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## **Editorial: Which is Harder to Believe?**

'Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing?' This intriguing question comes towards the end of Stephen Hawking's best-seller, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*.<sup>1</sup> Hawking's answer is that from a scientific point of view we still do not know, and cannot know until we can construct a grand universal theory that truly accounts for 'life, the universe and everything'. However, in the course of his book he juggles with the idea of a creator God, though finally appears to reject it. It does not fit with his concept of the universe as completely self-contained with no boundaries or singularities, and therefore neither 'beginning' nor 'end'. He realizes, however, that a creator God could combine with what he calls the 'strong anthropic principle', which states that the universe is as it now is precisely because we humans are here to observe it. If it had 'begun' in any different way (*i.e.* with even the slightest difference in the initial configuration of conditions at the Big Bang), then neither we would exist nor even the conditions for our life on this planet. In his own words:

The initial state of the universe must have been very carefully chosen indeed if the hot big bang model was correct right back to the beginning of time. It would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun in just this way, except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us (p. 127).

But Hawking does not believe this, though it is hard to see that he has offered any more credible alternative explanation. He finds the anthropic principle simply unbelievable. Certainly, as he quite rightly observes, it is an astonishing view. On the one hand, he says, we have

the modern picture in which the earth is a medium-sized planet orbiting around an average star in the outer suburbs of an ordinary spiral galaxy, which is itself only one of about a million million galaxies in the observable universe. Yet the strong anthropic principle would claim that this whole vast construction exists simply for our sake. This is very hard to believe (p. 126).

Hard for Hawking to believe, but the very core of the faith of millions through the ages, ever since the classic expression of it in the profound simplicity of Genesis 1. At least it is refreshing to see that he acknowledges his rejection of it as a matter of faith (or lack of), not of relevant scientific argument. The evidence he so penetratingly sifts does not at all rule out, and indeed may be taken to point to, the reality of a creator God who designed the laws of physics with the minutest precision in order finally to produce creatures like us. But this is 'very hard to believe' and so remains unbelieved. And ideas which seem less believable, even to non-Christian commentators, are offered in exchange.

A few months ago, a pastor from Singapore who has been involved in the phenomenal growth of the church there in the last two decades was telling me about what

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<sup>1</sup> London, Bantam Press, 1988. The Editor's holiday reading is at last catching up with everyone else's talking point for the last few years!

happens when people from a traditional religion background (otherwise known as animist or primal religion) turn to Christ, especially if they are baptised. He related several cases where such converts faced hostility from unconverted family and neighbours on the grounds that they had brought *a more powerful god* into their midst, an act which threatened the efficacy of their own rites and ceremonies. That is, people recognized the reality of Jesus Christ as a god, and indeed a more powerful god than their own, but that did not mean they were willing to turn to him or accept him as sole Lord. They could 'see' the reality of God, and indeed witness his power in miraculous ways (just like many of those who heard and saw Jesus on earth), yet choose to stick to their own gods rather than turn exclusively to Christ.

Both examples struck me afresh with the astonishing capacity of the human heart for suppressing the truth, even when faced with it. Is there, after all, any significant difference, in spiritual terms, between a religious animist who refuses to turn to Christ even when fully convinced of his deity and superior power and a brilliant intellect capable of penetrating conceptually to the very limits of our understanding or the universe but refusing to believe in the creator God virtually staring him in the face? The biblical category of 'folly', which includes the rejection of God, is not a matter of intellectual deficiency, but rather of refusing the truth of God because of the implications it inevitably has in other areas of life.

Of course, human beings ancient and modern are very skilled at finding the simple and obvious truth of God's revelation (in nature, history, Scripture and Christ) 'hard to believe', while simultaneously finding it easy to believe all kinds of other distortions and absurdities. There are those who reject a Father God, but affirm the deity of Mother Goddess Earth (under a variety of names), claiming it to be somehow less sexist to do so. A growing percentage of people in the West, finding the idea of resurrection hard to believe (a task not made any easier by some within the church itself), embrace reincarnation as a more credible personal future, overlooking the irony that in its oriental origins, reincarnation is a bondage from which you strive for ultimate release. There are always those who are willing and eager to give credence to the most fanciful theories about the historical Jesus (yet more having appeared in recent months) while dismissing with pseudo-scientific scorn the sober accounts of the earliest witnesses. And in what is probably the major current theological battlefield, Christian theology of other religions, there are those who find it hard to believe that God is as he is claimed to be revealed in Christ, and substitute an apophatic abstract construct, an 'ultimate divine reality', neither personal nor impersonal, which all religions reflect but which none really knows. One could say of relativist pluralism that it has serious inherent epistemological problems. Or one might say with greater simplicity. 'This is very hard to believe.' All the more urgent then is our apologetic responsibility to be 'valiant for truth' in a truth-resistant culture. We have the Scriptures, but other resources are not lacking either, provided we use them diligently.<sup>2</sup>

**Chris Wright**

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<sup>2</sup> The writings of Lesslie Newbigin repay careful reading, especially, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (SPCK, 1990). On pluralism H.A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices* (Apollos, 1991), is a very thorough critique. And most recently, see Alister McGrath, *Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics* (IVP, 1992). A future issue of *Themelios* will carry a 'resource-list' on the question of Christianity and science.

*With this issue we say farewell to three of our editorial panel and welcome two new additions. David Mcleod retires from the list of Assistant Editors, while Vernon Grounds and Masao Uenuma retire from the list of International Editors. We express our thanks for their support over the years. We have not previously had an Assistant Editor with particular responsibility for Missiology. This lack is now made good with the agreement of Bill Houston to join the team. Mr. Houston is Vice-Principal of the Evangelical Biblical Seminary of South Africa (EBSemSa), in Pietermaritzburg. He was formerly involved in student ministry in South Africa and has taught a variety of missiological subjects at All Nations Christian College for the last six years. On the International panel, we are delighted that Peter Kuzmic has joined us, representing Central and Eastern Europe. Dr. Kuzmic is principal of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, Croatia (formerly Yugoslavia), which sustained damage in the recent fighting. Dr. Kuzmic's article in this issue should urge us to prayer, not only for the critical needs of former Yugoslavia, but for the continent of Europe in general.*

*In this issue we begin a new column on the inside back cover, 'Personally speaking', in which we invite established scholars to reflect on their own pilgrimage in theology in a more personal fashion. For multitudes of theological students, old and young, the name 'Wenham' is synonymous with New Testament Greek, as they learned the language with the help of John Wenham's Elements of New Testament Greek. However, as his column shows, his major interest lies elsewhere. We pray that he may be given strength in retirement to complete his lifetime's project.*

# Development in New Testament Christology

R.T. France

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## 'Evolution' or 'Development'?

In 1977, two books on Christology were published independently in Britain. The first, a symposium entitled *The Myth of God Incarnate*,<sup>1</sup> attracted a lot of publicity, perhaps more on account of the provocative nature of its title than for any major contribution to scholarly discussion. The second, less noticed at the time, has proved, I believe, to be of more long-term significance: *The Origin of Christology* by C.F.D. Moule.<sup>2</sup>

Moule's primary aim was to call attention to, and to challenge, an assumption which underlies much recent christological discussion, and of which in fact *The Myth of God Incarnate* provides an obvious example. He characterizes this as a theory of **evolution**, as opposed to one of **development**, which Moule himself offers as an alternative. The terms chosen may not be the most helpful, particularly in circles where the word 'evolution' has emotive connotations in quite a different connection, but the point is crucial.

