is intended to mean that Jesus will only become the Messiah at the parousia, in contrast with Acts ii. 36. The point is that he is already appointed (prokecheirismenon) for this purpose.
If this suggestion is right, and the death of Christ received no direct interpretation in the primitive kerygma, it becomes easier to see why it is variously interpreted in the New Testament in accordance with the needs of different situations. It is not a case of one original interpretation, which tends to fall into the background in the face of fresh developments. Of course, this is not to say that the death of Christ was ever felt to be unimportant by the first Christians. It was a fact which could never be forgotten, and was bound to enter into discussion in relation to almost every aspect of the church's growing self-awareness. But it begins, as John Knox pointed out,¹ as the focal point of the memory of Jesus, so that it gathers up all that Jesus has meant to his followers. From this point of view it is not really separable from the church's declaration of his exaltation. The one who is exalted is the one who first died on a cross. And it seems to me that the first question which should be asked is whether there is any intrinsic connection between these two events. It is obvious that Jesus could not have been exalted unless he had died first. The New Testament knows nothing of an assumption of Jesus without the intervention of physical death.² But does the exaltation follow naturally from the death, almost as cause and effect? If we take the broader view of Knox, that the death of Jesus brings the whole of his life and teaching into focus, does this furnish the grounds for the declaration of his exaltation? If so, it will not be necessary to suppose that the resurrection is in the first instance a stupendous surprise, causing the shattered and defeated disciples to reverse their ideas and form a reappraisal of the meaning of the loss of their Master. It is true that the element of surprise is a feature of the resurrection narratives, but the evidential value of these narratives is notoriously difficult to assess. If, then, in spite of this seemingly contrary evidence,

¹ The Death of Christ (London, 1959), p. 139.
² This does appear, however, in the heresy of Cerinthus, who thought of the man Jesus as inhabited by the Messiah during his ministry until just before his death (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, I. xxvi. 1). This probably implies the Jewish apocalyptic view of the Messiah as an angel (see next section). It may well be the heresy of the Christian opponents of the writer of 1 John, cf. J. L. Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (London, 1973), pp. 36 f.
the life of Jesus culminating in his death could be regarded as the basis for the kerygma of his exaltation, we shall have to see whether there is anything in the teaching of Jesus himself which might have prepared the disciples to take this stand. It will also be necessary to see whether the Jewish background of the time can provide the frame of reference for it.

II

It will be convenient to take this last point first, and to look at the Jewish background. We have to remember that the backcloth to the time of Christ presents a more variegated scene than appears from rabbinic Judaism. The problem is to identify the proper milieu of Jesus and the disciples. Here there are two main contenders. On the one hand there is the large scene of normative Judaism, within which Jesus appears as a rabbi, albeit of a free-lance kind, so that there is only a difference of degree between him and the stricter rabbis to whom the name Pharisees might be applied. This view has recently been put forward with a special slant by Vermes.¹ On the other hand there is the much more intangible scene of apocalyptic expectation, which may be associated with distinct sectarian groups, but which may be no more than a mood, an emphasis, in ordinary Jewish (perhaps particularly Galilean) life. This way of thinking, it is argued, is characteristic of the first Christians, and so must be taken as the starting-point of Christian theology. This view is particularly associated with the work of Käsemann.²

It will be seen at once that the centre of interest for these two views is different. The first is concerned with the Jesus of history, the second with the historical emergence of Christianity in the post-resurrection situation. The crucial point is the relation between them. No solution can be regarded as satisfactory which does not account for the continuity between Jesus and the church. It is not thinkable that Jesus belonged

to one milieu and the disciples to another. It seems to me that Käsemann copes with this problem much more satisfactorily than Vermes. Käsemann argues that in Jewish Christianity the original apocalyptic enthusiasm quickly gave way to a more sober and practical approach, so that the business of Christian living became a matter of holy living according to the Law until the time of the End. This means that the eschatological events lie entirely in the future, even if they are expected to take place in the near future. As such, it agrees with the normal Jewish eschatological perspective, except for the place which is assigned to Jesus at the parousia. This outlook is reflected in Matthew. On the other hand the original apocalyptic fervour was maintained by Christian prophets, who preached that the exaltation of Jesus had already opened the way to salvation, so that through faith in Jesus the blessings of the End Time were already available. One consequence of this outlook was the opening of the church to the Gentiles, in accordance with the universalistic strand in prophetic eschatology. This was a profoundly important decision, not only for its historical consequence in the eventual breach between church and synagogue, but also for its doctrinal consequence in the rapid emergence of a highly creative and distinctive Christian theology, which has its best representatives in Paul and John. Eventually, however, Gentile Christianity also lost its creative impulse, so that the Pastorals show something of the same legalistic spirit as Jewish Christianity. This very brief account, which is far too brief to do justice to Käsemann, does give a plausible explanation of the derivation of different streams of Christianity from a common root, apocalyptic eschatology, which is consistent with Jesus' own proclamation of the kingdom of God. By contrast, Vermes can offer no explanation of the initial impulse of Christianity, so that he is reduced to saying that "from the beginning his [i.e. Jesus'] followers have had the greatest difficulty in accepting his expressed opinions regarding himself". ¹ But why this should

