

Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and Jewish/Christian Literature

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This paper argues that Apuleius in several passages of the *Metamorphoses* seems to reflect or react to charges made in the second century against Christians and Jews, while in the Isis-book (Book 11) the author both borrows from and corrects the details provided by Jewish-Christian apocalyptic literature as a model for the encounter of his protagonist with a divine figure. In particular, there are several passages in the first ten books of the novel which may reflect views expressed by Christian apologetics of the second century C.E. including the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix, the *First and Second Apology* of Justin Martyr, the *Apology* of Aristides the Philosopher, and the *Apology* of Tertullian as well as the Jewish apology, *Against Apion*, by Josephus. The exact date of many of these works is open to question, and Tertullian, at least, is certainly later than Apuleius. But together these apologies present a kind of consensus of the kind of defenses offered by second century Christians and give us an idea of the kind of charges made against Christians and Jews with which Apuleius may have been familiar. Then, the encounter between the narrator and Isis in Book 11 is compared with similar themes in contemporary Jewish-Christian apocalyptic literature, especially the apocryphal book of 2 *Esdras*.

Possible Allusions to Christians in Metamorphoses 6 to 10

Vincent Hunink has argued that Apuleius probably had some knowledge of Christianity, and that his antipathy toward it may be shown in his trial for witchcraft by his sympathetic attitude toward Lollius Urbicus, the city prefect in Rome who had prosecuted Apuleius' enemy, Aemilianus (*Apology* 2,11). Urbicus is denounced in Justin Martyr's *Second Apology* (Ch. 2) as a

notorious persecutor of Christians (see below).¹ But there is another more direct connection between Apuleius and Justin's *Second Apology*:

1. *The Baker's Wife*

The Baker's Wife in *Met.* 9,14 is an embodiment of vice, and probably is intended as a caricature of a Christian (though Apuleius may not have clearly distinguished Christians and Jews; see below).²

Her soul was like some muddy latrine into which absolutely every vice had flowed...Furthermore she scorned and spurned all the gods in heaven, and instead of holding a definite faith, she used the false sacrilegious presumption of a god, whom she would call 'one and only,' to invent meaningless rites to cheat everyone and deceive her wretched husband, having sold her body to drink from dawn and to debauchery the whole day (*Met.* 14,3-5)

The reference to the use of worship 'to cheat everyone and deceive her wretched husband' may suggest that she uses a religion which preaches chastity and temperance as a cover for her immoral behavior. Such hypocrisy is what moves Apuleius' narrator to the highest pitch of indignation.

The baker and his wife are a mismatched couple who sound like an inversion of the couple mentioned by Justin Martyr in his *Second Apology*, where a pagan wife, intemperate like her husband, causes a conflict by converting to Christianity.³ Both Apuleius and Justin describe the conflict which occurs in a marriage over such religious difference. In both accounts, it is the wife who becomes Christian; but all the vices in the Justin Martyr account are ascribed, not to the wife but to the husband, who cannot tolerate the virtuous behavior of his wife after her conversion because of the bad light it

¹ Hunink 2000, 88. He further argues that Apuleius' opponent in the *Apology*, Aemilianus, may have himself been a Christian, since Apuleius presents him as a mocker of religion, using language which is elsewhere applied to Christians. That theory was first put forth by Emanuele Griscti 1957.

² Victor Schmidt 1997, 51-71. Schmidt, like several others, interprets Apuleius' ironic epithet *unicus* as referring to the Christian God (cf. Schmidt 54), but the Jews, like the Christians, were accused of rejecting all that is sacred to the Romans, of 'despis[ing] all gods,' and of practicing promiscuous sex, cf. Tacitus *Histories* 5.4-5. In this paper passages from Apuleius are quoted from the Hanson Loeb translation (1989).

³ This was first pointed out by Baldwin 1989; see also Dowden 1994, Ramelli 2007. Benko 1986, 1, 104 discusses both passages though he does not explicitly connect them.

sheds on him, and he brings a legal action against her, and later against her Christian advisor.

For she, considering it wicked to live any longer as a wife with a husband who sought in every way means of indulging in pleasure contrary to the law of nature, and in violation of what is right, wished to be divorced from him...But this noble husband of hers—while he ought to have been rejoicing that those actions which formerly she committed with servants and hirelings, when she delighted in drunkenness and every vice, she had now given up, and desired that he too should give up the same—when she had gone from him without his desire, brought an accusation against her, affirming that she was a Christian. And she presented a paper to the emperor requesting that first she should be allowed to arrange her affairs, and afterwards make her defense against the accusation, when her affairs were set in order; and this was granted. And her erstwhile husband, since he was now no longer able to persecute her, directed his assaults against a certain Ptolemaeus, whom Urbicus punished, who had been her teacher of Christian doctrines...⁴

The case must have been sensational in its day, involving religion, sex, politics, and a considerable amount of money, implied by the woman's appeal to the emperor (probably Antoninus Pius) to avoid surrendering her dowry to her estranged husband.⁵ But the version told by Apuleius lacks the sympathy for the wife evident in Justin's version, and indeed could be interpreted as mockery aimed at Justin for naively trusting the wife's claim to have reformed her behavior. The sarcasm of Justin's ironic reference to the 'noble' husband is matched in Apuleius by praise of the 'chaste' (*pudica*) wife at the very moment when she arranges to admit a lover to her house (9,22).

Christians were known for their insistence on sexual fidelity within marriage, though Apuleius (like Fronto in a fragment of a lost letter⁶) regards this insistence as a sham.⁷ Justin sees the wife's chaste and abstemious behavior due to her Christian beliefs as creating a wedge between her and her husband, whereas in Apuleius she uses the adoption of monotheism and pious rituals as a front to divert attention away from her corrupt behavior.

⁴ Justin Martyr, *The Second Apology of Justin for the Christians*, Roberts-Donaldson trans., vol. 1, chapter 2, 188-189.

⁵ Grant 1988, 69-73.

⁶ Fronto's letter denouncing licentious Christian banquets is cited in Minucius Felix *Octavius* 9,8.

⁷ On Christian chastity, see references in Walsh 1994, Intro xxxix footnote 47.

The adoption of Christianity (or possibly Judaism) thus, in Apuleius' view, is a kind of parallel to the hypocrisy of the Syrian priests who flagellate themselves publicly as a sign of their humility and striving after religious purity, while engaging in immoral practices privately (*Met.* 8, 25-30).⁸ The passage on the Syrian priests draws a contrast between the foul practices (*exsecrandas foeditates*) of the Syrian priests and the chastity (*purissimam castimoniam*) which is appropriate to their office, similar to the discrepancy between the claims and the practice of the baker's wife.

2. *Ass's Indignation Over the Mime*

Chapter 33 of Book 10 of the novel includes an extraordinary passage which, like the passage about the baker's wife, draws a deeper meaning when considered in reference to the Christian or Jewish apologists of the second century. It is a sudden outburst by the narrator interrupting his description of a mime at Corinth depicting the Judgment of Paris. Paris' choice of Venus in the divine beauty contest is seen as setting an evil precedent for contemporary judges who are dismissed as 'cheap ciphers, sheep of the courts, or better still vultures in togas.' Paris' corruption is compared with that of the Greek warriors at Troy who falsely condemned Palamedes for treason, and awarded the armor of Achilles to the inferior Ulysses in preference to the warrior Ajax. This is all a prefix to the narrator's outrage over the 'divinely wise old man,' Socrates, who was falsely condemned for corrupting the young when he was in fact diverting them from vice. But today all the 'outstanding philosophers' even swear by his name.

The narrator's outburst comes to a sudden halt :

But I am afraid one of you may reproach me for this attack of indignation and think to himself, 'So, now are we going to have to stand an ass lecturing us on philosophy?' So I shall return to the story at the point where I left it. (*Met.* 10, 33, 4)

This rather astonishing and seemingly pointless interruption of the story, which sweeps the reader up in the narrator's indignation only to bring it all to a crashing halt, can be explained as a humorous or satiric response to Christian apologists of the second century such as Justin Martyr, Aristides of Athens, and Minucius Felix. To these we may add a Jewish apology from the

⁸ Schmidt 1997, 52-54 shows a number of verbal resemblances between the baker's wife passage and the description of the Syrian priests.

90's C.E., the *Against Apion* of Josephus. Finally, the *Apology* of Tertullian comes slightly later than Apuleius, but its contents also reflect the general trend of this genre. The apologists were defending themselves as Christians or Jews by contrasting their beliefs with those of the pagan culture which was judging them. The ass's denunciation of contemporary judges, with which the outburst begins, corresponds to the Christian /Jewish apologist's anger at the malice and ignorance of their accusers.

The sudden change of tone at the start of the outburst by Apuleius' narrator is noted by Zimmerman: in her commentary on *Met.* 10, she compares the passage to a Cynic diatribe 'occasioned by the theater performance.'⁹ But more than a change of tone, it is a change of setting: the narrator is not imagined as in a theater addressing the audience of the mime, he is suddenly addressing a group whom he denounces as 'sheep of the courts, vultures wearing togas,' that is, he is using language appropriate to a speech in a courtroom, denouncing his enemies, who in turn sound as if they were prosecutors bringing false charges against him. An apostrophe by the narrator in this novel to someone other than the reader is rare and catches our attention; something new is suddenly taking place.