In Moule's own words, the 'evolutionary' approach is 'the tendency to explain the change from (say) invoking Jesus as a revered Master to the acclamation of him as a divine Lord by the theory that, when the Christian movement spread beyond Palestinian soil, it began to come under the influence of non-Semitic Saviour-cults and to assimilate some of their ideas'; the result was the rise of new christological categories from non-Christian mythology, which were alien to the original character and teaching of Jesus. Moule's 'developmental' approach, by contrast, 'is to explain all the various estimates of Jesus reflected in the NT as, in essence, only attempts to describe what was already there from the beginning'.<sup>3</sup>

This is, to my mind, one of the most important issues in current christological debate. Was the increasingly sophisticated christology of the NT authors (and still more of subsequent Christian discussion) due to the addition of new ideas which substantially changed the underlying understanding of Jesus, or was it simply working out more explicitly what was already there? In what sense can Jesus the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, be recognized to be the same person as the historical Jesus of Nazareth? Is there a discernible continuity between them, and if so, how is the development of the more theologically explicit language and thought to be explained?

That there *was* a development is clear enough. To take the most extreme case, the use of the word 'God' to describe Jesus is very rare in the NT, and occurs almost exclusively in what are generally agreed to be the later writings (with the one remarkable exception of Rom. 9:5).<sup>4</sup> And in almost all these passages there is hot debate over either the original reading of the text or the syntactical analysis which allows the word *theos* to be construed as referring to Jesus (or, in some cases, on both points at once!).<sup>5</sup> The gospels (even the Gospel of John) do not portray Jesus as claiming in so many words that he was God, and in this they have historical verisimilitude on their side — the picture of the carpenter of Nazareth walking the hills of Galilee proclaiming 'I am God' is not one which rings true to the monotheistic culture of first-century Palestine. As a public relations exercise it would have been a guaranteed disaster.

And yet a generation or two later, Christians, including those of Jewish background, were beginning, however hesitantly, to use such language. Is it then necessary to see this remarkable change as the result of influence from pagan mythological ideas about 'the

gods come down to us in the likeness of men' (and therefore as totally lacking in 'factual' correspondence with what was actually true about Jesus)? Or was there something 'already there' in Jesus which, however veiled in its experience at the time, made it inevitable that eventually he would be described in some such terms?

The terms used would, of course, vary depending on the cultural and linguistic background of the writer; and indeed the immediate semantic value of a term such as 'Son of God' would also differ from one reader to another. New ideas and experiences, in theology as anywhere else, have to be expressed in terms which have not previously been used in quite the same way, and which may carry different connotations depending on the reader's background. In the process of exploring the significance of Jesus, many different categories were used, some of which proved to have more lasting value than others.<sup>6</sup> At first, these were mainly Jewish categories, since it was among Jewish Christians that the process of development began. But as the Christian message began to be preached in a wider context, new terms came to be used. In the following centuries, Greek philosophical categories came to be adopted as the chief currency of christological debate, a process which culminated in the 'orthodox' christological formulations of the great councils, in which the language of the NT has been left far behind. But even in the NT itself it is possible to discern the beginning of this development, as for instance in John's adoption for the first time of what became a central term in patristic debate, when he described Jesus as the *Logos*, a term which will be understood differently depending on whether you come to it from the background of OT thought about the 'word of Yahweh' or from a Greek philosophical school which sees *logos* as the governing principle of the universe.<sup>7</sup>

The question we need to ask is whether such terms and categories of thought, whether Jewish or pagan, are themselves the source of the christological ideas they are used to express, to the extent that the content of the Christology is determined by the linguistic and conceptual apparatus available, or whether they are rather, in Martin Hengel's helpful analogy,<sup>8</sup> to be seen as 'building material' available to the early Christians for the construction of a Christology which derived its content not from any existing model, but from the new events, experiences and teaching which had come to them in the life and ministry of Jesus.

## A sample area: christological development in the gospels

In the necessarily brief compass of this paper I cannot discuss this question of 'evolution *v.* development' with regard to the whole of the NT. But we may appropriately focus on the gospels, for there we find both an ostensible portrait of the beginnings of Christianity in the ministry of Jesus, and also at the same time some indication of the subsequent development of thought about him, at least in the explicit reflections of the evangelists themselves, but also in what we can discern of the development of the traditions between the events recorded and the incorporation of them into the finished gospels.

In this connection it has been usual to deal separately with the synoptic gospels and with John, since it is generally recognized that the process of development has gone much further in the case of John, resulting in a more explicit presentation of Jesus as the Son of God who came from heaven and will return there. In more recent scholarship, however, this difference has been understood more as one of degree than of kind, in that all the evangelists, not just John, are seen to have their own christological tendencies

which affect the way they present their material; there is a Marcan Jesus, a Matthean Jesus and a Lucan Jesus as well as a Johannine Jesus, and all these portraits in their differing ways reveal the features of the Son of God displayed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. At the same time, there is an increasing tendency to recognize in John a more historically grounded tradition, to a large extent independent of that found in the synoptics, but none the less reliable for that.<sup>9</sup> John may have carried out a more thorough and consistent process of christological interpretation in the way he has presented Jesus' life and teaching, but he is not therefore to be dismissed as having lost touch with the historical reality of Jesus. The distinction between John and the synoptics tends therefore to be less sharply drawn than it used to be.

(a) *The Messiahship of Jesus in the gospels*

For the earliest Christian preachers, working in a primarily Jewish context, one of the main points to be established was that Jesus was the *Messiah*. Indeed, during his ministry we are told that this was a question regularly canvassed by those who encountered him. All the gospels, in differing degrees, focus on this question, and Matthew's overriding concern with the theme of 'fulfilment' in Jesus clearly relates to this issue. How far, then, is it possible to discern a development in this area?

Discussion of Jesus' Messiahship frequently begins with William Wrede's theory of the 'Messianic Secret'.<sup>10</sup> For Wrede, Mark's presentation of Jesus as Messiah was not a development from Jesus' own claim, but a falsification of it. The belief of the early Christians (as a result of the resurrection) that Jesus had been the Messiah caused them, in Wrede's view, both to attribute falsely to Jesus a claim to that effect and also to explain its absence from the tradition (as well as the embarrassing failure of the Jewish establishment to accept him as Messiah) by the theory that Jesus deliberately suppressed any public acknowledgment of this supposed role during his pre-Easter ministry. Even the apparently very basic concept of Jesus as the Messiah is then, on this theory, not the result of development of what was 'already there', but rather represents the 'evolution' of a new and alien category.

It would be possible (though not perhaps very convincing) to isolate the specific occurrences of the word *Christos*, and to set these aside as unhistorical elements in the tradition. But the issue of 'Messiahship' involves much more than the usage of the title itself. Some of the most central elements in the gospel narrative presuppose that a messianic claim was involved. The accounts of Jesus' baptism and temptation focus on the distinctive role he was to fulfil as the one upon whom the Spirit came, and whose identity was declared in terms of Isaiah 42:1 and Psalm 2:7.<sup>11</sup> The feeding of the 5,000 takes place in an atmosphere of messianic expectation, and indeed it is hard to see how a ministry such as Jesus exercised could fail to evoke the sort of response indicated in John 6:14-15, where the people hail Jesus as 'the prophet who is coming into the world' and attempt to force him into the role of 'king'. The retreat to Caesarea Philippi and the teaching about the coming suffering both of Jesus and his followers which is associated with it would make little sense without Peter's use of the title *Christos* as the focus of Jesus' subsequent 'reinterpretation'. The involvement of the 'messianic' figures Elijah and Moses is fundamental to the account of the transfiguration (and that of Elijah at other points in the tradition as well). The entry into Jerusalem is viewed by all four gospels as a messianic demonstration, and it is hard to see what other meaning it could have had in earlier tradition. Jesus' demonstration in the temple is also best seen as conveying a similar message.<sup>12</sup> The trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin reaches its climax in the question of his alleged claim to be the Messiah; if that is eliminated, or if Jesus refused to acknowledge the alleged claim, what was the basis of his conviction? The subsequent Roman trial clearly depends on a charge of seditious intention, focused on the title 'King of the Jews'; it is agreed that it was on such a charge that Jesus was executed, and it is hard to see how Wrede's non-messianic Jesus could have attracted that fate.

