THE USE OF THE WORD "ANOINTED" IN THE TIME OF JESUS

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In a passage on the Jewish background of the New Testament use of the word χριστός which is found in his De Christologie van het Nieuwe Testament 1), Professor G. SEVENSTER remarks that the word Messiah has no fixed content. Various concepts may be connected with it and its exact meaning needs to be established within each context in which it is used. He emphasizes that the Jewish expectation of the Messiah was not mainly, still less exclusively, a politico-national one and maintains that no rigid distinction can be sustained between a "national" conception and a "spiritual" one.

This approach to the difficult problem of the meaning of the word "Messiah" ("anointed") in the time of Jesus seems to me to be on the right lines; it has, in fact, been corroborated by subsequent finds of new material which were not yet available to Professor SEVENSTER when he wrote his magnum opus. In the present article, written in his honour, I shall try to present the necessary supplementary evidence; it requires us, I think, to go even further than he did 2).

The study of Jewish expectations concerning the future is greatly hampered by a lack of agreement in terminology. The word "Messiah" is commonly used to denote any figure who brings about future salvation of any kind, regardless as to whether the source in question uses the term or not. The word "messianic" has acquired

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1) Amsterdam, 1946 (2448), pp. 75-78, esp. p. 76. See also Professor SEVENSTER's article "Christologie, I Christologie des Urchristentums", in Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, I, Tübingen, 31957, col. 1745-1762 (esp. col. 1751).

2) Together with Professor A. S. VAN DER WOUDE the present author has prepared an article on "Die messianischen Vorstellungen im Spätjudentum" which is to be part of the article χριστός in the Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament. The present article is the outcome of further research on the basis of the conclusions reached there.
a correspondingly wider range of meanings, and is even used in connection which passages which do not speak of a future deliverer (let alone one who is actually termed Messiah) at all. The terms "eschatology" and "eschatological" are handled in such a variety of ways, that every author should be asked to begin with an exact definition of what he means by them 1).

For the purpose of this article I shall use the word "anointed" ("Messiah") only where the sources use the corresponding word in their own language. Similarly the use of the term "messianic expectation" should be restricted to the expectation of a redeemer who is actually called Messiah. The terms "eschatology" and "eschatological" should only be used without any modern connotations dependent on philosophical or theological theories concerning the relation between history and that which is beyond history. The basic element in the expectations which are commonly called "eschatological" is the conviction that God will complete and crown His dealings with His people and with the whole world, by effecting a radical and lasting change which denotes the beginning of a new era in His continuing loving care for His creation. The mythological imagery, besides the other expressions denoting time and space, used to express this radical change are of secondary importance compared with this fundamental conviction. Therefore, though it may be useful or even necessary to distinguish between the various images and concepts, we must be careful not to prejudice our analysis through inadequate terminology.

As is well-known there are only remarkably few places where this expression occurs in our period, even if we expand it to include the first century B.C. and the first seventy years of the first century

1) Many examples could be given here. See e.g. the use of "messianic" and "Messiah" by J. Klausner, The Messianic Idea in Israel (transl. from the third Hebrew edition by W. F. Stinespring), London, 1956, p. 9: "The definition of the Messianic expectation is: The prophetic hope for the end of this age, in which there will be political freedom, moral perfection, and earthly bliss for the people of Israel in its own land, and also for the entire human race. But the definition of belief in the Messiah is: The prophetic hope for the end of this age, in which a strong redeemer, by his power and his spirit, will bring complete redemption, political and spiritual, to the people Israel, and along with this, earthly bliss and moral perfection to the entire human race". With regard to the terms "eschatology" and "eschatological" see e.g. Th. C. Vriezen, Hoofdlijnen der Theologie van het Oude Testament, Wageningen, 1954, pp. 363-386, and Kurt Schubert, "Die Entwicklung der eschatologischen Naherwartung im Frühjudentum" in Vom Messias zum Christus, Wien, 1964, pp. 1-54 (for a survey of recent literature see p. 42 n. 1).