Christian apologists are noteworthy for their *indignatio*; they spare no scorn in attacking their prosecutors. Justin Martyr's *First Apology* Chapter 5 opens, like the passage in Apuleius, with an angry rhetorical question aimed at the unjust prosecutors who, in Justin's case, do not investigate the baseless charges made against Christians. Justin in *Second Apology* ridicules those who bring charges against him, accusing them of ignorance and hypocrisy. He argues that evil demons have incited his judges to want to put Christians to death (Chapter 1). Crescens, his accuser, 'publicly bears witness against us in matters which he does not understand' and is 'thoroughly depraved and far worse than the illiterate' for assailing him without having read the teachings of Christ.¹⁰ Justin claims that Roman officials torture servants, women and children, 'and by dreadful torments forced them to admit those fabulous actions which they themselves openly perpetuate' (Chapter 12). In a similar vein, the Jewish apologist Josephus denounces the malice of Greek historians who misrepresent the Jews: 'having put together a few hearsay reports

⁹ Zimmerman 2000, 393. A comparable passage in Petronius is that containing elegiac couplets in *Sat.* 14 which denounces the corruption of the courts. There the joke is the hypocrisy of Petronius' two con-men, Ascyltos and Encolpius, complaining that the legal system is stacked against them.

¹⁰ Justin Martyr *Second Apology* 3.

[they]have, with the gross impudence of drunken revelers, miscalled their productions by the name of history' (*Against Apion* 1,46).

Tertullian at the outset of his *Apology* denounces the injustice of those who attack Christianity, stressing that their hatred is based on ignorance.

We lay this before you on the first ground on which we urge that your hatred to the name of Christian is unjust. And the very reason which seems to excuse this injustice (I mean ignorance) at once aggravates and convicts it. For what is there more unfair than to hate a thing of which you know nothing, even though it deserve to be hated?¹¹

Tertullian also sneers that Roman religion has been reduced to profit and a desire for monetary gain; this is analogous to the complaint of the narrator in the *Met.* that the judicial system is corrupt, and all contemporary morality has been lowered to the standard set by the ancient legends:

In like manner, by public law you disgrace your state gods, putting them in the auction-catalogue, and making them a source of revenue. Men seek to get the Capitol, as they seek to get the herb market, under the voice of the crier, under the auction spear, under the regulation of the quaestor. Deity is struck off and farmed out to the highest bidder...¹²

The evil examples of the stories set forth in Greek legends are another topic of the Christian apologists; indeed the immorality of the Judgment of Paris becomes a favorite topic of the Christians; it is already denounced in Aristides, followed by Tertullian and Augustine.¹³ At the same time, the lack of a religious or moral center in paganism, and the seeming immorality of the traditional myths, is deplored by the Christians. Justin Martyr complains,

And of these [philosophers] some taught atheism; and the poets who have flourished among you raise a laugh out of the uncleanness of Jupiter with his own children. And those who adopt such instruction are not restrained by you; but on the contrary, you bestow prizes and honors upon those who euphoniously insult the gods.¹⁴

¹¹ Tertullian, *Apology*, Roberts-Donaldson 1885, 1 (p. 17).

¹² Tertullian, *Apology*, 13 (p. 29).

¹³ Aristides *Apology* (D.M.Kay) 8; Tertullian *Apology* 15 (p.30); Augustine *City of God* 18,10, and see Smith 1968, 53-54.

¹⁴ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 4.

Minucius Felix in *Octavius* says that fables which preach evils were celebrated by poets, and used by the Greeks to justify the immoral behavior of humans:

Why should I speak of the detected adultery of Mars and Venus, and of the violence of Jupiter against Ganymede—a deed consecrated (as you say) in heaven? And all those things have been put forth with this view, that a certain authority might be gained for the vices of men. By these fictions, and such as these, and by lies of a more attractive kind, the minds of boys are corrupted...¹⁵

Aristides the Philosopher, in his *Apology* echoes Minucius Felix' argument that the Greeks ascribe evil deeds to gods:

The Greeks, then, because they are more subtle than the Barbarians, have gone further astray than the Barbarians, inasmuch as they have introduced many fictitious gods...some of their gods were found who were adulterers, and did murder, and were deluded, and envious, and wrathful and passionate, and parricides, and thieves, and robbers.¹⁶

According to Aristides, 'by reason of these tales [of Greek mythology]...much evil has arisen among men, who to this day are imitators of their gods...' (ibid 9)

The indignation of Apuleius' ass at the evil precedent set by the stories of Paris, Palamedes, and Ulysses could be interpreted as a humorous version of the Christian writers' shock at the immorality of pagan myth, and as mimicking their attempt to blame contemporary indecency on the precedent set by Homer and other recorders of myth.

In contrast, Socrates the 'divine man' is a hero of the Christian apologists for his brave defense in court. Socrates' wisdom is a cliché often used in these speeches in contrast with the folly of his fellow Greeks (Tertullian *Apology* 13). In Justin Martyr, Socrates is lauded for teaching men to reject wicked demons and the poets;

And those who by human birth were more ancient than Christ, when they attempted to consider and prove things by reason, were brought before

¹⁵ *The Octavius of Minucius Felix* (Roberts-Donaldson) 22. It should be added that Minucius Felix also attacks Isis-worship in *Octavius* 21, cf. Aristides *Apology* 12.

¹⁶ Aristides *Apology* 8.

the tribunals as impious persons and busybodies. And Socrates, who was more zealous in this direction than all of them, was accused of the very same crimes as ourselves. For they said that he was introducing new divinities, and did not consider those to be gods whom the state recognized. But he cast out from the state both Homer and the rest of the poets, and taught men to reject the wicked demons and those who did the things which the poets related...¹⁷

And Minucius Felix in *Octavius* 13 says 'However, if you have a desire to philosophize (*philosophandi libido*), let any of you who is sufficiently great imitate, if he can, Socrates, the prince of wisdom.'

The virtue of Socrates is regularly used by the Christian apologists as a contrast to the depravity of the culture out of which he grew, and Plato's rejection of poets in the start of Book 10 of the *Republic* is likewise seen (as in the passage above from Justin Martyr) as Socrates' rejection of the dangerous examples set by gods and men in the Greek literature. The apologists sometimes even compared Socrates to Christ and saw his condemnation in court as analogous to Pilate's condemnation of Jesus. Justin Martyr in *Second Apology* 10, though he finds Socrates inferior to Christ, saw him as an example of a virtuous philosopher who, by his knowledge of the Word, caught a glimpse of Christ himself.¹⁸ The praise of Socrates becomes a way for the Christian apologists to deny that they were rejecting all Greek thinkers and Greek culture, and to turn the tables on their accusers by saying that the Greeks failed to listen to the chastisement of one of their own philosophers.

In the *Metamorphoses*, the narrator's effusive praise for the asceticism of Socrates the philosopher, even likening him to a god whom men worship, has a second reason for an ironic edge. In the novel, Socrates has already been somewhat compromised by the satiric portrayal of his namesake in the 'Tale of Aristomenes' in Book 1, the man whose sensuality brings about his downfall; it is a portrait based in part on negative stories about the historical Socrates as unkempt and dirty, an indolent sensualist, neglectful of his family and helpless victim of aggressive women, stories which were current even in his own lifetime and later.¹⁹ To readers who remember that earlier tongue-in-cheek negative portrait of 'Socrates,' the narrator's exaggerated praise of

¹⁷ Justin Martyr *Second Apology* 10.

¹⁸ See further Leslie Barnard 1997, 109.

¹⁹ On the portrait of Socrates in the 'Tale of Aristomenes,' see Smith and Woods 2002, 172-193 esp. 189-190.

Socrates in Book 10, in the context of a passage which mirrors and mocks the arguments of the Christians, could be seen as undercutting the extravagant Christian admiration of the supposedly Christ-like Greek philosopher, and the Christians' claim to have an enlightened moral viewpoint. It is not so much that Socrates himself is mocked, as that the Christians idealize him blindly and have no right to claim him as their own.

Finally the 'ass preaching philosophy' mentioned in the reader's imagined interruption may be a hit at the Christians, who were popularly associated, like the Jews, with the ass (see below) and who boasted that as Christians they preached a higher kind of philosophy than the pagans, indeed one which completed what Plato and the other philosophers taught.²⁰ Aristides of Athens was known as a philosopher; Justin Martyr favorably called Christian doctrine 'more lofty than every human philosophy,' *Second Apology* 15, and called the 'philosophy' of Christian love 'the only [philosophy which is] safe and profitable,' *Against Trypho* 8. Josephus makes a similar claim about Judaism, saying of the law of Moses that it provided a model for the Greek philosophers and had a broader appeal than Greek teaching (*Against Apion* 2, 168-169, 281).

Thus the narrator's sudden interruption of the 'Judgment of Paris' mime with his polemic against the injustice of the contemporary legal system, and the corrupting influence of mythological tales, may have something of the nature of a parody of the denunciations by Christian and Jewish apologists against the prejudiced judicial system and against the immoral culture, exemplified by the Judgment of Paris, which holds them in contempt. The effusive praise of Socrates as an ascetic philosopher, praise which even exalts him to semi-divine status, then becomes unconvincing, part of the Christians' courtroom tricks in which they pretend to have an ally in the famous philosopher. Finally, the 'philosophizing ass' against whom the reader reacts may be intended as a mockery of the claims of the two groups associated in the popular mind with asses, the Christian and Jewish apologists, who claim that their law of Moses or their 'Jesus philosophy' is superior to the philosophy of the Greek sages.

3. *Charite and the Ass*

Christians were sometimes thought to worship the head of an ass, a claim mentioned both by Minucius Felix and Tertullian;²¹ according to Tertullian,

²⁰ Barnard 1997, 10.

²¹ Minucius Felix *Octavius* 28; Tertullian, *Apology* 16.

this slander against Christians arose from a passage in Tacitus' *Histories* 5,3-4. Tacitus says that the Jews were expelled (corrected by Tertullian to 'delivered') from Egypt when disease made them a threat to the general population. Wandering in the wilderness, they were dying of thirst until a herd of wild asses led them to water. Consequently, Tacitus adds, 'in their holy place they have consecrated an image of the animal by whose guidance they found deliverance from their long and thirsty wanderings' (trans. Hadas 1942). Josephus reports a similar slander against Jews: 'Within this sanctuary Apion has the effrontery to assert that the Jews kept an ass's head, worshipping that animal and deeming it worthy of the deepest reverence,' (*Against Apion* 2,80).