¹ Op. cit. p. 224. An explanation of the application of the Messiah title to Jesus by the early Christians is given on pp. 153-6. It involves the theory that they were motivated by the desire to salvage what they could from a ruined cause, rather than by anything that they had learnt from Jesus himself.
be so is not considered. The fact is that the disciples formed an estimate of Jesus which differs markedly from that of other disciples concerning their masters. Even if it was mistaken, we still need to know how it came about.

If, then, we follow Käsemann in regarding apocalyptic as the proper starting-point, it is not because the reconstruction of Vermes lacks positive value, but because it leaves a gap at the crucial point. Apocalyptic is a subject with wide ramifications, but we are here concerned with one matter only, the exaltation of Jesus as the fundamental claim of his disciples. This at once suggests that the central issue is that most disputed topic of New Testament studies, the Son of Man. But here I think there is wisdom in siding with Vermes in regarding the phrase as far too problematical and insecure to form the basis of discussion. In what follows I shall therefore avoid using the phrase, except where reference to actual texts demands it. What we are concerned with is the apocalyptic myth, which can be regarded as a frame of thought in the Judaism of the times, and shared both by Jesus and by the disciples who proclaimed his exaltation.

The central feature of the apocalyptic myth is the intervention of God at the climactic point of human history. This is not exclusive to apocalyptic, but belongs to all forms of eschatology. The difference between them lies in the manner in which this divine intervention is expected to take place. There is, firstly, the time-scheme which is involved. Eschatology refers to the future in general, whether it be the near or the distant future. But apocalyptic has a sense of present involvement in the process leading to the future, and so it often has a map of history in which the present is the penultimate stage of the divine plan, as in Daniel. Secondly, the place where the action is to take place tends to be conceived differently. Eschatology does not necessarily think of anything more than decisive political, usually military, action on the stage of human history, in which God, who is in charge of events, at last brings peace to his people. Apocalyptic, however, tends to see the action in relation to the cosmic struggle of the powers of good and evil, so that the earthly event has some kind of a celestial counterpart, and the resulting victory may obliterate the distinction between heaven and earth.
The most important difference, however, is for our purpose the agent whom God will use for his intervention. Political hopes naturally centre on the Davidic Messiah, whose coming is ardently awaited in Psalms of Solomon 17. Qumran, as is well known, looks forward to the coming of the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel, which apparently means the restoration of the legitimate highpriesthood and the legitimate royal line respectively. But these, and also the Prophet who is mentioned with them, are not celestial persons, and belong to eschatological rather than to apocalyptic thought. Apocalyptic, on the other hand, is hospitable to the idea of an agent of the divine intervention, who is a celestial person reserved in heaven for this purpose. In Daniel vii, according to the most probable interpretation, the final victory of the Holy Ones of the Most High, who are to be identified with the angels in the first instance, and only secondarily with the loyal Jews, is to follow almost immediately, so that the loyal Jews may take heart in their ordeal. The "one like a son of man" may be their leader, or symbolically identical with them, but really belongs to a distinct range of mythology which has not been fully integrated into its present context. But the agent of the divine intervention appears in later chapters as an angel, Michael, who is "the great prince who has charge of your people" (Dan. xii. 1, cf. xi. 21), and this agrees with the apocalyptic side of Qumran expectations (1 QM xvii. 6). In these contexts the divine intervention takes the form of the cosmic victory over evil rather than the judicial judgement against the enemies of God, though this of course is an important element in the vision of Daniel vii. But these ideas come together in Enoch and 2 Esdras, with the result that the agent of the divine intervention is the judge on behalf of God. In both

