PROPHECY &
APOCALYPTICISM
The Postexilic
Social Setting

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RelSRev	*Religious Studies Review*
RGG	*Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SB	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SEÅ	*Svensk exegetisk årsbok*
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* 10 vols. Ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964–1976.
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* Ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974–.
TEV	Today's English Version
TSK	*Theologische Studien und Kritiken*
TWAT	*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament.* Ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1973–.
TZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
Vg	Vulgate
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum, Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZTK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

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Introduction

One of the most fascinating questions raised by the proto-apocalyptic texts of the Hebrew Bible is the nature of the groups and societies that produced them. Who were the authors of these texts, which picture the cataclysmic end of the cosmos and the ushering in of a fabulous new era, and what sorts of communities do they represent? Many readers believe that if the texts' authors really saw the world apocalyptically, they must have been fringe figures, perhaps troubled psychologically. Others find in apocalyptic literature sane warnings for our time of ozone depletion, unchecked population growth, and the spread of nuclear weapons. Still others find in the apocalyptic writers·clear insight into the impossibility of genuine community on earth without divine intervention.

Led by Otto Plöger and Paul Hanson, many scholars have reached a consensus about the nature of biblical proto-apocalyptic groups. Their "conventicle approach" assigns proto-apocalyptic texts sociologically to the losers of the political disputes and power struggles that are held to have characterized the restoration community.[1] There are fundamental prob-

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1. Otto Plöger's work was first published as *Theokratie und Eschatologie* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1959). The second edition is available in English as *Theocracy and Eschatology,* trans. S. Rudman (Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1968). Paul Hanson's major study of the proto-apocalyptic texts is *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). A "conventicle approach" sees proto-apocalyptic texts as written within small religious communities that meet secretly for fear of those in authority.

lems with this view, and I propose to argue for a sociological theory that better clarifies the background of the proto-apocalyptic texts.

The wide acceptance of the conventicle approach is understandable. It offers an approach to the Israelite proto-apocalyptic texts that appears to clarify their sources and nature and to answer the form-critical question of the social setting of this literature. The conventicle approach even tallies with sociologists' current explanation of the origin of apocalyptic groups in non-Israelite societies: the causal theory of relative deprivation. Deprivation theory holds that apocalyptic groups arise among people who are marginalized, alienated, or at least feel deprived of what is essential to their well-being.

Significant anomalies, however, are now calling into question the current consensus about a deprivation background for the biblical proto-apocalyptic texts. The Hebrew Bible contains groups of texts that deprivation approaches cannot successfully interpret. I intend to examine these text groups and to assess the broader implications of a different approach to them.

My thesis is that the following proto-apocalyptic texts are *not* products of groups that are alienated, marginalized, or even relatively deprived. Rather, they stem from groups allied with or identical to the priests at the center of restoration society. First, the proto-apocalyptic description of the end-time assault of "Gog of Magog" in Ezekiel 38–39 expresses the same central-priestly motifs and concerns as the rest of the book of Ezekiel. Second, proto-apocalyptic texts in Zechariah 1–8 appear to have been written in support of the Second Temple establishment. Zechariah's visions aim at establishing a postexilic temple-centered community and are infused with central-cultic images and theology. Third, the early apocalyptic descriptions of cosmic upheaval and of the pouring out of the Spirit in the book of Joel also look like literature from the priestly center of postexilic society. The book is replete with central-cultic terms and motifs, and it calls for implementation of central-cult practices.

It is unlikely that the apocalyptic sections in these three text blocks are late intrusions into their pro-priestly contexts. Rather, these proto-apocalyptic texts have been produced by power-holding priestly groups, not marginal and deprived groups. In what follows, I attempt to test and confirm this thesis.

Apocalypticism and Prophecy in Prior Research

Historical-Critical Investigation of Apocalyptic Texts

Although historical-critical investigation since the nineteenth century tried to trace the roots of apocalyptic texts, several tendencies prevented

progress in understanding this literature's actual social background.[2] Being unsympathetic with apocalyptic worldviews, scholars looked for extra-Israelite sources, contemporary with the apocalyptic texts of the third or second century B.C.E., to account for apocalypticism's supposed pessimism, determinism, and even schizophrenia as due to foreign influence.

Julius Wellhausen viewed apocalypticism as devoid of theological value, and he had trouble fitting it into his understanding of the evolution of Israelite religion. Because Wellhausen believed the prophets represented the apex of Israel's ethical thinking and were the bridge to the religion of the New Testament, he viewed both Old Testament and New Testament apocalyptic writings as a curiosity at best.[3] Even the prominent work of R. H. Charles (1855–1931), the "grand old man" of apocalyptic literature, did not dissuade most scholars from arguing that the apocalyptic writings were somehow irrational and difficult to relate to their Protestant idea of the mainstream of biblical religion. Although Charles devoted a lifetime of study to apocalypticism, its language remained foreign to him. He could never empathize with the apocalyptic world and consistently viewed it as foreign to Israel's worldview.[4]

The notion that apocalypticism was a foreign import in Israel was also supported in Germany by form critics such as Hermann Gunkel, who

2. Historical-critical investigation of biblical apocalyptic literature began in the nineteenth century. Two of the earliest critical works on this literature were those by Friedrich Lücke and Adolf Hilgenfeld. See Lücke, *Versuch einer vollständigen Einleitung in die Offenbarung Johannis und in die Gesammte apokalyptische Literatur* (Bonn: E. Weber, 1852); and Hilgenfeld, *Die jüdische Apokalyptik in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Jena: F. Mauke, 1857). Lücke argued that apocalyptic writings developed out of prophecy. Hilgenfeld argued that the historical-critical method should be applied to the question of the origin of apocalyptic literature. See the overviews by Paul Hanson, *Visionaries and their Apocalypses* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 4; and John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 1–5.