According to another version of this rumor mentioned by Diodorus, what the Jews worshiped in the temple was a statue of Moses seated on an ass,²² and Justin Martyr may reflect this idea when he claims that the harnessed ass which Jesus asked his disciples to bring on Palm Sunday was 'a symbol of your [Jewish] nation. For you possess the law which was imposed on you by the prophets' (*Against Trypho* 53).

Tertullian commenting on the statement in Tacitus, adds: 'And as Christianity is nearly allied to Judaism, from this, I suppose, it was taken for granted that we too are devoted to the worship of the same image' (*Apology* 16). Both Minucius Felix and Tertullian react to the charge by arguing that it would not be so outrageous for Christians to worship an ass's head when the Romans already worship the same animal in their stables and pray to Epona, the goddess of mules and asses.

There is a passage in the *Metamorphoses* which alludes to the possibility of public homage to Lucius, the ass, and which acquires additional nuance from second-century charges made against Christians and Jews. This is the scene in 6,29 when the captive maiden Charite is attempting to escape from the robbers. She proposes decorating the ass with golden amulets and marching him in parades 'shining like the starry sky.' She calls him her 'savior' (*sospitatore*). She envisions celebrating the escape by displaying a tablet depicting it in her home, which will lead to a growing legend:

'People will come to see this simple tale, and will hear about it when stories are told, and the pens of the learned will perpetuate it. "A royal maiden flees captivity (*captivitatem*) riding on an ass." '

²² On the passage from Diodorus Siculus 34-35.1,1-5 see Van Henten and Abusch 1996, 285. Bar-Kochva 1996, 325 concludes that the pack-ass with Moses seated on his back was the oldest version of the slander.

Finally, she says that the existence of the ass will add credence to stories about Phrixus, Arion, and Europa, which involve mythical animals who saved them, and that 'If Jupiter truly bellowed with the throat of a bull, perhaps in this ass I am riding lurks the face of a man or the likeness of a god.'

There are elements in this rhetorical effusion which suggest the slanders about the Jews and Christians and their defense against these slanders. Charite's proposed veneration of the ass, decorating him and marching him in triumphal parades, will be due to his carrying her to freedom and safety, just as the Jews were said to venerate the ass in return for its delivery of them from their wanderings after their stay in Egypt (cf. Apuleius' *captivitatem*). Minucius and Tertullian defend the Christians against the charge of ass-worship by claiming that, if Christians did worship asses it would be no more outrageous than the Roman worship of Epona; Charite defends her notion that a man or god may lurk inside the ass by a reminder that Jupiter himself, the chief Roman god, once took on the form of a bull. The pens of the learned will tell of Charite's miraculous deliverance; according to Tacitus, 'a great many authors' (*plurimi auctores*) tell the story of the Jews' migration from Egypt, and the motive of associating the Jews with the ass was probably²³ originally an attempt by Egyptians to connect the Jews with Seth-Typhon (which takes on new relevance in the context of the Isiac bias of Apuleius' Book 11). Moreover the stages of her argument move up to a comical rhetorical climax, in which a simple event depicted in a panel at Charite's home becomes first an oral story (*fabula*) then a full-blown written narrative (*historia*) used as evidence to prove miraculous powers of animals, and the true identity of the ass is first elevated to a human being (*vultus hominis*) and then an actual deity (*facies deorum*). The whole sequence might be taken as a satirical account of how cult practices grow out of simple everyday events, a sequence of credulity which could be a judgment on Christian worship of the ass. The focus of the passage is the absurdity of Charite, who knows nothing about the true identity of the ass, wanting to elevate this most despised animal to divine status (as, supposedly, Christians and Jews did with their ass-worship).

Though none of these details is decisive proof of an allusion to Christianity or Judaism in the Charite passage, her glorification of the ass becomes funnier, and would have been funnier to Apuleius' contemporaries, with the realization that it reflects a common view of the practices of Jews and Christians. Both groups were associated with impiety and ridiculed for venerating

²³ On the charges against the Jews as ass-worshippers stemming from Egyptians who associated them with Seth-Typhon, see Van Heuten and Abusch 1996 and Bar-Kochva 1996.

the lowly and trivial, whether the form of an ass or the body of a crucified criminal.²⁴

Echoes of Jewish and Christian Writings In Metamorphoses 11

Apuleius' apparent allusions to the Christian apologists and their delusions add a topicality to his novel, since the speeches of Justin and probably others were contemporary events to his readers.²⁵ These passages are a buildup for the most ambitious response to the Christian religion in the novel, the 11th book which describes Lucius' re-transformation and conversion to the cult of Isis, a religion which the Christians despise and ridicule. The intervention of the goddess Isis into the novel in response to Lucius' appeal for help in Book 11 appears to be Apuleius' special addition to his source, since there is no trace of it in pseudo-Lucian's epitome, *Lucius or the Ass*, which like Apuleius' novel was based on the lost *Metamorphoses* of the mysterious 'Lucius of Patras.'

Apuleius' motive, his hidden agenda, for including this conversion story and paean to the cult of Isis into his racy novel has long been the subject of speculation. P.G. Walsh has argued that Book 11 of the novel is motivated in part to curb the spread of Christianity in North Africa.²⁶ Ken Dowden (1994), on the other hand, seems to have a stronger case in switching the focus away from Africa, arguing that the anti-Christian passages reflect popular reactions in Rome to such apologists as Justin (and perhaps also Minucius Felix, if in fact Minucius preceded Tertullian).

²⁴ Compare the *graffito* from the Palatine of a crucified ass (*DACL* 1.2.2044, fig. 585) which may reflect the lowly image of an ass as the equivalent in debasement of a worthless criminal (Rassart-Debergh 1994, 66-67). For attempts to find Christian symbolism in Charite's escape on the ass see bibliography in Hijmans 1981, 165 (allusions to Palm Sunday procession) and Shanzer 1990 (allusions to the flight into Egypt of Matthew 2,14). These attempts make some good points but there is no place in them for a mocking allusion to Jews' or Christians' supposed worship of the ass.

²⁵ Though the date of the *Metamorphoses* is unknown, Apuleius' *Apology* can be dated ca. 158 C.E. and parts of his *Florida* ca. 165-170; Aristides of Athens' apology is before 132; Justin's *First Apology* dates about 151-155 and the second soon after, while Minucius Felix's *Octavius* is after 160 (Hunink 2000, 85 sq.; Grant 1988, 39; Barnard 1997, 11).

²⁶ Walsh 1994 Intro xxxviii; (1968) 143-157; Tertullian *Apology* 37. Walsh further argues that in the late 2nd century the whole province of Africa, and Apuleius' town of Madauros in particular, were in ferment because of the inroads of Christianity.'

To say that Apuleius 'repudiates' the Christians, though it sheds some light on the overall attitude of his narrative, does not tell the whole story. Clearly, Apuleius and the Christians have much in common.²⁷ A narrative which speaks of repentance, lifelong dedication to the divine, renunciation of sensual pleasure, and eternal life, as Apuleius' does in Book 11, would surely have an affinity with Christians as well as devotees of Isis. Festugière speaks of Lucius 'consecrating his entire life to Isis' as a touch which can only be compared with Christian religious vocation.²⁸

So Apuleius may embrace some Christian concepts while rejecting that religion in general. But there may be a problem in seeing Apuleius' religious message as referencing the Christians in particular. Part of the need for caution comes from the likelihood that the stories he may have heard about Christians were fragmentary and distorted. Secondly, it is not clear that Apuleius would have been able to draw, or found it important to draw, a distinction between Christianity and Judaism, or that he had any specific direct knowledge of Biblical passages.²⁹ Jews as well as Christians were reported to worship the ass. As with the Jews, those who mocked Christians did not fail to seize on their association with the ass. Tertullian describes a scene in which a Jew carried about the streets of Carthage a picture of a man dressed as an ass with a sign saying DEUS CHRISTIANORUM—ONOKOITES, 'God of the Christians—an ass f..ker.'³⁰ This strange episode seems to suggest that at least in North Africa, there was a popular connection between the ass and Christianity. It is possible that in describing Lucius changing back from an ass to a man Apuleius is suggesting his renunciation of Christianity, or at least the distorted version of it known to him in which Christians were associated with the lowly and despised ass.

Moreover, if Apuleius in fact knew and reacted to some of the contemporary apocalyptic documents we allude to below, he would have found many of the same concepts in both Jewish and Christian documents, including separation from God, repentance, salvation, study of the word of God, a Messiah, divine visions, even life after death and resurrection. Moreover some of the early Christian apologists, such as Minucius Felix, did not even mention Jesus Christ or characteristic Christian dogma, but confined them-

²⁷ Egelhaaf-Gaiser, 2000, 80-84 with New Testament parallels and further bibliography.

²⁸ Festugière 1954, 80.

²⁹ Cameron 1965, 17.

³⁰ Tertullian *Apol.* 16. Translated and analyzed by Brent Shaw 2011, 269-270. Since the man carrying the sign was a Jew hostile to Christianity, it is possible that by associating Christians with an ass he was making an allusion to Balaam, a gentile who opposed the Jews, and his ass (Numbers 22,21-35). See Joan Taylor 1990, 25.

selves to concepts which they shared with many contemporary Jews such as one God, 'providence, the resurrection, and reward after death.' Joan Taylor writes: 'By the middle of the second century...Jewish interpretational forms, literary genres, traditions and theological conceptions from the earliest Jewish foundations of many [Christian] communities, especially those in Syria and Egypt, survived to influence later writers.' This broadened approach of second century Christians, which blurs the distinctions between the two faiths, is sometime referred to as 'Jewish Christianity.'³¹

Tacitus says that the Jews are particularly prone to lust (*Histories* 5,5), and the celibacy urged by Isis on Lucius may be seen in part as a correction of what was seen as Jewish and Christian promiscuity. Finally, since Jews, like Christians, were also associated with worship of an ass, transformation of an ass into human form might be symbolic of leaving behind either Judaism or Christianity, and Apuleius' failure to name either religion could be a sign that he had no deep understanding of the beliefs of either group and in fact blended them in his mind.