These are among the more prominent aspects of the story of Jesus which make little sense without at least an implicit messianic claim, and it would be a very bold critic who would attempt to discard all such stories as unhistorical at least in their essential outline. There is, of course, an element of reluctance or of reinterpretation about Jesus' response to overtly messianic language in some of these stories,<sup>13</sup> but that may tell us more about the possible connotations of *Christos* in popular Jewish thought than about Jesus' own view of his role.

In fact, the title *Christos* itself is not the main basis for asserting Jesus' 'messianic consciousness'. This is found rather in the subtle way in which the idea of the fulfilment of OT hope in Jesus' coming and through his ministry is woven into the tradition at many levels. Incidents such as the sermon at Nazareth (Lk. 4:16-30) and the reply to John the Baptist (Mt. 11:4-5) depend on this idea, as does also the fundamental summary of Jesus' preaching in Mark 1:15, etc. The centrality of the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus' preaching must raise the question of the status of the one who brings it. A similar force derives from the frequent mention of Jesus' unique authority, particularly when that authority is seen in a sovereign declaration of the will of God which dispenses not only with the traditions of the scribes but also with the generally understood sense of the OT itself.

Many more such indications of a 'messianic' element in Jesus' teaching and activity could be listed. Several of the sayings and incidents involved would be disputed by some scholars as historical records of what Jesus actually said and did, but the case is strong enough to survive a good deal of scepticism over individual items. The impression is very firmly embedded in the tradition of a Jesus who, whether he used or welcomed the title *Christos* or not, spoke and acted as the one in whom God's eschatological purposes were coming to fulfilment (and that is what *we* mean by 'the Messiah', even if the term *Christos* itself may have carried more specific and less desirable connotations for Jesus and his contemporaries).

On such grounds it may reasonably be concluded that the use of messianic language for Jesus is a clear case of the sort of 'development' Moule is arguing for. The title *Christos* itself is far more evident in the post-Easter preaching of the church and in subsequent Christian writing than it seems likely to have been during Jesus' ministry. It emerges, apparently, as a newly established theme in Christian preaching as a result of the resurrection (Acts 2:36), and the title about which Jesus' own attitude seems to have been at least ambivalent now becomes central to what his followers have to say about him. But this is not a matter of foisting onto Jesus after his death a role which he himself would have repudiated (as the 'evolutionary' approach would insist), but of expressing openly and unequivocally a perception which had been implicit in Jesus' own presentation of his mission but which it would have been premature (and politically undesirable) to express in such terms while he was still on earth.

Moule, having reached such a conclusion from his brief discussion of the title 'Christ', concludes drily: 'This is an absurdly old-fashioned conclusion, but the question is whether it does not still fit the evidence.'<sup>14</sup> I believe that it does, and that it thus provides a paradigm case of how 'development' (in Moule's sense of the word) operates in NT Christology.

(b) *Jesus as the Son of God in the gospels*

The preceding discussion may seem scarcely relevant to today's christological debates. It is not Jesus' Messiahship that is under discussion today, but the claim that he is to be understood as 'more than human', a claim often encapsulated in the title 'Son of God'. Indeed, even in ancient christological discussion this was so, as the title 'Christ', while not explicitly put aside, became increasingly less central to the discussion, particularly as Christian thought moved more outside Jewish circles. It remained one of the given factors rather than a matter for debate.

It has become customary to distinguish between 'functional' and 'ontological' aspects of Christology. In terms of that distinction, the question of Jesus' Messiahship is primarily a functional question, a matter of the role he had to fulfil, while the centre of interest soon became, and has remained, rather the ontological question of who he *was*. The two are of course inseparable:<sup>15</sup> the role he could fulfil depends on who he was, and who he was is likely to be discerned primarily through what he did. But insofar as the distinction can properly be drawn, 'Son of God' promises to be a more relevant title than 'Christ' for the 'ontological' questions on which today's christological debate is focused.

It is possible, to be sure, that 'Son of God' could have carried more ontological implications than 'Messiah' for some of Jesus' contemporaries, if, as is increasingly being recognized, it was a title which might be used in at least some Jewish circles for the Messiah.<sup>16</sup> It is certainly true that in both pagan and Jewish circles such phrases could be used of people who, either by office or by character, were felt to have a special relationship with a god or gods, without necessarily implying any doubt about their being themselves 'merely human'.<sup>17</sup> But it is clear that the NT usage of the title implied more than that, and formed a crucial element in the church's ultimate confession of the divinity of Jesus.

Is it then possible to trace in the case of such language the same sort of development which we have seen in the use of messianic categories? Was there anything in the life and sayings of the historical Jesus which might appropriately give rise not only to the use of the title 'Son of God' but also to the implication of his being 'more than human'?

A central issue here must be the clear difference in perspective between the Gospel of John and the other canonical gospels with regard to the sort of language Jesus used about himself. The Johannine Jesus not only refers to himself as 'Son of God' or 'the Son' some 25 times, and to God as 'Father' some 120 times, but his teaching develops a consistent view of his unique relationship with God which, for all its acceptance that 'the Father is greater than I', nonetheless finds its appropriate culmination in such sayings as 'I and the Father are one' and 'he who has seen me has seen the Father'. While the other gospels have a few sayings of Jesus which reflect a similar self-understanding (and a greater number of places where others refer to Jesus as 'Son of God'), there can be no doubt that we have here a specifically Johannine emphasis. From this, most modern scholarship has concluded that the Gospel of John is not the place to look for information about the historical Jesus.

But here the concept of 'development' is again important. It is one thing to recognize that John presents a more 'developed' Christology, in the teaching ascribed to Jesus as well as in the evangelist's own assertions, but quite another to assume that therefore there was no historical basis for this Christology in the teaching of Jesus. We have already noted that Johannine scholarship in the last 30 years or so has swung markedly back towards a recognition that John had independent and valuable sources of information, and that therefore when he differs from the other gospels it may not necessarily be because he is reading back later beliefs into the story of Jesus. A few years ago, this trend reached its remarkable climax in the posthumous publication of J.A.T. Robinson's book *The Priority of John*,<sup>18</sup> which argues not necessarily that John's was the first gospel to be written, but that it is the 'closest to source', in that its presentation of Jesus reflects the most reliable information on what Jesus was really like, so that it should have 'procedural priority' in our reconstruction of the historical Jesus. Thus, instead of taking the synoptic portrait as our primary framework into which Johannine material must somehow be made to fit, we should work the other way round. Robinson's argument includes (though it does not entirely depend on) the conclusion that the author of the gospel was John, the son of Zebedee, so that his primary source of information is his own reminiscences as one of the very closest of Jesus' disciples throughout his ministry. In that case, Robinson argues, we have every reason to be confident that John 'got it right' — historically and theologically.

It is hardly surprising that so unfashionable a view has as yet received little welcome in the scholarly world. Robinson's own earlier experience had warned him to expect this.<sup>19</sup> But such a radical challenge to the accepted consensus, coming not from a dogmatic conservatism but from a full and fresh reconsideration of the evidence, deserves to be taken seriously, however uncomfortable its wider implications for our conception of Christian origins. In that case, the Johannine Jesus may have a lot more to tell us about what Jesus of Nazareth actually said and believed about himself than is generally admitted.<sup>20</sup>

But in any case, the relation between the synoptic Jesus and the Johannine is not one of total discontinuity. The assertion of a unique relationship<sup>21</sup> in the statement that 'No-one knows the Son except the Father, and no-one knows the Father except the Son' (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22), which is sometimes said to be too 'Johannine' to fit in a synoptic gospel, is not alone. The declaration of Jesus' special status as 'Son of God' is central to the synoptic accounts of his baptism, and the subsequent temptation as recorded by Matthew and Luke focuses on this newly declared relationship: 'If you are the Son of God . . .'. The repetition of the same

declaration at the transfiguration would serve only to reinforce this conviction. It emerges most obviously in Jesus' use of the name 'Father' in addressing God (Mk. 14:36, using the Aramaic term *Abba*), a use which is not confined to John's gospel, and which has long been recognized as one of the distinctive features of Jesus' approach to God when contrasted with what we know of contemporary Jewish piety.<sup>22</sup> It even comes to public expression in Jesus' choice of the figure of the owner's only son to represent his own role in the parable of the tenants in the vineyard (Mk. 12:1-12), a choice daring enough to provide a plausible basis for the High Priest's inclusion of the title 'the Son of the Blessed' in his challenge relating to Jesus' alleged claims (Mk. 14:61). Even the assertion, potentially embarrassing for a high Christology, that there is something Jesus does not know (Mk. 13:32), is expressed in such a way as to locate himself as 'the Son' in a position in the ascending order between the angels and God.