3. The modern appreciation of the importance of apocalypticism in New Testament theology was not anticipated by Wellhausen. Wellhausen's disinterest in apocalyptic writings is clear from the paucity of their treatment in his *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973; 1st ed., 1878). See the discussion of Klaus Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* (Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1972), 36; and Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 1.

4. For this assessment of Charles's attitudes, see the discussion of James Barr, "Jewish Apocalyptic in Recent Scholarly Study," *BJRL* 58 (1975): 32. Charles's work did, however, provide the scholarly community with a number of important primary sources for the study of apocalypticism. For example, see R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913).

sought to relate biblical apocalyptic literature to the ancient Near Eastern mythological texts brought to light in the nineteenth century.[5] In turn, Sigmund Mowinckel, Gunkel's student, accorded much importance to Persian influence in the rise of apocalypticism.[6] In particular, Mowinckel argued that the origin of the dualism in apocalyptic literature could be traced to Persia. This view of Persian religion as the background of apocalyptic literature was popularized for the English-speaking world by H. H. Rowley and D. S. Russell, both of whom connected Persian influence with the rise of apocalypticism in Israel.[7]

More recent scholarship has rightly attacked the understanding that apocalypticism was a foreign transplant into Israel. It has become clear that it was inadequate to explain the apocalyptic writings through recourse to Persian dualism.[8] Focusing on the immediate environment's influence caused misunderstandings about the period of origin of apocalypticism and about the history and sociology of the centuries preceding the full-blown Hellenistic apocalypses.

The focus on a Persian matrix for apocalypticism was a significant factor in the general lack of scholarly attention to the sociology of the groups that produced (proto-)apocalyptic literature in Israelite society. Even as late as the work of Rowley and Russell, the Israelite social background of apocalyptic literature was not properly explored.

5. See Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895). Another important German contribution was that of Hugo Gressmann, *Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1905).

6. See Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954). In addition to tracing apocalypticism to Persian roots, some earlier scholars of the late nineteenth century had seen Persian or Zoroastrian influence on all of Judaism. See David Winston, "The Iranian Component in the Bible, Apocrypha, and Qumran: A Review of the Evidence," *HR* 5 (1966): 185.

7. See H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic* (London: Lutterworth, 1944); and D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic,* OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964); and *Apocalyptic: Ancient and Modern* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). For discussion of Rowley and Russell, see Barr, "Recent Scholarly Study," 10–14; and Ernest W. Nicholson, "Apocalyptic," in *Tradition and Interpretation,* ed. G. W. Anderson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 191–92.

8. Nevertheless, recent study suggests some Persian influence on Second Temple religion, especially an influence of Iranian ethical dualism on the Qumran writings. See Winston, "Iranian Component," 183–216; Shaul Shaked, "Qumran and Iran: Further Considerations," *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972): 433–46; and Richard N. Frye, "Qumran and Iran: The State of Studies," in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults,* Morton Smith *Festschrift,* ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 3:167–73.

Although Rowley was keenly interested in apocalypticism, for the most part his work merely described the literary characteristics of apocalyptic texts. Like other mid-twentieth-century scholars, Rowley did not explicitly use sociology and anthropology in his biblical studies. He confined his topic to Jewish apocalypticism and did not draw on cross-cultural parallels.[9]

Just as it was inadequate to evaluate apocalyptic literature as late or decadent over against so-called mainline biblical traditions, so also it was insufficient to study this literature merely by characterizing its literary distinctiveness and unique ideas and distinguishing it from prophecy. The nonsociological approaches to apocalyptic texts did not fully appreciate the sources and nature of this literature. Indeed, these methods left unanswered half of the form-critical problem, the question of the social setting of the literature.

The last several decades of the twentieth century have seen significant advances in understanding the nature of the groups and societies behind (proto-)apocalyptic texts. The position popularized by Rowley is no longer generally accepted. Rather, modern scholarship, while still allowing for Persian influence, has downplayed the idea of apocalypticism as a Persian import and has been more attentive to the social background of apocalyptic texts.[10] The discovery of the first Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 was a

9. See the historical summary by Philip R. Davies, who states that Rowley's account is "couched essentially in terms of Jewish history, religion and literature alone" ("The Social World of Apocalyptic Writings," in *The World of Ancient Israel,* ed. R. E. Clements [Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 255).

10. Several factors have contributed to a modern revival of interest in biblical apocalyptic writings. Klaus Koch has outlined some of these (see his discussion in *Rediscovery*). Koch himself is often given credit as a starting point for the modern interest in biblical apocalyptic writings, even though he is sometimes thought to have raised more problems than he solved. Another factor in the revival of interest in apocalyptic has been the emergence of theologians who emphasize apocalyptic religion. The foundations for this emphasis were already laid in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by scholars who interpreted early Christianity as an apocalyptic movement. (See Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971; 1st German ed., 1892]; Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988; 1st German ed., 1892]; and Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* [New York: Macmillan, 1957; 1st German ed., 1906].) Then, in the last half of the twentieth century, some scholars who took the apocalypticism of early Christianity seriously stressed its positive theological contribution to the gospel of Jesus and Paul. See Ernst Käsemann's claim that "apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology" ("The Beginnings of Christian Theology," in *New Testament Questions of Today,*

leading development in this connection. After the scrolls began to be trans-
lated, scholars realized that the Qumran community was an actual example
of an ancient millennial group.[11] This new evidence for the study of apoca-
lypticism impelled scholars to start focusing on the social background of
this type of religion.