In particular, Apuleius adopts some of the themes and methods of the apocalyptic literature which we find in Jewish and Christian literature of later antiquity, including *Ezekiel*, *Daniel*, *2 Esdras*, *Revelation*, *1 Enoch*, *2 Baruch*, and *Shepherd of Hermas*.³² A general definition of this genre of literature is provided by Collins:

'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an overworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it envisages another, supernatural world.³³

Much of this broad definition of apocalyptic literature could apply to the Isis-book. In some respects the Jewish apocalyptic literature parallels that book closer than does the Christian apocalyptic. This is particularly true of those documents which tie the fall of the first temple in the 6th century

³¹ Joan Taylor 1990, 326-327, Daniélou 1964. Cf. Catholic Encyclopedia, 'Minucius Felix,' in reference to the *Octavius*: 'In this debate the conception of Christianity is very limited... The name of Christ does not appear; among the apologists of the second century Aristides, St. Justin, and Tertullian are the only ones who pronounced it.' (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10336a.htm>).

³² *Daniel*, *2 Esdras*, *Revelation* quoted in New Revised Standard Version. *2 Baruch* quoted from Charles 1913; *Shepherd of Hermas* quoted from Ehrman 2003, vol. 2.

³³ Collins quoted in David deSilva 2004, 332.

B.C.E. to later crises such as the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes (*Daniel*, *Baruch*) or to the destruction of the second temple in 70 C.E. (2 *Esdras*, 2 *Baruch*). Both of these latter books share with Apuleius a narrator in despair at the hopelessness of the present situation, who confesses his sins and turns to God for hope for the future. That personal surrender followed by visions from God and a message of hope at the end is the core of the Apuleian message, and for it he found a parallel in the contemporary Jewish apocalyptic literature and, to some extent, the equivalent literature written by Christians, especially *Revelation* and *Shepherd of Hermas*; the latter, from the early second century, almost made it into the Bible and was widely known, 'one of the most popular books of early Christianity.'³⁴

The most complicated and rich of the analogies with Jewish-Christian literature comes in the final book of the *Metamorphoses*, the 'Isis-book.' In the late Jewish apocalyptic literature, Apuleius could have sensed that he found a spirit applicable to the final book of his great novel. An essentially good young nobleman, Lucius, has fallen into error, been transformed into a beast which in appearance and behavior belies the nobility of his former character, and been buffeted from one situation of suffering and humiliation to another. The analogy in the Jewish apocalyptic literature is with no less than the Jewish people themselves, the chosen people who are grieving over their apparent neglect by God, but also with the narrator of those works in particular, who needs convincing and has sins to confess. Christopher Rowland writes about Jewish apocalyptic,

Thus it would appear that in the apocalypses written toward the end of the first century A.D. the interest in eschatology is matched by another issue, the nature of man and the reason for the desperate straits in which the people of God found themselves....Jews sought to make sense of their beliefs and their history, aided by the conviction that even in the most terrible circumstances God still allowed men glimpses of his purposes and thus assurance of the divine dimension to human experiences.³⁵

In the Isis-book, Apuleius works within the Judaeo-Christian ethic and mindset to adopt for his own purposes many of its premises about forgiveness for sin and divine salvation, and at the same time move its world-view in a dif-

³⁴ Bart Ehrman 2003, Vol. 2, 162.

³⁵ Christopher Rowland 1982, 135.

ferent direction, presenting a pagan alternative to the Judaeo-Christian message.

Evil in the world of the *Metamorphoses* takes the form of magic and lawlessness. Fortune is the reigning goddess. In Apuleius, the power of both witchcraft and *Fortuna*, which wreak havoc in the early books of the novel, will be superseded by the power of Isis and her providence. In the Jewish apocalyptic, God has the means to destroy the power of 'magicians, enchanters, and necromancers' (2 *Baruch* 66,2), a power which is also of much concern to the narrative of the *Metamorphoses*. The message of the Jewish apocalyptic literature is that to be saved, the nation must return to the message of the Torah; similarly Christians preach the need to turn away from sin and to submit to the yoke of Christ. In Apuleius the narrator is asked to submit to Isis, whose yoke, like that of Jesus, is light and easy to bear, and whose power is greater than that of the witches and indeed, of all other gods.

There are other ways in which a novel with the theme of metamorphosis, fall and regeneration could find a parallel in the apocalyptic literature. The Jewish apocalyptic literature promises that the nation which has fallen to the 'Babylonians' (= the Romans) will have a new birth. But it is not just the fallen nation which will be restored; the people themselves in the new world will be changed when the aspect, even the shape, of the resurrected people will undergo a transformation. According to 2 *Baruch*, in the new world after the dead have come back to life:

And it shall come to pass, when that appointed day has gone by, that then shall the aspect of those who are condemned be afterwards changed, and the glory of those who are justified. For the aspect of those who now act wickedly shall become worse than it is, as they shall suffer torment. Also (as for) the glory of those who have now been justified in my law, who have had understanding in their life, and who have planted in their heart the root of wisdom, then their splendor shall be glorified in changes, and the form of their face shall be turned into the light of their beauty, that they may be able to acquire and receive the word that does not die...For in the heights of world shall they dwell, and they shall be made like unto the angels, and be made equal to the stars, and they shall be changed into every form they desire.³⁶

The wicked, according to 2 *Baruch*, are to be changed into ugly shapes (and ugliness is one of the ass's most prominent aspects). The good shall be

³⁶ 2*Baruch* 51, 1-10 (from R.H. Charles, 1913).

changed to 'any form they wish.' Surely this concept resonates with a novel about magical metamorphosis and spiritual redemption. Such language could be seen as consistent with Lucius' taking on an asinine nature when lost in error, and restored to a human form when he surrenders his life to Isis. (This, indeed, could be one meaning of the alternative title to the novel, 'golden ass,' the *asinus aureus* who turns from a worthless, ugly shape—almost always the popular association of the ass in Classical literature, which is why it was seized on as a Jewish and Christian symbol by the enemies of those groups—into the shining form of a human devotee of Isis, who had her own reasons for hating the ass, because of its association with Seth, the murderer of Osiris).³⁷

Yet there are many differences between expectations of the Isis-book and those of its apparent literary models. The apocalyptic literature of both Jews and Christians sees the world moving toward a final judgment at the end of time in which the righteous will be vindicated and the wicked punished; those devoted to the Isis-cult are rooted in the present, involved actively in social life. In the visions of the Jewish apocalypses, the restoration of the fortunes of God's people is not something to expect in the present but will come after God restores Zion to his people. By centering the blessings of Isis on the present for those who surrender to her power, Apuleius takes a stand against the Judaeo-Christian hopes for restoration which have to be postponed until a vague future, and which cannot be realized in the structure of the world as it currently exists.

The Christian worship, in the view of many in the second century, is clothed in secrecy and deeds of darkness; the Isiac religion celebrates openly in public parades. The Christian religion is one of 'godlessness' in which a single god is introduced and worshiped; the Isiac religion embraces and encompasses many gods and embraces Isis as embodying them all.³⁸

4 Ezra as *Parallel for Isis-Book*

The most intriguing parallel with Book 11 is offered by the book known as 4 *Ezra*. This constitutes the central portion (chapters 3-14) of the book of 2

³⁷ As in the interpretation suggested but rejected by Winkler, 1985, 305: 'It is, one might say, as if Apuleius has turned base Milesian metal into Isiac gold.' The alternative title *asinus aureus* would then have an analogy to the titles of the old *Atellanae Fabulae* where the second member of the phrase introduced a surprise twist, putting the clown in unlikely roles, e.g. *Maccus virgo*, *Maccus miles*.

³⁸ Walsh 1970, 188-189; Hunink 2000, 90-91 has further bibliography.

Esdras in the Apocrypha of the Bible (*Esdras* is the Greek equivalent of *Ezra*). This portion was written by a Jew under the adopted name of the *Ezra* who helped his people rebuild the temple at the end of the Babylonian Captivity. He probably wrote in Hebrew or Aramaic near the end of the first century C.E.; in the second century it was translated into Greek (though that translation was subsequently lost) and then into many other languages, and was widely read by Christian authors including Tertullian. Of all the examples of apocalyptic literature it seems to have the most in common with Apuleius' *Isis-book*.

4 Ezra consists of seven visions of a scribe named *Ezra* who presents himself as the *Ezra* who helped re-establish the Torah as the authority for the Jews after the destruction of the first temple and the return from the Babylonian exile in 538 B.C.E., though the actual setting of the apocryphal book is the aftermath of the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. 'Babylon' is used here to mean Rome. The first vision takes place in Babylon. *Ezra* asks God how Israel can be kept in misery if God is just. Uriel the archangel is sent to answer the question, and reveals two more visions to *Ezra*, assuring him, without much success, that God's justice will win out. The tone of this first section of the work is searching and pessimistic. *Ezra* wonders why God seems to have broken faith with his chosen people by delivering them into the hands of their enemies (cf. 6, 57-59). God's answers seem to be unsatisfactory responses to *Ezra's* doubts.