All that is obvious on the surface. A belief that Jesus neither thought nor spoke of himself as the Son of God involves the rejection of more than the Johannine testimony. But to focus attention solely on the title 'Son of God' is perhaps to miss the strength of the case that all the gospels, not just John, present Jesus as conscious of a 'more than human' status.

We have noted already the impression of a unique authority which comes across in many aspects of Jesus' ministry: men leave everything and follow him, accepting his demand for total allegiance even at the expense of the closest family ties; he declares the will of God with a sovereign assurance, 'not like their scribes', frequently using his distinctive formula 'Amen, I say to you';<sup>23</sup> his power over illness and even over the forces of nature is displayed in many remarkable miracles; and even the demons are unable to resist his authority. We are frequently told that people were 'amazed' at what they heard and saw, and asked, 'Who is this?' None of this, of course, in itself requires us to believe that Jesus was anything more than a very remarkable man who was closely in touch with God. But there are times in the stories of Jesus' ministry when such a view begins to seem inadequate.

Sometimes, Jesus seems to assume the right to exercise what are specifically divine functions. His response to the theologically correct comment that only God can forgive sins is not to retract his claim to do so, but to prove it by a miracle (Mk. 2:1-12; cf. Lk. 23:43). He gives rest to those who accept his yoke, a gift offered in Jewish thought only by the divine wisdom (Mt. 11:28-30; cf. Ben Sira 51:23-27). His words, like those of God, have eternal validity (Mk. 13:31; cf. Is. 40:8). He will be the one who determines men's final destinies, and the basis for the decision will be their relationship with him (Mt. 7:21-23). He is the final judge, the king in an eternal kingdom (Mt. 25:31ff.). To accept or to reject him is to accept or reject God (Mt. 10:40; Lk. 10:16). Such language does not constitute a formal claim to be divine. Some of it may be seen as no more than a rather exaggerated expression of the consciousness of a prophetic commission. But it is at least suggestive of something more far-reaching in Jesus' self-consciousness.

This suggestion is strengthened when we notice some of the ways the OT is used in Jesus' recorded teaching. That he should refer to OT messianic hopes as fulfilled in his ministry is not so surprising in the light of what we have seen above. But sometimes he takes up passages which refer to God himself, not to a messianic figure, and uses these equally naturally as if they refer to himself. Thus his mission 'to seek and to save the lost' (Lk. 19:10) echoes Ezekiel's prophecy about God himself as the shepherd (Ezk. 34, esp. vv. 16, 22), while his defence of the children's praise of him is based on a psalm about how God is praised (Mt. 21:16; cf. Ps. 8:2). He is the stone on which men stumble, taking up an image for God in Isaiah 8:14f. (Lk. 20:18). He identifies John the Baptist as the returning Elijah of Malachi 3:1; 4:5f., whose role it is to precede the coming of God himself to judgment (Mk. 9:12f.; Mt. 11:10, 14). The portrayal of himself as judge in the final assize is modelled on a group of OT visions of God himself coming as judge (Mt. 25:31ff.; cf. Dn. 7:9f.; Joel 3:1-12; Zech. 14:5).<sup>24</sup> None of this is argued out, it is simply taken for granted that such language is appropriate to Jesus, just as he seems to feel no difficulty in portraying himself in some of the parables in roles which are typically found in the OT descriptions of God himself — the shepherd, the bridegroom, the sower.<sup>25</sup>

Jesus' chosen 'title' by which to refer to himself seems to have been 'the Son of Man'. Later Christian thought has typically taken this term as an indication of his humanity, and so has contrasted it with 'Son of God'. It is reasonably clear, however, that whatever

the original lexical value of the phrase 'a son of man', the relevant background for Jesus' distinctive self-designation as 'the Son of Man' is to be found in the vision of 'one like a son of man' in Daniel 7, a passage from which Jewish thought was already beginning to develop the expectation of a heavenly deliverer.<sup>26</sup> In the view of some recent scholars, it is not going too far to claim that, far from conveying the *opposite* to 'Son of God', Jesus' choice of 'the Son of Man' is intended to convey something of the *same* connotations, a claim summed up in the title of Seyoon Kim's monograph, *'The Son of Man' as the Son of God*.<sup>27</sup>

What we have been considering are indications, sometimes subtle and uncertain, but perhaps the more impressive for their very unobtrusiveness, that Jesus was conscious of a status which was 'more than human'. He did not call himself 'God' — how could he? But if even some of this material is a genuine reflection of how Jesus spoke and thought, we have here at least the raw materials to enable us to discern a self-consciousness that forms a solid basis for the church's subsequent confession that Jesus was in a unique sense 'Son of God', a confession which in due course found its proper expression in the worship of Jesus as God.

We have often been warned of the danger of attempting a psychological analysis of Jesus. It is a necessary warning, but I do not believe that it prohibits us from taking notice of such hints in the accounts of Jesus as we have been considering. James Dunn boldly reopened the question in his book *Jesus and the Spirit*.<sup>28</sup> The first part of the book is devoted to 'The Religious Experience of Jesus', and within this section there is an important discussion of Jesus' awareness that he was the Son of God.<sup>29</sup> Jesus knew that he was God's son, Dunn argues, not just in the sense that any religious man might make such a claim, but with a distinctive intimacy which must be called unique, to the extent that other people's sonship is in some way dependent on his. To claim this as evidence of a metaphysical 'divine consciousness' is, Dunn believes, to outrun what we may responsibly conclude from the gospels, since he is not prepared to use the Gospel of John as a source for what the historical Jesus actually said and did. But even so, there is here, we may reasonably suggest, a firm foundation in the self-consciousness of the historical Jesus on which the later development of more explicitly metaphysical language could be built. If, with John Robinson, you are prepared to give more historical credence to the Gospel of John, that foundation is significantly strengthened.

## The nature of christological development

We have considered only two sample areas of christological development, and those only in relation to the gospels. If we could have taken our study further through the rest of the NT, the importance of this concept of development would have become much more evident.<sup>30</sup>

This study suggests that we are wrong to look in the accounts of the ministry of Jesus for the overt expression of metaphysical truths about the nature of his relationship with God in a way which might be appropriate to theological discussion at the end of the first century (still less for statements of Chalcedonian orthodoxy!), and that the absence of such language is no cause for doctrinal embarrassment. However great Jesus' own awareness of his unique status, it is surely to be expected that the extent to which he might give it open expression must be governed by the likely understanding (or rather misunderstanding) of such language on the part of those who heard him, whether friends or enemies. We have to reckon too with the fact that the accounts of what Jesus said and did have come down to us through his followers who themselves must have experienced a growth in their own awareness of the implications of what was said. No doubt the impact made on them by Jesus was striking and immediate, but there is no reason to imagine that their christological understanding was fully formed at the first encounter. Indeed, the gospels give us plenty of evidence that the progress was slow and painful for them, and that it was not until after the resurrection that the full truth of what they had heard and seen began to come home to them. Even then, it is no surprise that Peter's speech at the first Pentecost is far from the theological sophistication of the later writings of Paul.