1 This interpretation was put forward, on the basis of a suggestion of O. Procksch, by M. Noth in an essay, "Die Heiligen des Hochsten", in Festskrift til Prof. Dr. S. Mowinckel, Oslo, 1955, reprinted in his Gesammelte Studien, and translated into English in The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Studies (Edinburgh and London, 1966), pp. 215-28, but it appears not to have been influential among New Testament scholars. Noth's main contention, however, that the "holy ones" are celestial beings and not the Jews themselves, has been impressively confirmed by L. Dequeker, "The 'Saints of the Most High' in Qumran and Daniel", O.T.S., xviii (1973), 108-87.
these works the agent is a celestial person working in the celestial sphere. He has characteristics derived from the Son of Man figure in Daniel vii, who is thus interpreted as an individual, whatever was the original meaning of the text. He also has messianic texts applied to him, although he is not really thought of as the earthly descendant of David. It is thus possible to speak of the celestial Messiah, who can even be referred to as God's Son, perhaps as a result of the use of Psalms ii. 7 and similar passages as messianic texts. It may be that Iranian or some other mythology lies behind these conceptions, and many attempts have been made to explain them along these lines. But the important point is that in these last developments God's agent is thought of as a celestial person above the ranks of the angels. With such an exalted position, it is inevitable that he should be described to some extent with the attributes of God himself.

Our excursion into apocalyptic thought has brought us to a conception of eschatology which can be briefly, and in an all too obviously over-simplified way, summarized as follows. The kingdom of God is near, and present circumstances can be seen in relation to it as the penultimate stage of the working out of God's plan. The transition from the present to the coming age coincides with the final victory of God over the forces of evil, which include, but also transcend, the manifestations of evil in the contemporary political scene. This coming event includes the divine judgement, in which God may act through an agent, who may actually be called the Messiah, and to whom in any case the messianic prophecies are applied.

What we still have not done is to find the place of the idea of exaltation in this scheme, though we have gone some way to understanding what is meant by the exalted state which is achieved. For when the ideas about the judgement include an agent of God for the purpose, he is always a very exalted personage, either regarded as belonging to the highest ranks of the

1 In 2 Esd. xii. 32 the words "who will arise from the posterity of David, and will come and speak" are missing from the Latin texts, and have not been accepted into the NEB translation, apart from the final phrase which is necessary for the sense. In any case the hand of a glossator is to be suspected here, because the Davidic idea plays no part in the visions, and is missing in the corresponding messianic passage in xiii. 26, 37.
angels or as occupying a place of his own above them, so that
he is almost like God himself. It might be supposed that the
act of exaltation, whereby the destined agent reaches this position,
is already provided in the vision of Daniel vii. But this seems
to me to be doubtful, because the whole action of the vision
takes place in the heavenly realm. It provides for exaltation
in the sense of raising a person to honour, but not in the sense of
raising a person from earth to heaven, and the allusions to this
vision in 1 Enoch xlvi and 2 Esdras xiii do not take it this way.
Consequently it seems to me that we have to look elsewhere for
the background to this idea, which is certainly implied in the
proclamation of the exaltation of Jesus.

It is more promising to look at the idea of the ascension of
particular persons in the Jewish thought of the time. Here it is
natural to think of Elijah and of the Prophet of Deuteronomy
xviii, both of whom enter into the range of christological thought
in the New Testament. The Prophet, however, can be dismissed
at once, for he is not Moses himself, raised to heaven and
returning at the end of the age to speak the words of God, but
is a new figure like Moses who will make his first appearance at
that time for the purpose. It is possible that the idea of the
return of Elijah was originally intended to be something similar,
the appearance of a person who can be regarded as a new Elijah,
and indeed this seems to be the implication of the church's
identification of John the Baptist with Elijah. But already in
Ecclesiasticus xlvi. 9 f., which can be dated around the beginning
of the second century B.C., the promise of Elijah's return in
Malachi iv. 5 f. is taken literally in close association with the
legend of his ascension in 2 Kings ii. Hence there was the
widespread belief in New Testament times that Elijah had been exalted to heaven, where he remained in reserve for his
eschatological function. If we leave out a specific function of
this kind, we can also think of other Old Testament worthies

2 It is probable that in some circles Jesus was held to be the eschatological
Prophet, cf. John i. 21; Acts iii. 22 f. But this is not relevant to our present
purpose.
3 Cf. The Jewish Encyclopedia, v. 126 f.
who were believed, at least in some circles, to have ascended into heaven on account of their outstanding merits, as attested by the fragmentary Assumption of Moses. Moreover the questioning about the identity of Jesus in the gospels can only be regarded seriously if it is granted that popular speculation could think of the present availability of the great prophets of the past. This does not seem to me to be quite the same thing as the superstitious idea, attributed by Mark vi. 14 to Herod Antipas, that John the Baptist had returned to life immediately after his execution, though the evangelists seem not to be aware of any distinction between these expectations.