A watershed was reached when scholars began looking to Israelite so-
ciety, not Persia, for the background and setting of apocalypticism.[12] In
1959, Otto Plöger presented an influential original study of the origins
and development of Old Testament apocalyptic literature.[13] His argument
traced two lines of development in Israelite religion. One of these lines
had no traces of eschatological thinking, while the other was thoroughly
apocalyptic. Plöger associated these two lines of thought with two groups
that opposed the policies of Antiochus Epiphanes. One group, the Hasi-
dim, produced the Daniel apocalypse and represented a dualistic-
eschatological tradition. In contrast, the second group, the Maccabeans,
interpreted events from a noneschatological point of view and saw them-
selves as involved in a this-worldly revolt against mundane oppressors.

The significance of the Hasidim and the Maccabeans for Plöger was
that they represent two lines of thought that can be traced backward in
time. Plöger traced these lines of development back to two groups within
the postexilic Israelite community. He reconstructed a postexilic "theo-
cratic" group represented by P and the Chronicler. These theocrats, he be-
lieved, were interested only in cult and law. Thus, they had a realized escha-
tology with no tolerance for apocalypticism.[14]

Opposed to this group were the ideological forebears of the Hasidim,

trans. W. J. Montague [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969] 102); and the role that apoca-
lyptic has played in theologians such as Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Molt-
mann. For discussion of apocalyptic in these theologians, see Koch, *Rediscovery*,
14–15; Barr, "Recent Scholarly Study," 24–26; and Hanson, *Visionaries*, 7.

11. The terms *millennial* and *millenarian* are often used by sociologists and an-
thropologists to describe groups similar to those that biblical scholars describe as
apocalyptic. For discussion, see Sylvia L. Thrupp, "Millennial Dreams in Action:
A Report on the Conference Discussion," in *Millennial Dreams in Action*, ed. S.
Thrupp (The Hague: Mouton, 1962), 11–12.

12. Stanley B. Frost is usually considered an early representative of this newer
scholarship (see his "Apocalyptic and History," in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*,
ed. J. P. Hyatt [Nashville: Abingdon, 1965], 99–112).

13. As noted in note 1 above, the work was first published as *Theokratie und
Eschatologie*.

14. A note on terminology is in order at this point. Plöger's work uses the term
theocracy (*Theokratie*) to refer to a rule of the priests at the center of postexilic soci-
ety. In contrast, Hanson prefers the term *hierocracy* to denote the same priestly

who organized themselves into antiestablishment conventicles (secret
groups meeting for religious purposes). Plöger viewed these conventicles
as holding on to the prophetic word, and within them the cult officials'
opponents kept the prophetic spirit alive. Within these proto-Hasidic
groups, which produced Isaiah 24–27, Zechariah 12–14, and Joel, Plöger
found the origins of apocalypticism. Plöger thus rejected the notion that
apocalypticism was imported from Persia, and instead he established a tra-
jectory leading from Israelite prophecy to apocalypticism.

From one perspective, Plöger's thesis represents an advance. Although
earlier scholars, such as Rowley, had argued that a historical situation of
distress and persecution was behind Jewish apocalyptic, their arguments
lacked sociological precision. In contrast, Plöger went beyond Rowley in
specifying an inner-Israelite social matrix as the cause of the distress. In-
tergroup conflict within Israelite society was, he believed, the essential is-
sue.[15] Plöger's approach has some roots in the nineteenth-century socio-
logical work of Ferdinand Tönnies, who developed a distinction between
"community" (*Gemeinschaft*) and "society" (*Gesellschaft*).[16] Whereas earlier
scholars spoke in general terms about Jewish distress, Plöger's sociological
understanding specified apocalyptic literature as the product of a *Gemein-
schaft* alienated from the postexilic priestly establishment.[17]

Relying on the work of Plöger, Paul Hanson has developed similar
ideas, combining them with theses developed by Frank Moore Cross.[18]

government (*Priesterherrschaft*). Hanson's term may be the more specific one, be-
cause in the case of a theocracy (a government where a god is held to be the ruler),
the officials implementing the deity's will might not necessarily be priests. In this
book, however, both terms will be avoided. As the discussion of Zechariah in chap-
ter 5 below will show, Wellhausen's notion that the priests of Persian-period Yehud
ascended to governmental hegemony, ruling the society in the place of civil leaders,
is overstated. This does not mean, of course, that no priests shared central power
in this period.

15. See Davies, "Social World," 256.

16. For discussion of Tönnies, see Andrew D. H. Mayes, *The Old Testament in
Sociological Perspective* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989), 7–17.

17. Ibid., 14.

18. See Frank Moore Cross's *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge,
Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 343–46. Cross suggests sixth-century ori-
gins for apocalyptic involving reformulations of the prophetic tradition and of the
royal ideology. He holds that an important aspect of the new apocalyptic synthesis
of the late sixth century was the recrudescence of old Canaanite mythic lore. Han-
son took up Cross's suggestion of a new postexilic apocalyptic syncretism with early
Israelite and Canaanite roots, and attempted to assign it a social setting. He did this
by working into the theory the idea of a prophetic and sectarian impulse behind the
oracles of Zechariah 9–14 and Isaiah 56–66.