Such a gradual process of deepening understanding is what might reasonably be expected, and the NT does not dispel that expectation. This is not to suggest, of course, a rigid scheme whereby succeeding stages of christological understanding can be located at fixed points along an inexorable line of chronological development, so that the more 'primitive' is necessarily to be seen

as earlier than the more 'sophisticated', in much the same way that OT scholars used to attempt to date the presumed sources of the Pentateuch by their supposed place along an evolutionary line from the vivid anthropomorphism of 'J' to the dry scholasticism of 'P'. Life is not as simple as that, and we do well to heed B.C. Butler's dry comment that 'The parish magazine is not necessarily of earlier date than the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas.'<sup>31</sup> There is therefore no place for the dogmatism which will not allow Paul to express more 'developed' theological ideas simply because he was writing in the 50s, earlier than the generally agreed date for the writing of any of the gospels. But of the fact that the NT does include both more and less 'developed' christological formulations there can be no doubt, and it should be no surprise therefore that the sayings of Jesus in the gospels do not use the language of Hebrews 1:1-3 or of the Prologue of John.

The nature of the development is sometimes expressed in terms of the distinction mentioned earlier between functional and ontological aspects of Christology. At first, on this understanding, Christians thought of Jesus only, or at least primarily, in terms of what he had done, as the Messiah or the Saviour. It was only later that they began to realize that in order to fulfil these functions, Jesus must have been more than an ordinary man, and so ontological Christology came onto the scene. It may be questioned, indeed, how far a concept of Jesus as Saviour could ever have existed without at least a rudimentary realization that this was a role beyond the scope of a mere man. But the progression from functional to ontological interest is one which seems to correspond in general to the way religious experience may be perceived to develop. The development will not stop there, of course, but one ontological question will lead to another, so that the development from the Christology of the NT to the patristic formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity was a necessary next step — you could not confess Jesus as the eternal Son of God without having to go further and ask what this confession did to your monotheistic presuppositions.

It may be more appropriate, however, to formulate the nature of the development more in terms of the experience of the first Christians as this came to be expressed in their worship. Recent christological discussion, through concentrating mainly on the titles and explicit theological formulations found in the NT, may be in danger of missing the more fundamental evidence for a developing attitude to Jesus expressed in worship, which was itself the seedbed out of which the christological titles and formulations grew.<sup>32</sup> Those who, at a very early date after the resurrection, were 'calling on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 1:2), a practice reflected in the early Aramaic prayer 'Maranatha' (1 Cor. 16:22), who, in what is probably a pre-Pauline hymn, had already come to revere him as the 'Lord' to whom is due the worship exclusively reserved for God (Phil. 2:9-11, echoing Is. 45:22f.), were, in their worship, giving expression to a conviction about the nature of Jesus which may not yet have come to formal christological expression, but which must inevitably have led them in that direction. The development of Christology is, then, on this view, not a matter of abstract intellectual speculation but of the translation into more theological formulations of convictions which were already fundamental to the worshipping life of the Christian community. In opposition to the currently fashionable search for models outside the Christian community which they gratuitously adopted in their desire to clothe the figure of Christ with appropriately noble attributes, this view finds the origin of the high Christology of the NT within the Christian context, as the religious experience and worship of ordinary men and women (not necessarily speculative theologians) came to be focused on Jesus of Nazareth. Christology then arose out of the attempt to give appropriate expression to what they had already come to know to be true in their experience.

I have tried elsewhere<sup>33</sup> to sketch out this approach to NT Christology as finding its source in the worship of Jesus. It seems to me to supply a necessary context for christological thought which is lacking when the study is restricted to titles and formal statements.<sup>34</sup> If it is true that worship preceded and gave rise to theology, rather than vice versa, the origin of that experience which is expressed in worship lies much further back than the supposed influence of non-Christian cults on Christian thought in the context of the Gentile mission. It goes back to the beginning of the church's distinct existence as the body of those who worship Jesus. And that means, as we have seen argued in Moule's concept of 'development', that the high Christology to which NT writers eventually gave expression was in essence 'already there' in the beginning.



It was there in the impact that Jesus made on those who saw and heard him; it was there in the religious experience into which he led them, as they found that in coming to him they found a new relationship with God; it was there in the paradoxical compulsion to attribute divine honours in their worship to a man whom they had known before his death and resurrection as an itinerant preacher in Galilee. For Jesus' first followers were Jews, to whom the very thought of offering worship to a human being was abhorrent (cf. Acts 10:25f.). The fact that nonetheless, during the brief period between Jesus' resurrection and the writing of Paul's letters, the worship of Jesus had become the distinctive feature of this largely Jewish group, points to some influence more potent than a mere desire to imitate pagan myths. There was something 'already there' in the life and teaching of the historical Jesus which led them to take this remarkable step, with all the doctrinal problems it was bound to cause. It is, I believe, in this irresistible impact of Jesus himself that we must find the origin of Christology.

<sup>1</sup>J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM, 1977).

<sup>2</sup>C.F.D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 2-3. An interesting brief discussion by E.L. Mascall, *Jesus: Who He Is and How We Know Him* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), strongly endorses Moule's perspective, but goes on to suggest that the same 'development' which Moule traces only within the NT may be found continuing also through the christological discussions of the patristic church and beyond.

<sup>4</sup>For a full discussion of the textual and translation problems posed by Rom. 9:5, see B.M. Metzger, 'The Punctuation of Rom. 9:5', in B. Lindars and S.S. Smalley (eds.), *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: in honour of C.F.D. Moule* (Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 95-112. Metzger concludes that the passage does describe Jesus as 'God'. An even earlier example would be found in 2 Thes. 1:12, if the text were translated (as the Greek syntax suggests) 'our God and Lord Jesus Christ'; it is, however, possible, even if less natural, to construe it as referring to two persons, 'our God and the Lord Jesus Christ', and the other expression is felt to be so remarkable in a very early letter of Paul that commentators regularly opt for the latter rendering (or deny the Pauline authorship of 2 Thesalonians!).

<sup>5</sup>The relevant passages are usefully assembled and discussed by A.W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962), pp. 53-74, and by R.E. Brown, *Jesus: God and Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 6-28.

<sup>6</sup>R.N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (London: SCM, 1970), chapter II, considers a variety of 'distinctive imagery and motifs' (such as 'The Name', 'The Righteous One', 'The Shepherd and the Lamb', 'The Rejected Stone') which were explored in the earlier days of christological development, but tended to drop out of use, particularly in non-Jewish circles.

<sup>7</sup>The background of the term *Logos* as a christological title has often been discussed. For a good recent survey, see J.D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (London: SCM, 1980), pp. 215-230.

<sup>8</sup>M. Hengel, *The Son of God* (ET. London: SCM, 1976), p. 57.

<sup>9</sup>This movement in Johannine studies was described in an important paper by J.A.T. Robinson as 'The New Look on the Fourth Gospel', originally read at the Oxford conference on 'The Four Gospels in 1957', and reprinted in Robinson's *Twelve New Testament Studies* (London: SCM, 1962), pp. 94-106. One of the most influential works was C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge University Press, 1963). For a more recent survey, see S.S. Smalley, *John, Evangelist and Interpreter* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978). Robinson's last work, which will be noted below (see n. 18), takes this trend to new lengths.

<sup>10</sup>W. Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (1901), eventually published in English as *The Messianic Secret* (London: James Clarke, 1971). For subsequent discussion, see the articles collected in C.M. Tuckett (ed.), *The Messianic Secret* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), especially Tuckett's own introductory survey.

<sup>11</sup>J. Jeremias proposes that there is no echo of Ps. 2:7 in Mk. 1:11, and that Is. 42:1 supplies the only significant background. His view is discussed in detail by I.H. Marshall, *NTS* 15 (1968/9), pp. 326-336.