If, on the other hand, we wish to find an example of an historical character who is to perform the special task of God's agent, we shall inevitably turn to Enoch. Enoch was not only a man of exceptional righteousness in the antediluvian era of mankind, but also apparently was assumed into heaven without the intervention of death. It is not at all surprising that he was picked out as a seer by the practitioners of apocalyptic literature, so that a cluster of works grew up around him. But one of these authors, in the Similitudes of Enoch, went further than this. Enoch here, like other seers, is privileged to see during his lifetime the celestial arrangements and God's predetermined plan for the final overthrow of evil. The latter includes the judgement, which is to be performed by God's agent, who is variously styled the Messiah, the Elect One and "that Son of Man". But at the end of the book Enoch's assumption takes place, and then he discovers to his (and the reader's!) amazement that he is himself "that Son of Man", whom he has seen in previous visions. This interpretation of the clear meaning of the text has been disputed, as is well known, but is more and more recognized to be correct by scholars. The dating of the

1 Mark vi. 15 speaks of Jesus as a prophet like one of the prophets, but identification with a prophet of the past appears to be implied in Mark viii. 28, and this is how it is understood by Matt. xvi. 14 and Luke ix. 8, 19.

2 The phrase is not to be regarded as a title, but as a reference to the description of God and his agent in the coming judgement in 1 Enoch xlvi. 1, which is based directly on Dan. vii. The phrase is not used in the Similitudes (1 Enoch 37-71) before this point.

Similitudes, of course, remains a very difficult problem, but it is scarcely conceivable that a Christian author should produce such an exalted idea of Enoch without a trace of symbolical reference to Jesus.

What we have here, then, is the exaltation of a man to heaven, who is then revealed to be the person who is to fulfil the role of God's agent in the final judgement, which has been planned by God from the very beginning. This is obviously highly relevant to our search, but its value could be disputed if it were only an isolated example. However, it receives confirmation as a specimen of a more generally diffused type from a document of indisputable pre-Christian date, 11 Q Melchizedek.¹ In this tantalizing fragment the judgement is conceived in terms of vengeance on Belial and his spirits, and the agent of God's action is Melchizedek. How Melchizedek comes to hold this position is not stated, but there is no reason to deny that he is the same person as the mysterious figure of Genesis xiv. 18 and Psalm cx. 4. Further examples may be adduced from the Testament of Abraham, where, in the longer Greek recension of the book, the eschatological judgement is performed by Abel, by the twelve tribes of Israel, and by God himself, in a triple series of actions²; and perhaps from Sibylline Oracles v. 256-9, where Joshua is to "come from the sky" (unless this is a Christian interpolation referring to Jesus by means of Joshua symbolism).³

It seems, then, that God's agent in the coming judgement is on occasions identified with a hero of the past who has been exalted to heaven. In the Similitudes of Enoch at least we have an example of such a personage to whom both the characteristics


² Cf. M. Delcor, Le Testament d'Abraham (Leiden, 1973), pp. 59 f., 141 ff. He argues for dependence on a traditional interest in Abel as a witness to divine judgement, found in Targum Neofiti on Gen. iv. 8 and in other fragments of the Palestinian Targum. Cf. also Matt. xxiii. 35 ; Heb. xi. 4.

³ J. Jeremias, New Testament Theology, i (London, 1971), 270, n. 2, argues that line 257 only is a Christian insertion, and adduces other evidence for the idea of a new Joshua from Josephus, Ant., xx. 97 ff., 169 f.
of the Son of Man figure in Daniel vii and the designation Messiah are applied, along with allusions to messianic texts, although he is not regarded as the legitimate descendant of David. There is no reason, however, why this should not also be included, if the exalted person is believed to be descended from David, or at least claimed to be such. It must also be pointed out that, although Enoch was available for his future position because he passed to heaven without death, it cannot be regarded as essential that a candidate for such a position should not have died first. It is true that the idea of availability for the future, in the case of Elijah as well as that of Enoch, was assisted by the tradition of their translation to heaven. But by New Testament times ideas of the state of the dead had advanced far beyond the old negative concept of Sheol, and the souls of the righteous are commonly represented as waiting in a state of comparative bliss until the general resurrection. It can no longer be said that Sheol is outside God's power, so that exaltation to the heavenly realm does not depend on avoidance of death. The real qualification for a position of honour or responsibility in heaven is outstanding righteousness, and it is for this reason that Enoch bypassed death. It is not excluded, in the thought of some circles at least, that a righteous man who was known to have died (such as Abel) might hold a similar position.