The next three visions are more symbolic in nature. The fourth is of a woman mourning for her only son, who is transformed into an entire city when she hears of the desolation of Zion. Uriel says that the woman is a symbol of Zion. In the fifth vision, an eagle appears with three heads and twenty wings (twelve large wings and eight smaller wings 'over against them'). The eagle is rebuked by a lion and then burned. The sixth vision is of a man, representing the Messiah, who breathes fire on a crowd that is attacking him. This man then turns to another peaceful multitude, which accepts him.

Finally, there is a vision of the restoration of scripture. God appears to *Ezra* in a bush and asks him to take writing tablets and restore the Torah. *Ezra* gathers five scribes and begins to dictate. After forty days, he has produced ninety-four books (the twenty-four books of the canon of the Hebrew Bible) and seventy secret works (perhaps referring to the *Septuagint*). (Here the *4 Ezra* section ends, at *2 Esdras* 14.48).

In *4 Ezra*, the subject is the failings of Israel and God's attitudes toward its sin and the eventual restoration of Zion. The language of the book often

focuses on 'Ezra' himself, his own failings and doubts, which are expressed in terms similar to those used by the desperate donkey at the start of Book 11 (2 *Esdras* 3,1-3: 'I was troubled as I lay on my bed, and my thoughts welled up in my heart, because I saw the desolation of Zion and the wealth of those who lived in Babylon. My spirit was greatly agitated, and I began to speak anxious thoughts to the most high...' 4,1-2: Then the angel that had been sent to me, whose name was Uriel, answered and said to me, 'Your understanding has utterly failed regarding this world, and do you think you can comprehend the way of the Most High?'). The narrator of 4 *Ezra* stands for the Jewish people in general, but also his only personal plight, doubts, and need for spiritual renewal and mission come to the fore, as we will see below.

Sometimes in apocalyptic literature, as in 4 *Ezra*, *Hermas* (and later in Boethius), the deity is a wise female figure who may have an allegorical significance as a figure for the church or for Israel (cf. also the 'chosen lady' of 2 John). The female figure of *Revelation* 12 is a lady wearing the moon and twelve stars who is pregnant with the Son of God.

Isis, though not allegorical in that sense, is connected with the moon. She is a kind of amalgam of all the gods, embracing their various powers. She is not only wiser but more powerful than they, able to resolve the issue, cut to its heart. By acknowledging the powers of all the other gods but subsuming them in her own person, she becomes the symbol for Apuleius of a religion which accepts one god without having too narrow a view of the divine or falling into the trap of 'atheism' or irreligion, charges that were leveled at both Jews and Christians.

Points of Comparison

The concerns which the Jewish apocalyptic literature raises about the nature of the chosen people of God, and whether God has rejected them, are focused in Apuleius on a single man whose sins have reduced him to the shape of a donkey. Devices in Apuleius which find parallels in the apocalyptic literature include:

1. Use of formal prayer pleading with the divinity for help in a crisis (*Esdras*: pleading for help after the destruction of the temple)
2. Divine visions, or epiphanies of the deity, sometimes out of the sea
3. The deity assures the mortal of his/her good will
4. The god or his agent reminds the mortal of the need for purification

5. Eternal life is promised as a reward for a life of righteousness
6. The epiphany reminds the mortal that he has been seeing things wrongly and needs a new perspective; Lucius needs to move under the protection of providence, the Jewish suppliant needs to pay close attention to God's law. The mortal becomes a changed person.
7. The writer will record his conversion experience for the edification of others. In the Jewish-Christian apocalyptic literature, the resulting book will have the function of sharing his conversion experience and reaching out to others with a comforting message from God.
8. The role of Rome in carrying out the divine plan; it offers protection and inspiration, or it is a bloodthirsty monster which is destined to fall.

We will see how each of these eight points is treated in Apuleius and the apocalyptic literature.

1. Use of formal prayer in petition

Met. 11,1-2

After Lucius awakens in fright, he prays to the goddess of the moon, whom he acknowledges as exerting all power. In tears he addresses the goddess. One of her attributes is the comforts of civilization which enable humankind to give up the ways of wild beasts, both in terms of diet and in the beastliness of their behavior.

O Queen of heaven—whether you are bountiful Ceres, the primal mother of crops, who in joy at the recovery of your daughter took away from men their primeval animal fodder of acorns and who showed them gentler nourishment...

by whatever name, with whatever rite, in whatever image it is meet to invoke you; defend me now in the uttermost extremes of tribulation, strengthen my fallen fortune, grant me rest and peace from the cruel mischances I have endured. Let this be enough toil, enough danger. Rid me of this dreadful four-footed form, restore me to the sight of my own people, restore me to the Lucius I was. But if some divine power that I have offended is harassing me with inexorable savagery, at least let me die, if I may not live. (*Met. 11,2,1-4*)

The concept that the suppliant has behaved in ways suitable to a wild beast, rather than a human, is also found in *4 Ezra*.

Let it not be thy will to destroy those who have had the ways of cattle; but regard those who have gloriously taught thy law. Be not angry with those who are deemed worse than beasts; but love those who have always put their trust in thy glory.—2 *Esdras* 9,29³⁹

Ezra's prayer includes an acknowledgement of the greatness and universality of God, an acknowledgement that God's people have committed sin, and a plea for mercy.

O Lord who inhabitest eternity, whose eyes are exalted and whose upper chambers are in the air, whose throne is beyond measure and whose glory is beyond comprehension.

Hear, o Lord, the prayer of thy servant, and give ear to the petition of thy creature; attend to my words. For as long as I live I will speak, and as long as I have understanding I will answer. O look not upon the sins of thy people, but at those who have served thee in truth.

Regard not the endeavors of those who act wickedly, but the endeavors of those who have kept thy covenants amid afflictions. Think not upon those who have lived wickedly in thy sight; but remember those who have willingly acknowledged that thou art to be feared.⁴⁰

2. *Epiphany out of sea*

In the *Metamorphoses*, after he utters his prayer, Lucius again falls back to sleep, making it possible for him to experience his encounter with Isis as a dream-vision.

When I had thus poured out my prayer and added pitiable lamentations, my fainting spirit was once more engulfed and overwhelmed with sleep on that same couch. I had hardly closed my eyes when suddenly from the midst of the sea a divine face emerged, displaying countenance worthy of adoration even by the gods. Slowly it appeared until its entire body came into view and, the brine shaken off, a radiant vision stood before me. (*Met.* 11,3,1-2)

³⁹ The suppliant confessing his sins on behalf of his nation and appealing to God for an answer has its precedent in the *Book of Daniel* (9,4-6).

⁴⁰ 2 *Esdras* 8,1.

The concept of wonders in a dream-vision coming up out of the sea is one of the indications which may suggest a connection between Apuleius and apocalyptic literature. In the Jewish tradition the sea is associated with chaos and monstrous beasts (*Gen.* 1,2, *Psalms* 104,26, *Isaiah* 27,1, *Job* 41,1-11). The theme is already there at the start of the apocalyptic passages in *Daniel* in Chapter 7,1-3 where four figures come out of the sea.

After seven days I dreamed a dream in the night. And lo, a wind arose from the sea and stirred up all its waves. As I kept looking the wind made something like the figure of a man came up out of the heart of the sea. (*2 Esdras* 13,1-3)

And when I had said these things I fell asleep there, and I saw a vision, and lo! A cloud was ascending from a very great sea, and I kept gazing upon it, and lo! It was full of waters white and black... (*2 Baruch* 53,1)

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names. (*Rev.* 13,1)

The sea is a source of hidden wonders which can be either destructive or benevolent. To behold a dream-vision, as Lucius does, coming out of the sea is to probe the depths of the unconscious and discover the potential for change. In the Jewish version, the change includes the coming of the Messiah. In *2 Baruch*, one of the results of the coming of the Messiah will be the revelation of Behemoth and Leviathan, 'those two great monsters which I created on the fifth day of creation,' who will rise up out of the sea.

Ezra beholds a woman who appears in answer to his prayer, but she is in mourning, quite different from the goddess who appears to Lucius in the *Metamorphoses*:

When I said these things in my heart, I lifted up my eyes and saw a woman on my right, and behold, she was mourning and weeping with a loud voice, and was deeply grieved at heart, and her clothes were rent, and there were ashes on her head. (*2 Esdras* 9,38)

She is Israel, mourning for her lost child after the destruction of the temple, but she will soon be transformed into the vision of a beautiful city, Zion, restored by God.

Hermas follows the same pattern as *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*: a narrator praying and confessing his sins, heaven opening up and a divine spokesperson revealing the will of God to be followed later by a series of visions, narrated first by an elderly woman and later by a shepherd after whom the entire work is named.

While I was considering and deliberating on these things in my heart, I saw before me a great white chair made of snow-white wool; and an elderly woman in a brightly shining garment came up with a book in her hand, and sat down and greeted me, 'How do you do, Hermas?' (*Shepherd of Hermas Vision* 1,2,2)

3. *Deity assures mortal of his/her good will*

Isis, like Hermas' elderly woman, starts with an assurance of good will, and assurance that she is listening to the prayers of the one who beseeches her.

Behold, Lucius, moved by your prayers I have come, I the mother of the universe, mistress of all the elements, and first offspring of the ages. ...the Egyptians, who are strong in ancient lore, worship me with the rites that are truly mine and call me by my real name, which is Queen Isis. (*Metamorphoses* 11,5,1-3)

The deity must establish his or her name but also attest to the wideness of their power over their people.

I have come in pity at your misfortunes; I have come in sympathy and good will. (*Met* 11, 5,4)

God sent a message through Moses to his people in Egypt that he had not forgotten their suffering (*Exodus* 3,7), This same message of comfort is repeated to the Israelites after the destruction of their temple to the Babylonians, and we find it again in the apocalyptic literature after the city falls to the Romans in 70 C.E.