Hanson attempts to fill in gaps in Plöger's description of a trajectory from prophecy to apocalyptic writings. In part, he does this by looking for the reutilization of ancient Canaanite mythopoetic language by "new prophetic voices" in the postexilic period. Hanson finds such a reuse of myth among postexilic factions in tension with the restored community's leaders. By reconstructing these prophetic factions and their conflicts as the generative matrix of apocalyptic, Hanson tried to describe a development of prophetic eschatology into apocalyptic eschatology.[19]

Specifically, Hanson has maintained that the Third Isaiah prophetic group and their allies (groups of disenfranchised Levites), whose apocalyptic thinking was aimed against those in charge of the temple, were the first to produce Old Testament apocalyptic literature. Subsequently, Zechariah 9–14 was produced by the same antihierocratic circles. This ongoing conflict between prophets-become-visionaries and a Zadokite-led priestly hierocratic group is presented as the social setting of the dawn of apocalyptic eschatology.

Hanson is more explicit than his predecessors about alienation and deprivation as characteristic of the tradents of apocalyptic ideas. He argues that there is a "brooding minority" behind every apocalyptic movement.[20] Hanson's sociological heritage is also more clear than is the case with previous scholars of apocalyptic literature. His study is based on the work of Max Weber, as well as that of Karl Mannheim and Ernst Troeltsch.[21] Hanson's reliance on the sociology of Weber and Mannheim for his view of

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19. One of the clearest statements of this latter thesis is in Paul Hanson's *Old Testament Apocalyptic* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 33.

20. Hanson, *Dawn*, 2.

21. See Andrew D. H. Mayes, "Sociology and the Old Testament," in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 55. Hanson's discussion presupposes Weber's ideal types of the ruling class and the alienated class. For example, *Dawn*, 212, refers to Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. E. Fischoff (Boston: Beacon, 1963; 1st German ed., 1922), 80ff., 106–7; and Talcott Parsons's Introduction to that work, xxix–xxx, xxxv. Then, Hanson draws on Karl Mannheim to show how a "utopian mentality" is characteristic of the alienated ideal-type of group (*Dawn*, 213, refers to Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans L. Wirth and E. Shils [New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936; 1st German ed., 1929], 40, 87, 192–93). Hanson argues that when their expectations for a transformation of society are frustrated, the alienated are drawn to apocalyptic eschatology. Under these circumstances, it is "inevitable that consolation should be sought in genuine otherworldly hopes" (*Dawn*, 214, quotes Weber, *Sociology*, 140). Discussion of Weber, Mannheim, and Troeltsch is resumed below.

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deprivation as the causative matrix of apocalyptic eschatology is evident from the following quote:

> Modern sociologists like Mannheim and Weber have demonstrated convincingly that powerful officials ruling over the religious or political structures of a society do not dream apocalyptic visions of the revolutionary overthrow of the existing order of things. Temple priests are not likely candidates for apocalyptic seers.[22]

Although the influence of Weber and Mannheim on Hanson is unambiguous, his use of Troeltsch's church/sect paradigm most strongly informed his scenario of the rise of Israelite apocalyptic eschatology. Troeltsch argued that the medieval church, dependent on the upper classes, kept eschatological teachings to a minimum. By contrast, groups of the sect "type," composed of the marginal and oppressed, adopted eschatological views. The conflict between church and sect, in Troeltsch's view, formed the social matrix for the rise of medieval millennialism as the sect "type" groups adopted "chiliastic" dreams in the face of persecution. Hanson adopts Troeltsch's paradigm to support his description of a postexilic conflict between "hierocratic" and "visionary" elements.[23] Just as Troeltsch saw apocalypticism as the religion of marginal and alienated groups, Hanson places the rise of Israelite apocalyptic eschatology within those postexilic groups oppressed by the priests at the center of society.

The Present Situation

The view that apocalyptic eschatology emerged because of deprivation, particularly that felt by peripheral or disenfranchised factions, is now quite common. Modern discussions of the origins of millennialism in early Jewish history often draw on deprivation theory, especially as found in Plöger and Hanson.[24] For example, Walter Schmithals accepts Plöger's

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22. Hanson, *Dawn*, 232.

23. Hanson, *Dawn*, 215, refers to Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2 vols., trans. O. Wyon (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960; 1st German ed., 1911), 336, 995. Hanson, *Dawn*, 216, cites Troeltsch, *Social Teaching*, 337, 380.

24. Besides being presented in the work of Plöger and Hanson, the deprivation view is also found in Morton Smith's hypothetical reconstructions of postexilic religion in *Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1971). Also see such Old Testament Introductions as Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 585–90; and Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 502–4, 516, 622. Chapters 2–6 of Theodore Olson's 1982 monograph on the origins of the idea of "progress" provide an example of how widespread the deprivation view is (*Millennialism, Utopianism, and Progress* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982]).

view of a transition during postexilic times from the eschatology of the prophets to that of apocalyptic. He states that prophetic eschatology was converted to the apocalyptic view by "the heirs of the later prophetic movement, . . . pushed to the fringes of the Jewish community."[25] Schmithals believes that although the advantaged "will hardly denounce history as such," one can envision apocalypticism as arising "on a lower social level."[26]

As one would expect, considering the widespread consensus that apocalypticism originated in Persian period deprivation, proto-apocalyptic texts are often assumed to be the postexilic products of deprived groups. Reflecting this current view, Robert R. Wilson writes, "Postexilic authors seem to have added apocalyptic material to earlier prophetic books such as Isaiah and Ezekiel. The increased use of apocalyptic images suggests that the prophets themselves were part of groups . . . presumably becoming more and more isolated from the central social structure."[27] Reuben Ahroni, another scholar who finds deprivation behind biblical proto-apocalyptic material, argues that Ezekiel 38–39 is a product of distress or trauma in postexilic times.[28] Deprivation approaches are often also applied to texts in Zechariah. Thus, Zechariah 9–14 is treated by William Neil as the product of despair, and by Joseph Blenkinsopp as the probable product of peripheral conventicles.[29]