III

With these facts in mind we may now return to the New Testament to consider our second question, whether the teaching of Jesus himself could have prepared the disciples to form an estimate of their Master along these lines. Jesus was their hero, whose mission to announce the coming kingdom had been cut short by his ignominious death. There is no convincing evidence

1 Besides clearly Hellenistic ideas of immortality, such as are found in Wisd. ii. 23-iii. 9 and in 4 Maccabees, a great variety of speculations at this period can be adduced, cf. Jub. xxiii. 26-31; 1 Enoch 91-104; 2 Esdras vii. 75-101. We may also compare Mark xii. 18-27, in which Jesus probably echoes standard Pharisaic views, and Luke xvi. 19-31, which accords a special position to Abraham.


3 Cf. Jub. iv. 17-26; x. 17; Heb. xi. 5.
that he conceived his task in political terms and was planning armed insurrection, in spite of the charge of this kind laid against him at the trial. But within an astonishingly short space of time the disciples had decided that after his death he had been exalted to heaven, from which he would return speedily as the agent of the divine judgement. How far they applied to him the phrase "the Son of Man" as a title for him in this position it is difficult to determine. Usually they referred to him as the Messiah, meaning by this the agent of God and not the Son of David of non-apocalyptic eschatological expectation. However, the idea that he was the legitimate descendant of David seems to have been added very quickly, possibly as a result of debate with opponents, so that the fusion of properly distinct notions goes on apace, once the declaration of Jesus' exaltation has been established as the basis of faith. In this faith they immediately set out to continue the mission which Jesus himself had begun.

It can be objected that I have left out all mention of the crucial factor, and that is the resurrection. But this is because it has been my object to look for factors which could lead the disciples to interpret the resurrection in this way. There is no doubt that the declaration of the resurrection of Jesus is a matter of cardinal importance in primitive Christianity. The fact remains, however, that it has a peculiarly ambivalent quality, and this is because it is never treated simply as resuscitation for continuing life on earth. On such a view it would be necessary to suppose that, after his return to life, Jesus was translated to heaven by means of an ascension. A scheme of this kind seems

1 This view is argued by S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots* (Manchester, 1967) but denied by Vermes, op. cit. p. 49.

2 There is, of course, no formal opposition between the two. The Messiah is in any case God's agent for the deliverance of his people. It is a matter of differing emphases within a broad spectrum (cf. M. de Jonge, "The word 'anointed' in the time of Jesus", *Nov.T.*, viii (1966), 132-48). The common Jewish notion of a military deliverer who is the descendant of David is not denied, but the action is transferred to another plane suitable to the cosmic and ethical-dualist idea of the deliverance and of the coming reign of God, and the title Messiah accordingly carries the overtones proper to this conception of the kingdom, rather than merely those of the political conception. It is thus unnecessary to suppose that there are here such incompatible positions that a meeting of minds is impossible (against Vermes, pp. 153 f.).
to be presupposed in the Lukan literature, but even there the status of Jesus between his resurrection and ascension is very ambiguous. Elsewhere in the New Testament there is no clear distinction between Jesus’ resurrection and his exaltation. Although the idea of resurrection receives far the greater emphasis, this is due to the equally heavy stress on the death which precedes it. The language is that of resurrection, but the meaning is exaltation. Hence the resurrection and exaltation are very rarely mentioned in tandem in the New Testament. Paul in 1 Corinthians xv. 3 ff. concentrates on the resurrection and omits all mention of the exaltation, though it is implicit in what follows, but not as a separate event. Conversely Philippians ii. 9 omits the resurrection, passing straight from the death on a cross to the exaltation. In Acts ii. 32 f. and Ephesians i. 20 the resurrection and exaltation are mentioned together, but it is unclear whether they are separate events or the reverse sides of one coin. In Acts v. 31 and Ephesians iv. 20 the resurrection is omitted (cf. Col. i. 18).

It can thus be argued that the resurrection was understood in terms of exaltation from the very first, and consequently that the interpretation of the resurrection is a matter of more fundamental importance than the fact. It can even be asserted that the idea of the exaltation of Jesus could have been reached, along the lines argued in this essay, without the experience of the resurrection as an historical event. For it depends on the observation that, in a climate dominated by apocalyptic expectations, the death of a supremely righteous man could be interpreted as the transition from earthly life to a position in heaven appropriate to God’s designated agent of the judgement. From this point of view, the experience of the resurrection, instead of originating a wholly new understanding of the meaning of Jesus, simply provides confirmation of what is already felt to be possible, or probable, or even virtually certain, on other grounds. It clinches the argument and removes all further doubts. But the grounds on which this estimate of Jesus is made must not be confused with the factors provided by the apocalyptic background of thought. With such factors in mind, the disciples could certainly have identified Jesus with the agent of God in the apocalyptic myth,
whether he had so identified himself in his teaching or not. But they would obviously be more likely to do so if his teaching about himself had included such an identification. But even this is not sufficient to account for their estimate of him in the last analysis. The real grounds for the disciples' conviction are to be found in the profound impact of the personality and teaching of Jesus himself, which are such as to make the application of the apocalyptic myth to him not only plausible but almost inevitable.