Again one in human form touched me and strengthened me. He said, 'Do not fear, greatly beloved, you are safe. Be strong and courageous!' (*Daniel* 10, 18-19)

Take courage, O Israel; and do not be sorrowful, O house of Jacob; for the Most High has you in remembrance, and the Mighty One has not forgotten you in your struggle. (*2 Esdras* 12,46-47)

Now stop your tears and cease your lamentation; banish your grief. (*Met.* 11,5.4)

Therefore do not be afraid, and do not let your heart be terrified. (*2 Esdras* 10,55)

Now by my providence your day of salvation is dawning. (*Met.* 11,5,4)
For you are more blessed than many, and you have been called to be with the Most High as few have been. (*2 Esdras* 10,57)

The Providence of Isis, to be discussed further in the priest's speech below (11,15) is the new order of things into which Lucius has been admitted which breaks the spell of the old Fortune under which he had been buffeted around at will by the fates. In the Jewish apocalyptic literature the process through which Israel or its representative must go is the rediscovery that God is in charge after all despite the seemingly undeserved suffering of the nation. The oppression of the Israelites is a kind of delusion which has fallen on them in view of their wicked behavior and their ignorance of God's plan.

Then I arose and walked in the field, giving great glory and praise to the Most High because of his wonders, which he did from time to time; and because he governs the times and whatever things come to pass in their seasons. (*2 Esdras* 13,57-58)

Now, therefore, set your house in order, and reprove your people; comfort the lowly among them, and instruct those that are wise. And now renounce the life that is corruptible, and put away from you mortal thoughts; cast away from you the burdens of man, and divest yourself now of your weak nature, and lay to one side the thoughts that are most grievous to you, and hasten to escape from these times. (*2 Esdras* 14, 13-15)

If God seemed to be absent at the time of the destruction of his city and the triumph of his enemies, this is a delusion, for his promises surely will be fulfilled.

For the Most High will assuredly hasten His times, And He will assuredly bring on His hours. And He will assuredly judge those who are in His world, And will visit in truth all things by means of all their hidden works. And He will assuredly examine the secret thoughts, And that which is laid up in the secret chambers of all the members of man...

And let us not now look unto the delights of the Gentiles in the present, but let us remember what has been promised to us in the end. For the ends of the times and of the seasons and whatsoever is with them shall assuredly pass by together. The consummation, moreover, of the age shall then show the great might of its ruler, when all things come to judgment. (2 *Baruch* 83, 1-8)

4. *Deity reminds mortal of need for purification*

Lucius' shedding of the detestable form of an ass corresponds to the shedding of the weakness of human imperfection and human nature. To become human again he must eat roses, a formula which will break the spell of his magical enchantment. Later as he prepares for initiation, part of the process of purification means abstention from forbidden foods, as in *Met.* 11,21,9: 'Also like the other worshippers I ought already to begin to abstain from unholy and unlawful foods, in order that I might more properly penetrate to the hidden mysteries of the purest faith' (in 11,23, before his first initiation, he abstains from wine and animal foods.)

In this tradition it is normal to prepare oneself for a divine vision by purifying your body through fasting or abstaining from rich food.

At that time I, Daniel, had been mourning for three weeks. I had eaten no rich food, no meat or wine had entered my mouth, and I had not anointed myself at all, for the full three weeks. (*Daniel* 10,2-3)

And now renounce the life that is corruptible, and put away from you mortal thoughts; cast away from you the burdens of humankind, and divest yourself now of your weak nature. (2 *Esdras* 14,13-14)

2 *Esdras* even has a parallel for the command made by the divine that the favored mortal must eat flowers as a prerequisite for divine revelation. The flowers here are part of a regimen of fasting which will only allow the plain-

est of natural foods. The diet of flowers prepares him to hear the message from the most high.

Now, if you will let seven days more pass—do not, however, fast during them, but go into a field of flowers where no house has been built, and eat only of the flowers of the field, and taste no meat and drink no wine, but eat only flowers—and pray to the Most High continually, then I will come and talk with you. (2 *Esdras* 9,23-25)

It is typical of Apuleius to expand and widen the implications of a recurring theme. The flowers in the *Met.* had been a cure prescribed by the witches to restore an enchanted ass to humanity. Now the author elevates the roses in a manner to make them associated with the highest goddess and not an agent of witchcraft. They are Lucius' crown of glory as he returns to the human race:

In his right hand he held... a *sistrum* for the goddess, a crown for me; and it was fitting that it should be a crown of victory, by Hercules, since now, after enduring so many great toils and passing through so many perils, by the providence of the great and mighty goddess I would overcome Fortune... (*Met.* 11,12,1)

In 2 *Esdras*, the eating of flowers is part of the regimen of fasting and abstinence from rich food and drink; it is a sign that the initiate is prepared to deny luxury and prepare himself for an encounter with the divine. The eating of flowers is now more than a sordid reminder of witchcraft, it is a sign of Lucius' purification from sin and the undertaking of a new life under the guidance of Isis. In this respect it has analogies with Christian baptism, in which the candidate puts off his old self and takes on a new life in Christ. One of the occasional features of early Christian baptism was a coronation, which is mentioned in *Shepherd of Hermas* and in other Jewish-Christian literature; it was later dropped from Christian ritual because of its universal association with paganism.⁴¹

⁴¹ Daniélou 1964, 270.

5. *Eternal life promised*

Isis assures Lucius that at her command the people will recede and not question you. You will remember, she tells him, that your life is now pledged to me (*vadata*).

The pledge of surrendering his life to Isis and entering into bondage with her is an absolute one which will even extend beyond death.

Nor is it unjust that you should owe all the time you have to live to her by whose benefit you return to the world of men. Moreover you will live in happiness, you will live in glory, under my guardianship.

And when you have completed your life's span and travel down to the dead, there, too, even in the hemisphere under the earth, you will find me, whom you see now, shining among the shades of Acheron and holding court in the deep recesses of the Styx, and while you dwell in the Elysian fields I will favor you and you will constantly worship me. (*Met.* 11,6,5-6)

Later Jewish scripture and apocalyptic writings have begun to embrace the idea which we associate with Christianity, of an immortal life after death, at least for the righteous. Often the concept of protection by the deity after death includes the idea that the resurrected soul will be surrounded by bright light.

The first clear Biblical reference to a resurrection of the dead, final judgment, and afterlife is in the book of *Daniel*, dating from mid 1st century B.C.E:

But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (*Daniel* 12,1-3)

It is picked up in the apocalyptic literature which follows Daniel:

You shall not fear those who trouble you, for restoration shall be yours. A splendid light shall shine around you, and the voice of Tranquility shall be heard from heaven. Woe to you, sinners, for your wealth makes

you resemble saints but your hearts reproach you, knowing that you are sinners. (*Book of Enoch* trans. R. Laurence 95,4)

The spirits of those who die in righteousness shall exist and rejoice, Their spirits shall exult, and their remembrance shall be before the face of the Mighty One from generation to generation. (*Enoch* 103,3)

In 4 *Ezra*, the righteous are assured of special privilege after death. The souls of the righteous are to pass through seven stages of rest after death. (2 *Esdras* 7,97-98)

6. *New perspective needed*

Yet the benefits promised by Isis are not postponed to some distant future life, but can be begun to be realized even in the present, provided the Lucius adopts a new way of life.

But if you are obedient, worshipful and celibate, I can prolong your life beyond the limits of fate. (*Met.* 11,6,7)

Though Apuleius may have thought of Christians as sexually promiscuous while claiming to be celibate, the apocalyptic literature is prominent in its praise of celibacy.

And you alone have been enlightened about this, because you have forsaken your own ways and have applied yourself to mine, and have searched out my law. (2 *Esdras* 13,54)

'I command you' he said 'to guard chastity, and do not let anything occur in your heart about another man's wife or about some immorality or about any such evil things even similar to these.' (*Shepherd of Hermas* Mandate 4,29 ; cf. Similitude 60,4)

And if you, with your family, keep these things, all trouble will leave you, and trouble will leave all' he said 'who walk in my commandments.' (*Shepherd of Hermas* 66,7)

In *Met.* 11,8 is described a parade of characters in costume. The openness of the parade, the many expressions of joy and celebration, can be seen as a

contrast to Christian worship which is regarded as secret, subversive and degenerate, not meeting publicly hiding away in caves and private dwellings. The cult of Isis, though it contains hidden secrets which must not be revealed to the profane, is open to all and visible to all, and by its diversity seems to embrace many members of society who intermingle with the gods themselves. At the same time, the objects of worship carried in the procession have an air of mystery about them which invites the worshiper to want to learn more.

In 11, 15 the priest's address to Lucius, using words which have been dictated to him by the goddess, explain Isis' providence and divine plan. As an interpreter of the divine will, he corresponds to the angel or other divine being in the apocalyptic literature that is appointed to explain the divine will to the pilgrim. In 2 *Esdras* 4,1 the angel is Uriel.