<sup>12</sup>For the messianic significance of the cleansing of the Temple, see e.g. B.F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979), pp. 197-202; E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985), pp. 61-76.

<sup>13</sup>See e.g. the reaction of Jesus to the titles 'Messiah' and 'King of the Jews' in Mk. 8:27-33; 14:61-62; 15:2. For the affirmative force of the formula 'You have said', but with an element of reluctance or circumlocution, see D.R. Catchpole, *NTS* 17 (1970/1), pp. 213-226.

<sup>14</sup>*The Origin of Christology*, p. 35 (concluding a discussion on pp. 31-35).

<sup>15</sup>O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (ET. London: SCM, 1963), especially pp. 315-331, argues that 'Functional Christology is the only kind which exists' (p. 326). W. Pannenberg warns on the contrary of the danger of approaching Christology from the perspective of soteriology: *Jesus — God and Man* (ET. London: SCM, 1968), pp. 38-49. In response to Pannenberg, A.E. McGrath, *Theologische Zeitschrift* 42 (1986), pp. 222-237, asserts the inseparability of Christology from soteriology.

<sup>16</sup>For the possibility that 'Son of God' was an accepted title for the Messiah, see e.g. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, pp. 93-99.

<sup>17</sup>For non-Christian use of 'Son of God', see e.g. Hengel, *The Son of God*, pp. 21-56; more briefly, Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, pp. 13-22.

<sup>18</sup>J.A.T. Robinson, *The Priority of John* (London: SCM, 1985).

<sup>19</sup>Robinson's equally ground-breaking study, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1976), has been largely ignored by NT scholarship. It may be suggested that this was because its conclusions would involve too drastic an upheaval in the accepted framework of thought. Robinson wryly comments on his own experience in this connection: 'One must always beware of the tendency of the critical establishment to close ranks against anything that disturbs its fundamental presuppositions' (*The Priority of John*, p. 10).

<sup>20</sup>It should be noted, however, that Robinson's high view of the reliability of John does not lead, as might be expected, to a high Christology, since he argues in his final chapter that not even this gospel may be properly interpreted as teaching the incarnation of a pre-existent being.

<sup>21</sup>J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology, Part One: The Proclamation of Jesus* (ET. London: SCM, 1971), pp. 59-61, argues that 'the son' and 'the father' here are not specific 'titles' but merely convey a general statement about human relationships. Even if this were so, it is hard to see what other sense such a 'parable' might be intended to convey in this context than to claim a special relationship between Jesus and his Father — the same point would be made, but by analogy rather than by a direct statement.

<sup>22</sup>The well-known argument by J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (ET. London: SCM, 1967), pp. 11-65, that Jesus' use of the term *Abba* as an address to God in prayer marks his awareness of a unique relationship, has been heavily contested (notably by G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (London: Collins, 1973), pp. 210-213) but remains intact. See the assessment by J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1975), pp. 21-26, and more recently (with specific reference to Vermes' arguments), *Christology in the Making*, pp. 26-29. J. Barr, 'Abba isn't "Daddy"', *JTS* 39 (1988), pp. 28-47, has shown convincingly that *Abba* is not a specifically childish form of address, as preachers often assert, but does not (and does not intend to) disprove Jeremias' basic argument for the originality of Jesus' use of the term.

<sup>23</sup>J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, pp. 112-115.

<sup>24</sup>For these and other such passages in the synoptic gospels, see my *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1971), pp. 150-159 ('The Assumption of the Role of Yahweh').

<sup>25</sup>For a fuller list of such features in the parables (some of which are of more questionable relevance), see P.B. Payne, 'The Authenticity of the Parables of Jesus', in R.T. France and D. Wenham (eds.), *Gospel Perspectives II* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), pp. 338-341.

<sup>26</sup>In view of the complexity of scholarly discussion on the title 'the Son of Man' in general and the interpretation and use of Dn. 7:13 in particular, it is bold to risk so firm a statement! A recent full discussion of the subject, however, moves strongly in the direction of identifying the 'one like a son of man' in Dn. 7:13 as a transcendent, heavenly being who replaces the traditional concept of a human Messiah: C.C. Caragounis, *The Son of Man: Vision and Interpretation* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), pp. 35-81.

<sup>27</sup>Seyoon Kim, 'The "Son of Man" as the Son of God' (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983). Cf. Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, pp. 25-27.

<sup>28</sup>J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: a Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1975).

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 11-40, 62-67. Cf. more briefly, Dunn's *Christology in the Making*, pp. 22-33.

<sup>30</sup>Moule's presentation of his case for a 'developmental' view of NT Christology is derived in fact mainly from outside the gospels, with special reference to the letters of Paul.

<sup>31</sup>B.C. Butler, *The Originality of St. Matthew* (Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 171.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. the remarkable statement of M. Hengel, *The Son of God*, p. 2, on the christological development in the 30s and 40s of the first century: 'One is tempted to say that more happened in this period of less than two decades than in the whole of the next seven centuries, up to the time when the doctrine of the early church was completed.'

<sup>33</sup>'The Worship of Jesus: a Neglected Factor in Christological Debate?', in H.H. Rowdon (ed.), *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie* (London: IVP, 1982), pp. 17-36. A parallel argument was developed independently by R.J. Bauckham, 'The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity', *NTS* 27 (1980/1), pp. 322-341. See also the recent work of L. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (London: SCM, 1988), which explains the 'binitarian mutation' within Jewish Christianity as arising out of the worship of Jesus as 'a second object of devotion alongside God'. A forthcoming book by Douglas de Lacey, *The Mediator: On the Christology of Saint Paul*, proposes a similar view: ch. 1 is entitled 'Faith Before Doctrine'.

<sup>34</sup>For some cautionary comments on the danger of restricting Christology to a study of titles, see L.E. Keck, *NTS* 32 (1986), pp. 368-370: 'To reconstruct the history of titles as if this were the study of Christology is like trying to understand the windows of Chartres Cathedral by studying the history of coloured glass.'

# The Jewish reclamation of Jesus and its implications for Jewish–Christian relations

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## Introduction

There is no doubt that one of the most significant aspects of modern 'Jewish Research', to use Charlesworth's phrase, is the participation and contribution of Jewish scholars in the whole enterprise. The purpose of this paper is to outline the history of this Jewish movement towards a new appreciation of Jesus, to draw out some of the main issues involved in the contemporary debate, and to suggest some of the major challenges to the church in terms of the broader issue of Jewish–Christian relations. My title was inspired by a 1984 book written by Donald Hagner, then a professor of NT at Fuller Theological Seminary, in which he was at pains to show that Jewish interest in Jesus was in fact being pursued at the expense of his true identity, *viz.* the Son of God and Saviour of the world.<sup>1</sup> We shall attempt to evaluate this claim as part of the present study.

Specifically, we are concerned here with those Jewish scholars who fully belong to the Jewish traditions. In other words, we shall not be examining the work of so-called 'Jewish Christians', whether in any given case theirs is a genuine faith in Jesus or a device to achieve security in a Christian society. In either event, they will be determined to defend the divinity of Jesus. Nor shall we be dealing with those who seem to be Jewish simply by accident of birth, but who in reality bring no real Jewish perspectives or learning with them. This is a study of those Jews who identify with their Jewish traditions.