Consequently, when we turn to the gospel tradition to discover the role of Jesus in preparing the disciples for their subsequent belief, the first thing which we should look for is evidence for a person of exceptional impressiveness. And here our argument joins hands once more with that of Vermes, whose express object in approaching the Jesus tradition from the Jewish background is to restore the real image of Jesus, which he feels has been obscured almost beyond recognition by the church's claims about him. For it is indeed a most impressive person who emerges from Vermes's researches. It is, of course, in his moral impact that Jesus makes an unforgettable impression. And this brings us once more to the question whether the apocalyptic frame of thought is essential to his ethical teaching or not. Here again there is bound to be divergence of opinion. Modern scholarship has largely accepted the results of Albert Schweitzer's classic study of this issue in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. The burden of that great book is that the search for Jesus as an ethical teacher through two generations of scholarship eventually came full circle, so that Jesus emerged as a prophet proclaiming the imminent reign of God rather than a teacher of timeless truths. The result is that Schweitzer gave the most thoroughgoing eschatological interpretation of the teaching of Jesus as the key to understanding the gospel. Though much in his presentation has had to be corrected, this remains the dominating position, and has one of its best contemporary representatives in the work of Joachim Jeremias. The truth of the matter remains beyond our grasp precisely because Jesus is concerned with the ethics of confrontation with God rather than with theories about the form of the eschatological event in which that confrontation takes place. Jesus draws the future into the
present, and will allow no procrastination of moral decision. It thus remains unclear whether apocalyptic is the catalyst of his moral discernment, which brings it to expression under the pressure of a sense of crisis, or whether it is a sort of top dressing largely supplied by the disciples in the course of transmission of his teaching.

Where so much uncertainty remains, I must simply content myself by repeating that the importance of the apocalyptic myth in the shaping of primitive Christianity tips the scales in favour of the view that Schweitzer was right in his fundamental position. Jesus preached the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God against the same background of apocalyptic thought as forms the basis of the church’s subsequent kerygma. It is therefore legitimate to try to see whether he understands his own role in the same light. Here I will only specify a few points which can lead us quickly back to the central issue of the death of Christ. Firstly, the spirituality of Jesus, and especially his use of the *Abba* address, does give the impression of a sense of a special position of intimacy with God. This gives to his teaching its characteristic note of authority, which suggests that he thinks of himself as God’s spokesman, so that he is not unnaturally popularly regarded as a prophet. Secondly, a more precise idea of how Jesus saw his personal position may be gained from a cluster of sayings which probably have an authentic basis, in which Jesus correlates the response to his message with the verdict at the judgement (e.g. Matt. x. 32 f.). In the Markan version of this saying the verdict is to be given by the Son of Man, which appears to be a self-reference denoting Jesus’ personal role at the coming judgement (Mark viii. 38). Thirdly, in answer to the highpriest at his trial Jesus does not deny that he is the Messiah, but he adds the important qualification, “You will see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark xiv. 62).1 This

1 Mark’s *ego eimi* is unequivocal, but both Matthew and Luke appear to tone it down, if not to express repudiation of the idea (Matt. xxvi. 64: *su eipas*; Luke xxii. 70: *humeis legete hoti ego eimi*). But it is probable that, in spite of all arguments to the contrary, the object of these changes is to strengthen the affirmation, because (a) Matt. xxvi. 25 appears to be a Matthean composition in which *su eipas* can only be affirmative, and (b) Luke xxii. 71 treats the preceding
answer, if authentic, indicates that he does think of himself as God's future agent, so that, when directly challenged, he cannot refuse to be called Messiah in this sense, in spite of his care to avoid the title on other occasions. It is a confession of faith which plays straight into the hands of his enemies, and thereby attests his moral integrity when he is driven to an extreme position.