But now you have been taken under the protection of a Fortune who can see, and with the brilliance of her own light illumines all the other gods as well. Put on a happier countenance now, to match the white garment you are wearing. (11,15,3)

In the Jewish view, the fact that injustice seems to prevail in the destruction of the temple is due to a failure to see God's whole plan; God's purpose has not been thwarted, though he seems slow in putting it into effect:

For it shall come to pass at that time that thou shall see—and the many that are with thee—the long-suffering of the Most High, which has been throughout all generations, which has been long-suffering towards all who are born, (alike) those who sin and (those who) are righteous. (2 *Baruch* 24)

Then I arose and walked in the field, giving great glory and praise to the Most High because of his wonders, which he did from time to time; and because he governs the times and whatever things come to pass in their seasons. (2 *Esdras* 13,57)

In Mithras' address to Lucius after his reformation, at one point Christians may be specifically addressed:

Join the procession of the savior goddess with triumphant step. Let the unbelievers (*irreligiosi*) see; let them see and recognize their errant ways (*errorem suum*). (*Met.* 11,15.4)

There is a good possibility that this passage may be aimed specifically at the Christians, who were accused of being *irreligiosi* (Minucius Felix *Octavius* 8) and of trying to undermine traditional religion and encourage dissolute behavior, preaching that one could do as one pleases without fear of divine punishment. In particular, Mithras' great emphasis on brightness and visibility, and on Lucius joining a triumphal procession which can be "seen" by others (the verb is reiterated), may hit at the secrecy of Christians who were said to worship at night out of the view of outsiders and avoided the light (*conscio lumine*, *Octavius* 8). It is certainly of interest that Pliny in his letter to Trajan (10,96,7) says of the Christians, ...*hanc fuisse summam vel culpae vel erroris, quod essent soliti stato die ante lucem convenire*, "this was the worst of their guilt or error, that they were accustomed on a fixed day to gather before light..."⁴² Secret worship services in the dark seem to have been part of the *errores* of which unbelievers are accused: the openness of the Isiac worship will be a lesson to them. The Christians were designated as 'unbelievers' and 'godless' by their accusers.⁴³ The allusion to Isis as a 'savior goddess' is meant as a replacement for the salvation offered by the Christian faith, and a retaliation against the Christians who rejected and ridiculed the Isiac religion. Mithras preaches to Lucius that he has been in a kind of slavery to pleasure but will experience a new freedom when he enters the service of Isis.

But to be safer and better protected, enlist in this holy army (*sanctae militiae*), to whose oath of allegiance (*sacramento*) you were summoned not long ago. Dedicate yourself today to obedience to our cult (*obsequio religionis nostrae*) and take on the voluntary yoke of her service; for as soon as you become the goddess' slave you will experience more fully the fruit of your freedom. (*Met.* 11,15,5)

The combination of being set free from sin and accepting the easy bondage of allegiance to God is a familiar one in the Christian literature.

⁴² Pointed out by Schmidt 1997, 70 n. 64.

⁴³ Justin in *1 Apology* 61, and see Schmidt 1997, 57-60.

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (*Galatians* 5,1)

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (*Matthew* 11,30)

So in the crucial speech by Mithras outlining the terms of Lucius' fall and redemption, we see how Apuleius is quite capable of embracing Christian concepts such as 'salvation' and 'the yoke of freedom' even in the context of rejecting 'atheistic' Christianity.

The priest gives Lucius a reassuring talk; everything is set by the goddess; she can prolong your life; begin to abstain from unlawful foods.

In fact, those who had finished their life span and were already standing on the very threshold of light's end, if only they could safely be trusted with the great unspoken mysteries of the cult, were frequently drawn forth by the goddess' power and in a manner reborn through her providence and set once again upon the course of renewed life. (*Met.* 11,21,7)

7. *The petitioner will record his experience
and become a divine spokesperson.*

Lucius several times reminds us that his experiences in the cult of Isis left him tongue-tied, unable to find the words to describe his experience; this humble reaction is quite different from earlier passages which boasted ironically of the cleverness and eloquence of an ass. The amazing appearance of Isis and the unprecedented change back into a man require a new kind of eloquence which must be aided by the divine. This parallels the need of the Jewish apocalyptic writers to seek divine aid in describing the wonders they have seen.

In 11, 3,3, his previous jokes about the inability of an ass to express himself are left behind as the narrator, though still an ass, struggles to convey the ineffable in "human speech." This is echoed in 11,14,1-2 where he is left speechless after being restored to human shape.

In 2 *Esdras* 14, 22 the suppliant likewise prays for the skill which will enable him to convey his encounter with the divine experience.

If then I have found favor before thee, send the Holy Spirit into me, and I will write everything that has happened in the world from the beginning, the things that were written in thy law, that we may be able to find the path, and that those who wish to live in the last days may live.

In response to this prayer, Ezra is given a magical drink the color of fire which gives him eloquence and understanding. He is in need of such wisdom and eloquence as he is about to dictate all the books of the Hebrew Bible.

and on the next day, behold, a voice called me, saying ‘Ezra, open your mouth and drink what I give you to drink.’ Then I opened my mouth, and behold, a full cup was offered to me; it was full of something like water, but its color was of fire. And I took it and drank; and when I had drunk it, my heart poured forth understanding, and wisdom increased in my breast, for my spirit retained its memory; and my mouth was opened, and was no longer closed. (2 *Esdras* 14,38-41).

What corresponds in Apuleius to Ezra’s burst of creativity is the novel itself, which will be the proclamation of the word of Isis. The *Metamorphoses* will be the cause of great glory which will be bestowed on Apuleius.

After warnings that he may need additional initiation, Lucius meets with Asinius Marcellus. Each has a dream about the other. Lucius has a dream about a lame man, Asinius has a dream that a poor man from Madauros is being sent to him, who will win fame for his studies.⁴⁴

A man from Madauros was being sent to him; the man was quite poor, but it behoved the priest to administer the god’s initiation rites to him at once, since by the god’s providence the man would acquire fame for his studies and the priest himself ample recompense. (*Met.* 11,27,9)

The ‘studies’ are the book itself, the novel which we are reading, and the ‘ample recompense’ may be Asinius Marcellus’ mention in that novel. This passage is reflected in two earlier passages in the novel, one in 2,12,5 and the other in the prologue:

Soon afterwards, in the city of the Latins, as a newcomer to Roman studies I attacked and cultivated their native speech with laborious difficulty and no teacher to guide me. (*Met.* 1,1,4)

The reference to the ‘laborious difficulty’ in which the narrator attacked the native speech of the Romans, and had no teacher to guide him, must mean on one level that the *Metamorphoses* is a new and trail-blazing novel in

⁴⁴ On the “confirming dream” motif see Smith 2012. See further Graverini’s analysis of the *Onos* passage in 2007, 210-211.

which the author is doing something never attempted before (viz. to write a novel combining the Milesian style with the insertion of Egyptian religion.)⁴⁵

The recording of the initiate's vision is part of his duty. John in the Christian book of Revelation has been favored with a vision of heaven partly because he is chosen by God to record the visions he sees and send them to wayward churches (Rev. 1,11, 'Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches...'). Furthermore at the end of his book, he warns the reader not to tamper with the words of the vision which he has recorded. The author of the *Shepherd of Hermas* is ordered to preach God's message to others and urge them to do good works so that they might be saved (*Hermas*, Parables 111-112 = 10, 1-2).

So will it be of the visions in 2 *Esdras*; not only that book itself but the entire corpus of the Hebrew Bible plus the Septuagint as well, will be the means by which God spreads his message to the world. Scripture itself becomes the answer for all the narrator's doubts; 2 *Esdras* 12,35: 'This is the dream you saw, and this is its interpretation. And you alone were worthy to learn this secret of the Most High. Therefore write all these things that you have seen in a book, and put it in a hidden place; and you shall teach them to the wise among your people, whose hearts you know are able to comprehend and keep these secrets.'

In 2 *Baruch* the speaker is instructed to send words of comfort to the tribes of Israel who are in oppression of Babylon. The epistle of 2 *Baruch* is itself the document which will be sent to them by an eagle as messenger, which is compared to Noah sending forth a dove from the ark. The epistle is intended 'to justify his judgment which He has decreed against you that ye should be carried away captives for what ye have suffered is disproportioned to what ye have done in order that, at the last times, ye may be found worthy of your fathers' (2 *Baruch* 78,5-6).

8. *The role of Rome in the divine plan*

The prominence of Rome in the Isis-book is notable. In 11,17 in the temple of Isis in Cenchreae, the scribe proclaims to the college of *pastophori* the launching of the *ploiaphesia* or navigation season. But first he pronounces prayers for the emperor, senate, knights, Roman people, and sailors and ships in the world wide empire. Our first glimpse of an Isiac ceremony

⁴⁵ On the correspondences between the prologue and the final book, see W. Smith 2001, 88-98. The prologue, the Diophanes passage in the second book, and allusions in Cupid and Psyche all point to the fame of Apuleius' novel.

stresses the patriotism of the worshippers of Isis and their wish for well-being for the political establishment in Rome.

11, 26, 1-2 reports Lucius' arrival in Rome. He is instructed to go to the 'Holy City' by Isis and it becomes the center of his worship, with a reminder that Isis had always had a temple there since the time of Sulla. The novel will end with his residence there as a priest supporting himself by pleading in the forum.

Christians and Jews are thought to be rooted in civil disobedience; Tertullian is one of those who tries to defend Christians against this charge.⁴⁶ At least in the apocalyptic literature, they seem to fulfill this common prejudice against them when they see the Roman empire as the instrument of evil and oppression and eagerly await its overthrow.

In the apocalyptic literature, Rome is a beast known as Babylon, a city which must be destroyed for its evil ways before the reign of God can come in. The destruction of the second temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. is analogous to the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians in the 6th century B.C.E.; this is one of the reasons that Rome is often called 'Babylon' by both Jews and Christians.

In *Revelation*, the fall of Rome is predicted, and God's wrath is promised against the followers of that city.

Then another angel, a second, followed, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.' Then another angel, a third, followed them, crying with a loud voice 'Those who worship the beast and its image, and receive a mark on their foreheads or on their hands, they will also drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and they will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.' (*Rev.* 14,8-10)

In *4 Ezra*, God through the lion condemns the Roman eagle for its perpetuation of injustice and cruelty over all the earth. Rome must be removed before God's kingdom can prevail.