Interpreters of Joel, furthermore, find deprivation behind its proto-apocalypticism. For example, Hans Walter Wolff's commentary accepts Plöger's view that Joel stems from an eschatological opposition party.[30] Similarly, Paul L. Redditt argues that Joel and the central officials of his society rejected each other, resulting in the Joel group's peripheralization. Redditt's article bases itself on I. M. Lewis's notions about peripheral prophecy and the theory that millennial groups perceive themselves as relatively deprived.[31]

Several studies of full-blown apocalyptic texts are also modeled on the

25. Walter Schmithals, *The Apocalyptic Movement: Introduction and Interpretation*, trans. J. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 136.

26. Ibid., 144–45.

27. Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 292; cf. 285–86, 290, 308.

28. Reuben Ahroni, "The Gog Prophecy and the Book of Ezekiel," HAR 1 (1977): 24.

29. William Neil, "Zechariah, Book of," *IDB* 4:947; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 263.

30. Hans Walter Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 10–12, 36, 49, 82, 84–85.

31. Paul L. Redditt, "The Book of Joel and Peripheral Prophecy," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 236–37. Discussion of Lewis is resumed below.

deprivation approach. For example, Schmithals's discussion of apocalypses such as Daniel and *1 Enoch* leads him to conclude: "The apocalyptic groups . . . obviously led an existence as conventicles and, separated from the public religion, cultivated a sect-mentality."[32] In like manner, W. Sibley Towner places Daniel's authors within a dissident apocalyptic tradition, traceable back to those who opposed the triumphant priestly rulers of postexilic Israel.[33]

The recent approaches to apocalyptic literature have overcome many of the problems of the older studies. In doing so, however, they have produced an overarching understanding of the social matrix of apocalyptic literature that, at best, fits only some of the biblical texts. First, this understanding views apocalyptic religion as the child of prophecy. Hanson adopts Plöger at this point, but this view is already found in Rowley and Russell. Rowley had stressed the contribution of prophetic eschatology in the origin of apocalypticism. Russell, in turn, saw postexilic prophecy as the taproot of apocalyptic.[34]

From the beginning there were indications that this view was inadequate to account for all the data. As early as 1919, Gustav Hölscher had argued the opposite idea that *wisdom* is the source of apocalyptic literature.[35] Gerhard von Rad's later elaboration of Hölscher's view has not found wide acceptance, but it does serve as a prominent indicator of unsolved problems.[36] One such unsolved problem is the book of Daniel,

32. Schmithals, *Apocalyptic Movement*, 46.

33. W. Sibley Towner, "Daniel," in *Harper's Bible Commentary*, ed. J. L. Mayes (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 695–96. At this point, it should be noted that New Testament scholars of apocalyptic texts also use deprivation approaches. Thus, Philipp Vielhauer, drawing on Plöger, accepts the view that apocalyptic literature first originated among the disenfranchised. He writes, "We may accept the view that the home of Apocalyptic is in those eschatologically excited circles which were forced more and more by the theocracy into a kind of conventicle existence" ("Apocalypses and Related Subjects, Introduction," in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher [London: Lutterworth, 1965], 2:598; cf. 2:595). Vielhauer finds that the temper of Jewish apocalyptic was shared by the early Jewish-Christians, and that apocalyptic expectations were especially cherished in eschatologically stimulated circles in Asia Minor.

34. In this opinion they were following the view set out by Lücke in the nineteenth century (see n. 2 above).

35. Gustav Hölscher, "Die Entstehung des Buches Daniel," TSK 92 (1919): 113–38.

36. Gerhard von Rad argued that both apocalyptic and wisdom literature focus on esoteric knowledge divorced from Israel's saving history. See his *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 2:301–15; and

which was more likely produced by wisdom circles than by prophetic circles.[37] If groups such as wisdom circles were millennial, this suggests that other circles, such as priestly groups, are also possible sources of apocalyptic literature.[38]

Second, the newer approaches' overarching understanding reads the apocalyptic texts as the literary expressions of alienated factions in the restored community. These groups are seen as disenfranchised and deprived by a hierocratic group in power. This reading cannot account for the biblical evidence and must be corrected. Left unexplained are those texts often identified as proto-apocalyptic that occur in books from central priestly circles of exilic and postexilic times. It is necessary to move beyond deprivation approaches in order to understand these texts.

Sociological Research on Millennialism

The basic problems raised by Hanson and Plöger's conventicle approach cannot be redressed by simple recourse to sociological and anthropological theory. Like the work of Plöger and Hanson, the sociological discipline itself accepts a generalizing and overarching understanding of the social matrix of apocalyptic literature.

In particular, sociological theory parallels Plöger and Hanson in putting forward alienation and deprivation as the cause of millennialism. The similarities in the approaches to apocalypticism of sociological theory and biblical studies, however, are largely due to a shared foundation. Sociologists' understandings of millennial groups are often rooted in Weber's and Mannheim's paradigms, the same paradigms that also form the foundation of Hanson's thesis.[39]

In the early twentieth century, Max Weber and his friend Ernst Troeltsch[40] argued that millennial type groups consisted of the powerless

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Wisdom in Israel, trans. J. Martin (New York: Abingdon, 1973), 263–83. Also see Koch, *Rediscovery,* 45–46.