It is thus arguable that Jesus not only preached the imminence of the kingdom, but also believed he would play a central role when it arrived, a role which is in harmony with the decisive character of his preaching ministry. It is not necessary to suppose that he indulged in the fantastic extravagances with which this role is depicted in the apocalyptic literature. Nevertheless such a theory raises an acute problem with regard to the prospect of his death. The foreshortened perspective of his preaching suggests that, in the first instance at any rate, he expected the arrival of the kingdom in his own lifetime. The passion predictions suggest the opposite, but they are not above suspicion of being vaticinia post eventum. In any case they represent the certainty that he will be vindicated by some means. It may well be that the answer to the highpriest should be taken as evidence that he still hoped, even at the last possible moment, that God would act to vindicate him and to justify his mission. If so, the cry of dereliction (Matt. xxvii. 46 = Mark xv. 34) attests the collapse of this faith in the future before the awful reality of death. Contrary to many modern scholars, I hold that these words are authentic, and that they have been preserved, in spite of the discomfort which they offer for Christian readers, simply as the grounds for the two following

answer as an incriminating confession on the part of Jesus. It is possible that these features are dependent on the answer of Jesus to Pilate (su legeis), which is identical in all three gospels (cf. also John xviii. 37). In the rest of Mark xiv. 62 "the Son of Man" could be a self-reference (cf. R. Leivestad, "Exit the Apocalyptic Son of Man", N.T.S., xviii (1971/2), 264), as the future position of Jesus is sufficiently indicated by "sitting on the right hand of Power", without the need for a further title; and "coming with the clouds of heaven" suitably follows the heavenly session, because it denotes celestial transport for his apocalyptic function (but this could be an expansion of the text, cf. B. Lindars, New Testament Apologetic (London, 1961), p. 49).
verses about Elijah. That some supposed that Elijah might come and release Jesus is eloquent testimony of the kind of apocalypticism which has been the burden of this whole study. Elijah did not come, and Jesus died.

The crucifixion was a shattering blow to the disciples. If I have implied that, according to current apocalyptic ideas, the death of such a righteous man could be interpreted as his exaltation, it must still be asserted that the application of these ideas, even after the lead given by Jesus himself, must have been extremely difficult in such circumstances. There has to be an interval of time, during which the process of reflection on the meaning of Jesus can begin after the immediate shock has passed. But after the initial shock is over, the search for a clue to God's will in the tragedy will coincide with reaffirmation of what Jesus has meant to the disciples. It is then that the answer to the highpriest is felt to be right, in spite of the events which so swiftly followed from it. The proclamation of the exaltation is the result. The third day is really just about long enough for this process of reflection to have taken place and to have led to a deep conviction. Naturally the exaltation is expressed in terms of resurrection, because it is not a matter of *translation* to glory from earthly life, but an event which follows *death.* The experience of the resurrection coincides with the conviction of Jesus' exaltation, and this is true whether we interpret the resurrection as a subjective experience expressing this conviction, or as an objective experience which acted as a catalyst to bring it to expression. Awful as it was, the death of Christ can now be regarded as the transition from earthly life to heavenly glory.

IV

In conclusion, a word must be said about the beginnings of a positive evaluation of the death of Christ considered in itself. This must be seen as part of the general tendency to analyse the essential core of the kerygma and to build new structures upon

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1 From this follows the claim that the resurrection of Jesus is an anticipation of the general resurrection, which is the main burden of Paul's argument in 1 Cor. xv, cf. also 1 Thess. iv. 14.
its component parts. It would be a mistake to think of a linear process, because these developments are evoked by a variety of factors, such as new teaching needs as the disciples extend their mission and apologetic needs as official Jewish opposition increases. What can be said with a fair degree of assurance is that the Pauline view of the atoning and justifying effect of the death of Christ is a highly individual response to circumstances that belong to his special position in early Christianity. Paul undoubtedly takes up fundamentally important issues from the teaching of Jesus, but we cannot simply step from Easter Day to the Epistle to the Romans in one stride. We are again faced with the problem of continuity, this time not the continuity of Jesus and the church, but the continuity of thought about the death of Jesus, the question whether Paul’s thought is a legitimate development from the most primitive ideas.

Some help may be forthcoming from the pre-Pauline hymn in Philippians ii. 5-11. It may seem hazardous to dissent from the conclusions of such a distinguished study as Martin’s Carmen Christi, but I do not think he has made out the case either for its being a product of Hellenistic Christianity or for its soteriological, as opposed to christological, thrust. Admittedly the hymn does not go back to the earliest days, for the notion of the pre-existence of Christ is already established. But the main plot of the hymn is, as Lohmeyer saw, an application of the