The fascination that mankind has had with Jesus became part of what we would today call a disciplined scholarly research programme with the publication in 1778 of Hermann Reimarus' 'Fragments'.<sup>2</sup> What was known as the 'quest for the historical Jesus' has moved in three phases, according to most analysts. Craig Evans, in a recent article, has spoken of them as the 'Old Quest' (1778–1906), in which it was presupposed that the real historical figure was non-supernatural, the 'No Quest' (1906–1953), built upon the conviction that not only was the real historical figure lost in history (or better still, lost to history), but in fact it was the Christ of faith who alone was important in any case, and the 'New Quest' (1953– ), whose proponents have moved in almost Hegelian fashion to combine a renewed search for the Christ of faith, seeing the twin search as somehow indivisible.<sup>3</sup> He takes his 1906 date from the publication of Albert Schweitzer's critical survey of the first period, and his 1953 date from the appearance of Ernst Käsemann's programmatic essay on the quest up to that point.<sup>4</sup>

Our particular interest lies with the increased Jewish participation in Jesus research, especially in the context of the post-World War Two New Quest. They form part of what Tom Wright refers to as yet another new phase of the quest for the historical Jesus, one that is admittedly diffuse, but based on a general consensus that Jesus can only be recovered and reclaimed, both as historical person and God-with-us, as we recover and reclaim his own historical context, which is to say first-century Jewish society, in its cultural, political and religious reality. We must penetrate beyond the naivety and superficiality (not to forget limited historical sources) of the Old Quest, the dogmatic negativity of the No Quest, and the anachronistic existentialism of the New Quest.<sup>5</sup>

Just as the new 'realistic quest' (if one may be allowed to coin a phrase) is not monolithic with respect to the images of Jesus produced by those scholars who are involved in it, neither is there a common portrayal of Jesus by Jewish scholars. From Christian participants have come images of Jesus including aggressive political revolutionary, social and political anarchist, committed advocate for the poor, eschatological prophet, and magician.<sup>6</sup> Examples of Jewish images of Jesus include political revolutionary, Essene Torah-purist of the Hillelite stream, and Galilean charismatic leader.<sup>7</sup> Christian scholars, on the whole, are convinced that the contribution of Jewish expertise *vis-à-vis* the Second Temple period is proving to be invaluable. And so we move to begin our tracing of the path which has led to this amazing Jewish preparedness to consider the Jewishness of Jesus once again, after the awful experience of Jews down the generations at the hands of Jesus' representatives on earth.

In a sense, we can date the real impetus and momentum in contemporary Jewish research on Jesus to the turn of the century, when the German non-Jewish scholar, Wellhausen, wrote a statement which changed the face of NT scholarship, not simply for specialists, but also for Christian and Jewish religious leaders. In his introduction to the synoptics he stated:

Jesus war kein Christ sondern Jude.<sup>8</sup>

These words have driven and haunted Jesus research ever since. Never again could the Jewishness of Jesus be ignored or undervalued. Of course, there have been strong negative reactions to Wellhausen's claim, notably in Nazi-influenced scholarship, but this in itself shows how deeply the debate was engaging the churches. It was, and is, no mere historical truism, but has implications for the assessment of the person and work of Christ. Eighty years after Wellhausen, another non-Jewish scholar, James Charlesworth, could write authoritatively that Jesus' Jewishness was not simply a matter of interesting background to his life, but rather part of the indispensable foreground for coming to terms with him.<sup>9</sup> A significant contribution to the work done in those 80 years has been offered by Jewish scholars.

There have been some particular landmarks along the way. In 1922, Joseph Klausner wrote the ground-breaking book on Jesus by a Jewish scholar. His Hebrew original was translated into English in 1925 by Herbert Danby, and it took the Jewish world by storm. At one summary point he wrote:

Jesus is a great teacher of morality and an artist in parable. He is the moralist for whom, in the religious light, morality counts as everything: in his ethical code there is a sublimity, a distinctiveness and an originality in form unparalleled in any other Hebrew ethical code.<sup>10</sup>

Then, in 1930, Martin Buber wrote:

From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother . . . I am more than certain that a great place belongs to him in Israel's history of faith and that this place cannot be described by any of the usual categories.<sup>11</sup>

By 1973, Geza Vermes was able to say that

no objective and enlightened student of the Gospels can help but be struck by the incomparable superiority of Jesus. . . . Second to none in profundity of insight and grandeur of character.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, one could mention Pinchas Lapide, who declared in 1981 that at the end of the 1970s

Jesus is no longer the central figure in the discussion between church and synagogue. Thanks to the current surge of interest in Jesus within the State of Israel, the Nazarene, long shrouded in silence, is beginning to be acknowledged among his own people and in his own land.<sup>13</sup>

These kinds of statements would have been unthinkable for Jewish people before the modern period, and even now, most Jewish people advise a more cautious appreciation of Jesus, lest the Jewish community develop the wrong attitude to Christianity, viz. that it too is acceptable for Jewish people. However, Jesus is very definitely back on the agenda in Jewish-Christian relations, and this is of paramount significance for the church.

Indeed, it is worth mentioning here that the Jewishness of Jesus is beginning to feature more prominently in contemporary documents published by church authorities, such as Diocesan statements, Synodal statements, World Council of Churches statements, and the like. For example, one might cite the progress in Roman Catholic documents from the 1965 publication of Vatican Two's influential *Nostra Aetate*, through the 1975 *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate*, to the 1985 *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*. Section Three of the *Notes* of 1985 is devoted to 'Jewish Roots of Christianity', and its opening words are, in their own way, as significant and unexpected as were Wellhausen's some 80 years earlier:

Jesus was, and always remained, a Jew.

What role, then, have Jewish scholars played in the eight decades between those two programmatic Gentile Christian statements? And what are the implications for Jewish-Christian relations?

## Pre-modern Jewish views of Jesus

There is hardly any actual reference to Jesus in the literature of Talmudic times, which is to say, the first six centuries of the Common Era. Since there is no doubt whatsoever of the significance of Jesus for the history of the Jewish people, seeing that in the fourth century the processes of self-definition by both church and synagogue, following in particular the conversion of Constantine and the consequent Christianization of the Empire, led to the oppression of the Jewish people, by followers of Jesus, in hitherto unknown systematic ways, the lack of reference to Jesus and the birth and growth of the church must be the result of a conscious decision to avoid, and indeed prevent, discussions about Jesus in the Jewish community. What mention there is of Jesus, or even of those Jewish people who became his followers, is further differentiated by being usually ascribed to the period of the Amoraim (c.200-500) rather than the Tannaim (first and second centuries). In other words, the gospels are the only first-century documents which give us accounts of the early Jewish reaction to Jesus. When he is spoken of in the Rabbinic literature, he is regularly referred to as 'that man', or some form of symbolic name such as 'ben Pandera'. Occasionally, we find him called 'Yeshu', a term which soon became known as an acronym for the Hebrew curse, 'Yimach Shemo Uzzikhrono' (May his name and memory be blotted out).<sup>14</sup>

Two important points need to be made about the presentation of Jesus in these texts. (a) *There is no denial that Jesus was an historical person, though there is some confusion about his exact dates.* (b) *Jesus is denigrated as a blasphemer and heretic who tried to exploit the divine Name in order to aggrandize power to himself and lead the Jewish people away from their true path of faithfulness to God.*

By the ninth century, a whole series of calumnies of Jesus were being crystallized into various recensions of a popular piece which came to be known as *Toldot Yeshu*. This purports to be an account of the life of Jesus, but it is clearly apologetic and polemic in tone and intention. Jewish scholars today consistently maintain that it has no historical value whatsoever for the life of Jesus, though of course it does have immense importance for study of the attitudes of Jewish communities to Jesus and the church, particularly Jewish believers. *Toldot Yeshu* became the prime, if not the sole, source of

the Jewish community's knowledge of Jesus from the early Middle Ages to the early twentieth century in Eastern Europe. The narrative is made up of stories of Jesus' illegitimacy, blasphemy, immorality and hubris, presenting him as a thoroughly reprobate Jewish man, one of whom the Jewish community should be ashamed, and at whose actions and attitudes it should be outraged.<sup>15</sup> Note should be made of the fact, however, that Jesus' existence is still taken for granted.