37. The court tales of Daniel 1–6 are replete with wisdom concepts and vocabulary. See the discussion in Robert R. Wilson, "From Prophecy to Apocalyptic: Reflections on the Shape of Israelite Religion," *Semeia* 21 (1981): 87–93.

38. See R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society,* 308.

39. Max Weber's most important contribution on the rise of millennialism is found in his 1922 treatise *The Sociology of Religion* (e.g., 106, 109, 140, 175). Weber's influence on figures such as Troeltsch predated the publication of this work, however. For Hanson's reliance on Weber, Troeltsch, and Mannheim, see pp. 8–9 above.

40. See Troeltsch, *Social Teaching,* 336–37, 380, 995.

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and deprived ("pariah groups").[41] Karl Mannheim, writing in the late 1920s, was influenced both by Marxist categories and by the thought of Weber. Mannheim argued that millennialism is the religion of deprived groups, the lower strata of society, and oppressed and persecuted minorities.[42] Weber and Mannheim are cited both by Hanson, as shown above, and by later sociological studies that Hanson did not employ.

From the 1930s on, sociologists studying group psychology and acculturation reintroduced Weber's view that powerless, persecuted, or dissatisfied groups are the source of apocalyptic ideas. Harold Lasswell, writing in 1935, tried to understand millennialism in terms of psychopathology, and Philleo Nash, writing in 1937, linked millennial groups to the experience of deprivation.[43] Then, in 1941, Bernard Barber argued that millennialism is one of several alternative responses to harsh times: "The messianic movement is comprehensible only as a response to widespread deprivation."[44]

Among anthropologists, Ralph Linton was one of the first to synthesize a complete theory of millennialism based on the deprivation idea.[45] In his pioneering 1943 article, Linton was concerned with movements that result from a culture's contact with other cultures that threaten its integrity. According to Linton, when a culture is dominated, the conditions of hardship, or at least of extreme dissatisfaction, that result can give rise to millen-

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41. Of course, pre-Weber scholarship often pictured the members of millennial groups as peripheral, antisocial, or psychologically troubled people. For discussion, see Hillel Schwartz, "Millenarianism, An Overview," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 9:531–32. Schwartz notes that seventeenth-century works about millennial groups described them as composed of fanatics and even deluded and possessed people. Then, eighteenth-century accounts suggested millennialism was a medical problem. A loss of memory and sense of time was suggested as its cause (ibid., 531). Similarly, nineteenth-century articles looked to chemical imbalances or money-making schemes as explanations for millennialism.

42. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia,* e.g., 40, 87, 192–93.

43. Harold D. Lasswell, "Collective Autism as a Consequence of Culture Contact: Notes on Religious Training and the Peyote Cult at Taos," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 4 (1935): 232–47; Philleo Nash, "The Place of Religious Revivalism in the Formation of the Intercultural Community on Klamath Reservation," in *Social Anthropology of North American Tribes,* ed. F. Eggan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 377–442.

44. Bernard Barber, "Acculturation and Messianic Movements," *American Sociological Review* 6 (1941): 667.

45. Ralph Linton, "Nativistic Movements," *American Anthropologist* 45 (1943): 230–40.

nial movements.[46] Because he held that millennialism originates in times of stress as an irrational flight from reality, Linton helped establish the then-current idea that stress and deprivation give rise to this type of religion.

Like Linton, and Barber before him, Fred W. Voget saw millennial movements as the result of deprivation and frustrations consequent to contact with a dominant society. In addition, Linton's idea received support from Raymond W. Firth, who also viewed millennial groups as composed of the deprived.[47] Anthony F. C. Wallace was another early influential millennialism theorist.[48] Wallace also emphasized stress due to needs not being satisfied as a major cause of millennial groups.[49]

The same year that Wallace's article appeared, Leon Festinger published his theory of cognitive dissonance.[50] Festinger's social psychological study (1956) was concerned to discover why millennial groups continue despite the psychological conflict caused by the disconfirmation of their beliefs and perceptions of the world. Scholars have since used the cognitive dissonance notion, however, to add sophistication to the theory of deprivation.[51] Wayne A. Meeks, for example, has surmised that the "deprivation"

46. Ibid., 233. Linton's theory of cultural deprivation was actually a refinement of F. E. Williams's view that cargo cults result from the imposition of Western culture and the destruction of native ceremonies. Williams made this observation based on his work on the "Vailala Madness" in the 1920s. See his "The Vailala Madness in Retrospect," in *Essays Presented to C. G. Seligmann,* ed. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, et al. (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1934), 369–79.

47. Fred W. Voget, "The American Indian in Transition: Reformation and Accommodation," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 249–63; Raymond W. Firth, *Elements of Social Organization* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), 113.

48. Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 264–81.

49. Wallace draws upon Max Weber at several points. For example, Wallace cites Weber's concept of charismatic leadership in characterizing the organization of revitalization movements (ibid., 273).

50. Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group That Predicted the Destruction of the World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964; 1st ed., 1956). "Cognitive dissonance" involves a person having two cognitions (pieces of knowledge, beliefs, or feelings) that are inconsistent with each other, thus causing the person to experience interior conflict. Festinger argued that the presence of this sort of dissonance gives rise to pressure on the individual to reduce or eliminate the dissonance.