'You, the fourth that has come, have conquered all the beasts that have gone before; and you have held sway over the world with much terror, and over all the earth with grievous oppression; and for so long you have

⁴⁶ Tertullian *Apology* 30-36 (on Christian patriotism); Justin *First Apology* 17 (defense against charge of civil disobedience).

dwelt on the earth with deceit...Therefore you will surely disappear, you eagle, and your terrifying wings...so that the whole earth, freed from your violence, may be refreshed and relieved, and may hope for the judgment and mercy of him who made it.' (2 *Esdras* 11, 37)

Apuleius, well aware that 'Roman emperors did not welcome apocalypses or the attitudes they expressed,'⁴⁷ has avoided any prophecies in the Isis-book that might seem to have political overtones. Rome is affirmed as the seat of empire. The Isiac religion respects the state, sees Rome as a holy and eternal city, even as a center for Isiac worship for several centuries past going back to the time of Sulla.⁴⁸ In the parallel Greek novel the *Onos*, the narrator is saved from the crowd's hostility in the arena by appealing to the Roman governor (*Onos* 54-55). Apuleius omits this episode but maintains its positive attitude toward the role of Rome. In contrast with the Rome-hating attitudes of Jewish-Christian literature, he rehabilitates the city, alluding to it in his preface as a future destination (1, 1, 4) and allowing the final events of the novel to unfold there, even seeing it as a center for his narrator's religious vocation, one in which the worship of Isis has long since been established, in the days of Sulla (11,30,5).⁴⁹ The emphasis in these passages on the narrator's learning of Latin is also noteworthy, as though the conversion to Isis, far from turning the narrator into an exotic or alien person, makes him a solid and mainstream, Latin-speaking Roman citizen. The narrator's learning to support himself by pleading in the forum is a reminder that he is a self-sufficient and loyal citizen who acknowledges, accepts, and is nurtured by the imperial city as it is now, not as it might be in some mystical future.

In 11, 28 Lucius is ordered to second initiation but deterred by the meagerness of his funds.

In 11,29 a third initiation is ordered. Lucius has trouble understanding the need for a third initiation with its attendant expenses and even begins to doubt the good faith of the clergy who repeatedly force the process on him. However, he is reassured by a nightly vision that repeated calls are merely a sign of his favor with the gods, and that he should lay aside his fears about them.

⁴⁷ Grant 1988, 15.

⁴⁸ On the movement to Rome in the novel and Rome as a venerable center for Isis worship, see Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2000, 68-72, and Dowden 1994.

⁴⁹ On Apuleius' ambiguous attitude toward the greatness of Rome see, with bibliography, E. Finkelpearl 2007, 263-276.

The hesitations of the petitioner, sometimes thought to reflect the author's own doubts about the sincerity of the Isiac clergy, seem less surprising in a Jewish context. Doubts are a very prominent feature in *4Ezra*, where the narrator, particularly in the early chapters, doubts why God has abandoned him and his chosen people. Even after repeated assurances of God's justice by the angel, Ezra refuses to accept his explanations of how God will set things right in the future (2 *Esdras* 7,62-69). Indeed a prominent part of the divine encounter in *4 Ezra* is to remove the deep doubts of Ezra and turn him into an effective spokesperson for God's word, by a renunciation of his human weaknesses:

And now renounce the life that is corruptible, and put away from you mortal thoughts; cast away from you the burdens of men, and divest yourself now of your weak nature, and lay to one side the thoughts that are most grievous to you, and hasten to escape from these times. (2 *Esdras* 14,14,13-15)

The Isis-Book and Apocalyptic Literature: Difference

The apocalyptic literature sees the world coming to an end and God reaching in and judging the people in it. Future judgment, which no one can escape, is bearing down on us with inexorable force. Apuleius envisions no such cataclysm, but sees the need for amendment of life as pertaining to life in the here and now. The reign of Isis in which we enter under the protection of her *providentia* is very much in the present, in contrast with the emphasis in Jewish-Christian apocalyptic in which we are to endure our present sufferings patiently as we await the coming of the Messiah who will restore us to live in the wider context of the restoration of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Accordingly, in *Daniel*, *4 Ezra*, *2Baruch*, the narrator is speaking on behalf of his people who are in distress. He is not so much an individual seeking salvation as a representative of his own people (though at times the narrator appears to be speaking openly on his own behalf, discussing his own shortcomings and need for salvation.) In Apuleius, the narrator does not represent anyone else; like the narrator of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, he is a fallen individual who has changed into an ass by his own fault.

Likewise, at the end of the visions, the narrator in the Jewish literature is to write down an account of his divine revelation to bring back to his own people and bring them consolation. The very document we are reading—or

even, in *4 Ezra*, the entire corpus of scripture itself—will be a glimpse of God's law intended to enlighten the nation. This theme extends to the Christian apocalypses. In *Revelation* the narrator of the book is used as a scribe who is supposed to transmit God's messages in writing to seven churches (1,11) and the reader is solemnly warned at the end of the work that this book is not to be tampered with in any way (*Rev.* 22,18-19). In *Hermas Visions* 5-6 (1, 2) the narrator is given a small book which he is to copy and is told at the very end of the work to write a book proclaiming the Lord's mighty works to everyone (*Parable* 10, 111-112).

The result of the narrator's glimpse of the divine in Apuleius is that it does indeed become a message to the world in the form of the *Metamorphoses*, the very novel which we are reading, a varied book and the result of much labor containing both racy stories and religious edification. But the main effect of the publication of the book will be to win glory for the author. This is far from an ignoble purpose; it puts Apuleius in the company of such major writers as Horace and Vergil, each of whom predicted fame for their great works (Horace *Odes* 3,30; Vergil *Aen.* 9,446-449). Obviously Lucius' conversion can be seen as a model for others to follow. Indeed 'glory' is even promised in the Jewish apocalyptic literature to those who help restore the law to God's people. It is a startling thought that Apuleius may conceive of his novel as a substitute or equivalent of the Jewish-Christian scripture which is designated by the gods as a document to enlighten all.

In the apocalyptic literature as in Apuleius, the 'providence' of the divine is praised and the power the god can exert for good over her followers. But there is a conceptual distinction between the two. In the apocalyptic literature, God is in charge of all human history, though his actions cannot always be seen from close up, but only from the perspective of time. In Apuleius, the world is ruled by 'fortune' which buffets most people about in an unpredictable way. It is possible to break away from the rule of fortune by surrendering to Isis, who then will change to rules so that they are governed by 'providence' and there is thus a purposeful direction for them to pursue.

I suspect that the many parallels between the Isis-book and Jewish-Christian apocalyptic literature suggest a complex relationship between Apuleius and the Jewish-Christian faith, which he may have regarded as a single religious cult, or perhaps two cults with similar views. In this he could have been misled by some of the Christian apologetic literature which fails to make a systematic presentation of Christian doctrine to distinguish it from Judaism, or even to mention Christ. Moreover, it is not immediately obvious to the reader even today whether *2 Esdras* is predominately Jewish or Chris-

tian, since the first two chapters, 1-2, and the last two, 15-16, are thought to be Christian additions to an originally Jewish text, but they fit together easily since both Christian and Jewish portions speak with similar terminology about a coming 'Messiah.' The Christians early appropriated *4 Ezra* as their own document and the additions of *5 Ezra* and *6 Ezra* were made to it rather seamlessly. Though contemptuous of their monotheism and dubious of their moral sincerity, from the Jewish-Christian sources Apuleius is drawn to the concept of salvation and a new direction in life. The second-century apologetics of Christians like Justin Martyr and Minucius Felix use the rhetorical methods, vocabulary, and mythological framework of their pagan adversaries. Apuleius returns the compliment by rooting his refutation of Jewish and Christian literature in the framework used by his adversaries, and even following them in adopting such religious concepts as falling into error, redemption, adoration of the divine, chastity, and eternal life to the believer.

Much of Apuleius' knowledge of the Christians, at least, was probably hearsay, and he may not have wanted to dignify them by mentioning them by name. He does, however, appear to have some direct acquaintance with contemporary Jewish-Christian literature, especially Justin Martyr and *4 Ezra*. He knows enough of Justin's courtroom apologies, and perhaps those of other Christians and Jews, to mock them at several points, and enough of Christian-Jewish apocalyptic literature to stir his imagination and borrow some specific details from it: a dream-vision rising out of the sea, a vision of an allegorical or multi-faceted female divinity, the eating of flowers as a preparation for divine encounter, the reception of favor from the divinity following after the suppliant turns away from the behavior of animals. This leads to the related developments of the transformation into human shape and discarding of the ugly form of an ass, the conversation with a secondary figure (Mithras) who knows the will of the divine, the acquiring of eloquence by divine favor, the winning of glory through the writing of his experiences in a book to be read by others.

While embracing these broad concepts and narrative devices, Apuleius attempts to correct and challenge many of the Jewish-Christian assumptions, while at the same time blending them together as atheistic and a front for immoral behavior. The apocalyptic literature asserts that the righteous must await the end of the world, the passing away of the evil empire, and the coming of the Messiah in order to be fully restored to glory; Apuleius challenges this idea by placing the blessings of Isis as accruing to a worshipper leading an active life in the midst of the capital city of the empire. The Isis-worshiper thus is fully integrated into Roman society as a patriotic citizen.

He further rejects the exclusive monotheism of Christians and Jews; and what he sees as their secrecy and the degenerate nature of their private worship, including sexual promiscuity and drunkenness: in contrast, the devotee of Isis leads an abstemious and celibate life.

Finally, the *Metamorphoses* itself gains glory by being published as the divine record of the incredible events described in the eleventh book of the novel, for which the first ten books have been a sweet enticement to the reader, intermingled with more serious lessons for those enlightened enough to discover them. In the context of the framework of the Jewish-Christian apocalyptic literature the novel thus becomes no less than the equivalent of the word of the gods, and Apuleius the scribe who transmits their message to the reader as a fantastic yet practical book.⁵⁰

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