CHAPTER FIFTEEN

APOCALYPTIC AND WISDOM IN 4 EZRA

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It was, I suppose, Gerhard von Rad who first gave prominence to the idea that apocalyptic is a form of wisdom. In itself the idea is quite old; it can be found already in an article on Daniel published by Hölscher in 1919 and can be traced back even before this. However, in the face of the overwhelming view that apocalyptic is the child of prophecy it was only with the publication in 1960 of volume 2 of von Rad’s *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (where his arguments on the origins of apocalyptic were first set out) that serious consideration began to be given to the possibility of a connection between apocalyptic and wisdom. Von Rad has found few followers, although Hans-Peter Müller has sought to defend von Rad by defining more precisely the kind of wisdom which, in his view, lies behind apocalyptic; Müller argues that we must distinguish between educational and mantic wisdom, and that apocalyptic is a continuation of the latter rather than the former. More recently Jürgen Lebram has expressed support for the approach

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3 Hans-Peter Müller, “Mantische Weisheit und Apokalyptik,” *VTSup* 22 (1972): 268–93. As evidence for his view Müller argues, *inter alia*, that passages such as Isa 19:11–13; 44:25; 47:13; Jer 50:36; Esther 1:13 (cf. Gen 41:8) indicate that Israel became more familiar with mantic wisdom in the period after 587 B.C.E.; that the Daniel of Dan 2; 4; and 5 is a wise man of a mantic type; and that various features of apocalyptic (e.g. its eschatological orientation, its determinism) can be explained more readily against the background of mantic wisdom than of educational wisdom.
of von Rad in his article on Old Testament Apocalyptic in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*. In general, however, von Rad’s views have met with rejection, but they have at the same time been sufficiently influential that it seems useful to begin by saying a little about them.

In the first edition of his *Theologie* von Rad emphasized, as the basis of his argument, the contrast which he saw between the prophetic and apocalyptic attitudes towards history; in his view there was no way which led from the former to the latter. Thus whereas in prophecy history was the area in which Israel experienced the savings acts of Yahweh and accounts of this history have a confessional character, in apocalyptic history is looked at from the outside, “from a spectator’s point of view”, and we are presented merely with a lifeless series of events. The essential thing about this history is not that Yahweh intervenes in it, but that it is all determined in advance. As such, it can be known in advance, and it is the link with knowledge—knowledge based on a universal Yahwism and divorced from the saving history—which provides the clue as to the matrix of apocalyptic, namely wisdom. Knowledge of this kind is characteristic of wisdom, while the Praise of the Fathers (Sir 44–50) provides us with the first example of the history of Israel presented without reference to the saving history, and merely as a catalogue of the events concerned.

These points were repeated by von Rad in the fourth edition of his *Theologie* which was issued in 1965; but in that edition von Rad substantially revised and re-ordered his argument, and a certain shift of emphasis is discernible. In particular von Rad developed a number of points which were only lightly touched upon in the first edition, or ignored altogether, in an apparent attempt to stress the positive links between apocalyptic and wisdom. Thus von Rad thinks it important that the apocalyptic seers are called wise men and scribes, and he maintains that the relationship between apocalyptic and wisdom is evident in the fact that the apocalyptic books are concerned not only with history, but also with nature. He argues that the concept of the divine determination of the times, which is central in apocalyptic thought, is a fundamental presupposition of wisdom, and that the

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