51. For example, Weston La Barre notes that acculturation theories of millennialism posit "a 'cognitive dissonance' between competing systems which the syncretic [millennial] cult somehow resolves" ("Materials for a History of Studies of Crisis Cults: A Bibliographic Essay," *Current Anthropology* 12 [1971]: 20). (It should be noted that La Barre criticizes the acculturation theory, arguing that mil-

behind Pauline Christian millennial groups can be described in terms of cognitive dissonance. The groups' members found themselves "in an ambiguous relation to [their society's] hierarchical structures." The interior conflict resulting from this perceived "status inconsistency" pressured these people to seek relief from their stress. Appealing to Festinger's theory, Meeks suggests they found relief when millennialism's fundamental images accounted for their cognitive inconsistencies with its view of the world as just as out of kilter as they felt it to be.[52]

Old Testament scholars have also adopted the cognitive dissonance refinement of the deprivation theory. Thus Paul Hanson's 1976 article on apocalypticism seems to adopt a cognitive dissonance approach in its argument that an apocalyptic symbolic universe resolves inner contradictions between religious hopes and experience. This argument's strong link to the deprivation thesis is clear from Hanson's contention that the symbolic universe in question is opposed to that of the dominant society, and that the experience causing inner contradiction is always the group experience of alienation.[53]

It is unfortunate that scholars have so closely linked the dissonance theory with deprivation theory. Dissonance can occur even when groups are not at all deprived or frustrated. As Meeks shows, not all early Christians were objectively deprived; some also belonged to the upper levels of the social structure. Some even had wealth and high prestige.[54] Besides occurring among such people of prestige, cognitive dissonance can also

lennial groups can also be caused by socially endogenous conflict.) A cognitive-dissonance explanation for millennialism is also found in Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965).

52. Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 173–74.

53. Paul Hanson, "Apocalypticism," *IDBSup*, 28–31. Other students of apocalyptic groups, such as Robert P. Carroll and Paul L. Redditt, are more explicit than Hanson in their reliance on cognitive dissonance theory. Carroll argues that the rise of Israelite apocalypticism is an example of how "dissonance gives rise to hermeneutic." In his view, postexilic deprivation accompanied by a collapse of prophetic hopes gave rise to dissonance. As a response, apocalyptic reinterpretation of earlier prophecies attempted to eliminate the dissonance (*When Prophecy Failed* [New York: Seabury, 1979], 88, 110, 160, 205, 219). Carroll writes, "With its roots in prophecy, apocalyptic became the resolution of the dissonance caused by the lack of fulfillment of prophecy in the early post-exilic period" (*Prophecy,* 205). Redditt similarly argues for cognitive dissonance behind Zechariah 9–14, resulting in "a revised eschatology in which the old prophecies could still come true" ("Israel's Shepherds: Hope and Pessimism in Zechariah 9–14," *CBQ* 51 [1989]: 640).

54. Meeks, *Urban Christians,* 52, 57, 73.

be experienced by a society's leaders. For example, a group in power can experience psychological turmoil when confronted with an important omen or the message of a persuasive teacher. One would normally consider such psychological turmoil as cognitive dissonance, but not as deprivation. To identify it as such is special pleading. A rehabilitated understanding of cognitive dissonance helps us understand millennialism's background (see below, chapter 2), but there is no need to link it to deprivation.

David F. Aberle's modification of the deprivation thesis helped pave the way for including phenomena like cognitive dissonance under the deprivation rubric. Writing in 1959, a few years after Festinger's book was published, Aberle strongly renewed the argument for deprivation as the cause of millennialism.[55] Although dependent on Lasswell's, Nash's, and Barber's causal theories of deprivation, Aberle's refined deprivation theory was distinctive.[56] His modified theory broadened the deprivation thesis by introducing the notion of relativity. In relative deprivation theory, deprivation is not considered an objective condition that any neutral observer would recognize. Rather, the deprivation consists of people's *perception* of their present condition relative to their expectations.[57] For example, a multimillionaire would have a feeling of relative deprivation if he lost all but his last million. Although Aberle's notion of deprivation clearly covers more millennial groups than previous versions, it is a more difficult con-

55. David F. Aberle, "The Prophet Dance and Reactions to White Contact," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 15 (1959): 74–83.

56. For discussion, see La Barre, "Materials for a History," 24; Weston La Barre, *The Ghost Dance: Origins of Religion* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 287; Virginia H. Hine, "The Deprivation and Disorganization Theories of Social Movements," in *Religious Movements in Contemporary America,* ed. I. Zaretsky and M. Leone (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 651; R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society,* 78; R. Wilson, "Prophecy to Apocalyptic," 85; and Meeks, *Urban Christians,* 172.

57. See David F. Aberle, "A Note on Relative Deprivation Theory as Applied to Millenarian and Other Cult Movements," in *Millennial Dreams in Action: Essays in Comparative Study,* ed. S. Thrupp (The Hague: Mouton, 1962), 209. Like Aberle, Charles Y. Glock has tried to refine the concept of deprivation to make it more useful. Glock writes, "Deprivation, as we conceive it, refers to any and all of the ways that an individual or group may be, or feel, disadvantaged in comparison either to other individuals or groups or to an internalized set of standards" ("The Role of Deprivation in the Origin and Evolution of Religious Groups," in *Religion and Social Conflict,* ed. R. Lee and M. W. Marty [New York: Oxford University Press, 1964], 27). Glock applies deprivation theory to the origin of religious movements in general. Thus, in his view, religion often compensates for feelings of deprivation ("Role of Deprivation," 29).

cept to apply objectively, and it permits almost any group to be described as deprived.

