

Collins, A Y, 1996 — Cosmology and eschatology in Jewish and Christian apocalypticism

Leiden/New York/Köln: EJ Brill. 261 pages. Price US\$ 99,50.

Reviewer: Prof P M Venter (University of Pretoria)

Collins is first and foremost a literary analyst. In this work she shows her skills in reading apocalyptic and related texts from the pre-Christian as well as Christian era on an intertextual basis. She deals with these texts from the viewpoint of *Gattungs*-analysis, penetrating into the world of their *Sitze im Leben*. In her opinion a text has both meaning and significance. Meaning is found when the text is read within

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its original historical and cultural context. Significance is created when the text is read within the religious and cultural framework of the interpreter. Although the author does deal with the aspect of significance, for instance the inadequate way in which apocalypses are read today (pp 15-19), or the use of the expression 'Son of Man' in the contemporary understanding of the historical Jesus (p 157-158), this aspect does not in general receive the attention due to it in this book.

Defining the genre of apocalypse *inter alia* in terms of narrative framework, a transcendent reality which is temporal and spatial, and the intention of interpreting earthly circumstances in the light of the supernatural, Collins identifies three bodies of literature in which these topics are dealt with. In the prophetic literature of Israel, the Greek magical papyri and contemporary as well as later Jewish mystical texts, she finds the appropriate material for finding the meaning of the apocalypses. Although she emphasizes that these texts are to be read against the background of millenarian movements, using contemporary methods of sociologists and anthropologists, her work is much more dedicated to descriptive analysis and comparison of texts according to mutual themes and ideas, than anything else.

In the chapters dealing with the seven heavens and numerical symbolism in Jewish and Christian apocalypses, the origin of these motifs, their functional use in contemporary literature for ordering time and space and their meaning are indicated. In two chapters dealing with the term 'Son of Man' the author indicates that this term was rather used of Jesus by his disciples and the author of Revelation than by Jesus himself. In another chapter, dealing with Revelation, Collins comes to the conclusion that holy war traditions are used in this book to indicate that martyrdom is part of the eschatological process hastening the eventual end. In a last chapter the author studies the religious phenomenon of Christian baptism in contemporary literature.

Although this monograph can be read by any one interested in the subject, some of the chapters do need specialized knowledge and the ability to read and understand Hebrew and Greek. The book is not a general introduction to apocalyptic writings but rather focuses on some of the themes in the field of study. The erudition of the author, the use of literature from such a wide spectrum and the use of both Old and New Testaments, make this an attractive publication. It is recommended for any one academically interested in apocalypticism.