2 But this may have been reached very rapidly, especially if, as argued in this paper, the apocalyptic myth played a decisive part in the formation of the disciples’ convictions about Jesus. For he is exalted to the position of one who has been planned by God before the creation, and even his name has been determined beforehand (1 Enoch xlviii. 2 f.; cf. Pesahim 54a and Nedarim 39b, where the name of the Messiah has been similarly predetermined). The distinction between predetermination and pre-existence is a real one, but once Jesus has been identified with the one named from before the foundation of the world, it becomes very easy to speak of him as pre-existent, even if other influences (such as the Wisdom tradition) are excluded from consideration. See R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, Pre-existence, Wisdom and the Son of Man, Cambridge, 1973, and M. D. Hooker, op. cit. pp. 42 f.
apocalyptic myth to the exaltation of Jesus. Here Jesus is represented as taking the form of a slave, and as such he is obedient even as far as (mechri) death; and therefore (dio kai) God has exalted him and conferred on him the divine title of Lord, in accordance with the tendency of apocalyptic thought to use expressions which properly apply to God alone with reference to his celestial agent. Thus the exaltation sets the seal of the divine approval on the moral worth of Jesus’ approach to death.

Here, then, we have an interpretation of the death of Christ in terms of moral obedience. This at once commends itself as likely to be a primitive development, for it is at the base of other more developed interpretations, not least that of Paul himself (cf. Rom. v. 19). It also occurs in Hebrews v. 7 f., where Jesus “learnt obedience through the things that he suffered”, though elsewhere the themes of identification with humanity and

1 E. Lohmeyer, Kyrios Jesus: eine Untersuchung zu Phil. ii. 5-11, Heidelberg, 1928, 1961. We are not here concerned with the details of his interpretation, or with his dubious identification of hōs anthrōpos (verse 8) with the Aramaic kbr nš of Dan. vii. 13.

2 The universalism of verse 10 f. does not prove that the hymn already presupposes the move of Christianity out into the Gentile world, as it goes no further than the implications of Isa. xlvi. 23, on which it is based. The Kyrios title does not necessarily imply a debt to pagan notions, nor does it necessarily entail the application of the name YHWH to Jesus. It only implies that this title (onomà) of honour is appropriate to Jesus in his exaltation. It is in any case used of men as a mark of respect, but may be applied to the Messiah (so Ps. cx. 1, ðonàs), and is frequently applied to God (ðonàs, cf. Deut. x. 17), and was perhaps already regularly substituted for YHWH in reading. Though it has been objected that the absolute form is never applied to God, there are sufficient exceptions to disprove this assumption. Thus Hebrew 'aden occurs in Ps. cxiv. 7; 11QPs' xxviii. 7 f.; 11QPs' xviii. 6 (= Syriac Psalm 2), and Aramaic māre' or māreh occurs in 11QtgJob xxiv. 12; 1QapGen xx. 12 f. (cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, “The Contribution of Qumran Aramaic to the Study of the New Testament”, N.T.S., xx (1973/4), 382-407). It would seem probable that Jesus was on occasions addressed as māri in his lifetime (hardly the simple form mār, which is not attested as early as this), and that the title was used frequently after Easter because of his exaltation as Messiah (cf. maranatha, 1 Cor. xvi. 22). Eventually it carried more positive overtones of divinity. Phil. ii. 11 shows a situation midway between the messianic usage of Ps. cx. 1 and an ascription of divinity, in which a confession of faith in Yahweh (Isa. xlvi. 23 f.) has been transformed into an acclamation of the exalted status of Jesus without actually calling him God. It may well mark an important stage in the pre-Pauline development of this aspect of christology (see further O. Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament (London, 1963), pp. 195-237).
sacrifice on their behalf are more prominent. Naturally the same theme of moral obedience is the grounds for the exemplary use of Christ's sufferings in 1 Peter and elsewhere. It is an extremely important factor in the Fourth Gospel, with its great concentration on the ethical relationship between Jesus and the Father. But here it is joined with another facet of apocalyptic thought, the conquest of the demonic powers (John xii. 31), which also has echoes in many other parts of the New Testament. This development makes sense, because the conquest of evil is fundamentally an ethical matter, and the supreme ethical realism of Jesus himself prevents deterioration into magical concepts, in spite of the fantastic imagery employed in this connection in apocalyptic literature. Finally, the theme of moral obedience has been incorporated into the gospel presentation of the passion in the Gethsemane story, and this takes us back once more to the profound impression made on the disciples by the personality of Jesus.

The apocalyptic myth, as I have presented it in this paper, provides an answer to the problem of the continuity between Jesus and the church. Within this frame the death of Christ has no special meaning in itself, but is the moment of transition from earth to heavenly glory. Further reflection, however, discovers the greatest depths of significance in it, so that what is "a stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles" becomes "to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. i. 24).