Other modern sociologists also use deprivation theory in more or less refined forms to account for millennialism. A few of the better known deprivation theorists may be mentioned. Drawing on Weber, Barber, Linton, and Firth, Vittorio Lanternari describes millennial movements as "the religions of the oppressed." These movements, Lanternari argues, convey a message of salvation and hope in the face of crisis and deprivation. "Everywhere, in primitive as in highly developed societies, the messianic movement emerges from a crisis, to offer spiritual redemption."[58]

Norman Cohn employs Weber's theories and a refined deprivation approach in an attempt to find the social and economic causes of millennial movements.[59] Cohn focuses not on poverty as such, but on marginalization or loss of traditional ways of life as the cause of millennialism. Although recognizing that millennialism may appeal to people in various social strata, he argues that discontent or lack of material and emotional support is present in each case. And in the final analysis, Cohn stresses the tendency of medieval millennialism to occur among the lower strata and the radical fringe, arguing that its general context was widespread dissatisfaction with the establishment.[60] Alienated people adopted millennialism to "hold their anxieties at bay" and make themselves feel important and powerful.[61]

As a final development, note I. M. Lewis's work on marginal groups and deprivation cults. Although concerned with a broader category of phenomena than just millennialism, Lewis clarifies peripheral groups and the religion found among them.[62] His investigations have made the scholarly discussion of the differences between peripheral and central groups and institutions more precise and enhance the deprivation thesis.

A New Cross-disciplinary Approach

The present scholarly situation requires not only a correction of Plöger and Hanson's conventicle thesis in light of recent sociological thinking but

58. Vittorio Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed,* trans. L. Sergio (New York: Knopf, 1963), 309.

59. See Thrupp, "Millennial Dreams in Action: A Report," 20. Norman Cohn often draws on Weber in his *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

60. See Cohn, *Pursuit,* 10, 37, 50–52, 282, 284.

61. Ibid., 87–88.

62. See I. M. Lewis, "Spirit Possession and Deprivation Cults," *Man* n.s. 1 (1966):307–29; and *Ecstatic Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1971).

also a critique of the sociological theory of deprivation. Retreatment of the apocalyptic texts in the Old Testament is in order based on such a reassessment, especially retreatment of central-priestly apocalyptic texts. In addressing this task, I shall make use of sociological studies of millennialism,[63] particularly the efforts at comprehensive treatment that began with the work of Linton and Wallace.[64]

The sociological and anthropological study of millennial groups has been advancing since the end of the nineteenth century, when James Mooney carried out his work on the Ghost Dance religion among Native Americans.[65] These studies constitute relevant sources already used in dealing with some of the aforementioned problems in the study of biblical apocalypticism.[66] As noted above, past sociological study of millennialism parallels the study of apocalyptic religion by biblical scholars. The notion that millennial groups are deprived is common and has a long history in scholarship. Deprivation theory, however, has not been held universally, and several millennial groups have been described that are *not* peripheral or alienated in any obvious sense. I shall make direct use of these sociological descriptions in the hope of avoiding the pitfalls that result from drawing exclusively on the theoretical constructs of sociologists. When the relevant Israelite groups are compared to millennial groups in power, several problems in the study of biblical apocalyptic literature can be solved.

63. A comprehensive review of the anthropological scholarship is unnecessary here. The history of deprivation theory has already been outlined above. Beyond this, several good bibliographic essays are available reviewing the general study of millennialism. See H. Schwartz, "Millenarianism," 531–32; Hillel Schwartz, "The End of the Beginning: Millenarian Studies, 1969–1975," *RelSRev* 2/3 (1976): 1–14; La Barre, "Materials for a History"; Yonina Talmon, "Millenarism" [*sic*], in *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan Company and Free Press, 1968), 10:349–62; and Ted Daniels, *Millennialism: An International Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1992).

64. Linton, "Nativistic Movements"; and Wallace, "Revitalization Movements." See the discussion above, and Gary W. Trompf, "Introduction," in *Cargo Cults and Millenarian Movements: Transoceanic Comparisons of New Religious Movements* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990), 1–5.

65. James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991). The first edition of this work was published as Part 2 of the *Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* 14 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896).

66. For example, see the several related articles in *Semeia* 21 (1981).

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The Sociology of Apocalyptic Groups

Robert R. Wilson has listed a number of guidelines for using comparative material to elucidate aspects of Israelite religion,[1] and these guidelines are central to the methodology used in this book. Following them, I rely only on twentieth-century sociological work and base my results on a survey of as many societies as possible,[2] collecting information on the history of millennial groups and their ideas, leadership, and recruiting.[3] The results of this survey will help to form hypotheses about apocalypticism, hypotheses that I shall subsequently test with respect to the relevant biblical texts. The exegesis of the texts will control the use of comparative material.

The first problem is deciding how to select millennial groups for analysis. As Norman Gottwald has noted, some criteria for selective grouping

1. Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 15–16.

2. This examination of groups and societies for later comparison with the biblical material will not be limited to groups and societies that presently exist. Andrew D. H. Mayes refers to both Max Weber's and Emile Durkheim's work as justification for associating sociology and history and for using sociology in trying to understand ancient Israel (*The Old Testament in Sociological Perspective* [London: Marshall Pickering, 1989], 1). Authors such as Sylvia L. Thrupp also argue for the validity of comparing the results of both field and historical studies ("Millennial Dreams in Action: A Report on the Conference Discussion," in *Millennial Dreams in Action: Essays in Comparative Study,* ed. S. Thrupp [The Hague: Mouton, 1962], 13).

3. See the list in Thrupp, "Millenial Dreams in Action: A Report," 13.