The Middle Ages saw another source of information about Jesus develop as the church began to see religious capital in imposing formal controversies on the Jewish communities of Europe. These so-called Disputations were structured like an open dialogue between Christian theologians (often converts from Judaism) and Jewish religious leaders, but in reality the Jewish participants were placed in a situation in which it was impossible for them to win. What ensued was, of course, polemic and counter-polemic. The Jewish spokesmen knew that it might be better for their community were they to 'lose' the debate, and so there was also a great deal of political retreat on behalf of the Jewish religious leadership. As Hagner summarized:

We encounter here, by way both of reaction and self-protection, at worst a wholly negative, destructive attitude to Jesus, and at best a cold neutrality.<sup>16</sup>

One can sum up the attitude to Jesus which resulted from the interaction between Christians and Jews in the pre-modern period quite easily: because of the anti-Semitism of the church, expressed in contemptuous attitudes, social marginalization, theological demonization, and outright persecution and murder, Jewish people came to fear and hate Jesus. Of course, not only was there the push away from Jesus due to the attitudes and behaviour of the church, but there was also the constant pulling back by the rabbis, who developed their own theological system for interpreting history and redemption for the Jewish people. As a result of both discourse contexts, the Jewish people did not consider Jesus a worthy subject of discussion.

## Enlightenment and emancipation

These are without doubt the two key events and issues in the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the gradual opening of the West to Jewish involvement, participation and even influence. The European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century had its impact on the Jewish communities of Europe and the West. There we also find increased questioning of authority and tradition, increasing faith in the supremacy of reason, open enquiry and experiment, a determination to foster tolerance and the priority of morality over theology, and a commitment to the separation of church and state. The proponents of Jewish Enlightenment were convinced that Jews were persecuted because they persevered in being different from the non-Jewish world in terms of culture, language, educational policy, ritual observance, etc.

When we speak of the Emancipation of the Jews, the reference is to the gradual abolition of those disqualifications and inequities which had been meted out specifically to Jewish people. Citizenship was granted; admission to politics, higher education and the arts, etc., was given. Nothing was ever to be the same again in any sphere of Jewish intellectual, aesthetic or religious life. In terms of our present concern, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, in 1925, following the translation into English of Joseph Klausner's *Life of Jesus*, said about it at a public meeting in New York:

It marks the first chapter in a new literature. Such a book could never have been written years ago. . . . Thank God the time has come when men are allowed to be frank, sincere and truthful in their beliefs.<sup>17</sup>

The context for the writing of this first chapter was a momentum of political freedom in which Jewish people could develop confidence in speaking publicly at all about Jesus. This relative freedom within the Christian society of Europe led also to an increased willingness to consider Jesus within the Jewish community itself. Above all, it was vital that there be a general cultural context in which the traditional Christian views of Jesus could be challenged.

Until the late eighteenth century, Jews and Christians only really encountered each other as adversaries, the whole process being under the domination and control of the theological dogmas which informed and established each community's self-definition vis-à-vis the other. The Enlightenment, and perhaps most

especially, as Novak points out, the rise of nineteenth-century historicism, made it possible for the new, liberally minded Jews and Christians to side-step dogma, whether about Christ or Torah, and begin to examine one another's faith/ethics/community life matrix more openly, more objectively, and more generously.<sup>18</sup>

Liberal Christians began to look at Jesus in a new, non-christological light. Liberal Jews, already working out a life no longer dominated by the Torah as defined by the Orthodox Rabbis, began to question whether such a 'de-dogmatized Jesus', to use a phrase of Novak's, could be a suitable person for Jewish people to investigate. Of course, one must not forget that anti-Semitism was alive and well throughout this entire period. There was no hidden agenda among the liberal Christian scholars which sought to enable a rapprochement with the Jewish people. Judaism was still denigrated as legalistic, in contrast with Jesus' gracious ethics of love. Jewish spokesmen were well aware of the continuing negative attitude towards them, but they began to gauge the spirit of the times as at least allowing them at last to counter the claims of Christianity publicly, as well as within their own walls, as had always been the case. The most celebrated such exchange of opinions remains the response of Leo Baeck in his 1905 book, *Das Wesen des Judenthums*, to Adolph Harnack's 1900 book, *Das Wesen des Christenthums!*

Jewish thinkers came increasingly under the influence of Kant's rationalism, specifically his rationalizing of religion, whereby it was held that if ideals were to be considered valid, they had, of necessity, to be of universal significance. Jesus was therefore increasingly presented as a paradigm of the universal ethical ideals of civilized, rational humanity, these being simultaneously presented as the heart of Judaism. These liberal scholars were determined to be emancipated from the prisons of their respective Orthodoxies, and both groups, as part of their own agenda, wanted to emancipate Jesus from the dogma of the church's Christology. Buber, in his 1930 book, *Two Types of Faith*, showed a certain desire to see this development progress apace. As Novak perceptively states:

Buber wants to release Jesus from the confines of both Christian and Jewish dogma. The former makes too much of him, and the latter too little.<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, Charlesworth stresses this very point in his work on modern Jesus research. In his opinion, it only became possible to search realistically for the historical Jesus once he had been freed from the traditional christological dogma of the church which prevented even an attitude of open enquiry into these matters, let alone the development of alternative reconstructions of Jesus. He argues in *Jesus Within Judaism* that, having come through the turmoil of the years of so-called critical scholarship of the Bible, we are now in the position of proclaiming, Jew and Christian together, that all theological truth about Jesus *must* be based squarely upon what he calls 'free historical inquiry'.<sup>20</sup> In his other major work in this area, he comments that the new situation has helped both Jewish and Christian communities in coming to a more mature appreciation of the Jewishness of Jesus. Jewish people are learning that they need to escape the caricature of Jesus as a confused, deluded, probably illegitimate person, and Christians are realizing the error of seeing Jesus as either not really Jewish at all, or else as so unique that he has nothing in common with other Jews, then or now.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to emphasize that this movement towards a new appreciation of Jesus in the Jewish community has only involved those Jewish people who are true children of the Enlightenment and the Emancipation. The traditional, Orthodox communities, as a rule, resisted, and continued to resist, this change. To this day, they generally continue to operate on the level of avoiding all conversation about 'that man' of the Talmud. Largely, this reflects a reaction against what they see as the widespread assimilation of the Jewish people in the modern period, and is thus much more of a negative response to the Enlightenment, with its drive for the supremacy of free enquiry, reason, and the search for universal ideals, than it is specifically a reaction against the purported Jewishness of Jesus. Relatively few Orthodox Jews are involved in the Jewish reclamation of Jesus, then, and those who are do not really represent mainstream Orthodoxy.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, it must also be emphasized that these Reform Jews were essentially setting out to challenge their own community's traditional self-understanding, and its role in the modern world. So their investigation of Jesus must be seen as part of this more particular quest for self-identity. Post-Enlightenment Jewish

thinkers were not concerned with helping Christians in their faith. They wanted a de-dogmatized Judaism, a faith for a faith community which was de-ritualized and de-supernaturalized, and a lifestyle and relationship model which was liberated from the domination of *halakhah*. Jesus was therefore viewed primarily (once he had been de-dogmatized) as a most important representative of the universal ethic of the de-dogmatized Judaism. In the 1901 book written by the Reform Rabbi, Joseph Krauskopf, the following words are to be found, words which capture exactly the motivating agenda of the Jewish reclamation of Jesus:

when the Jew shall have completely cast away his obstructive exclusiveness and ceremonialism, and the Christian his Christology, Jew and Gentile will be one.<sup>23</sup>

Above all, one needs to point out that it has never been part of the Jewish agenda to have their faith in any way 'fulfilled' by their participation in the quest for the historical Jesus. As Samuel Sandmel, one of the most influential Jewish students of NT studies, has put it:

I neither feel nor understand that my Judaism is in any way incomplete . . . I do not discern any religious incompleteness which the figure of Jesus would fill in, just as I see no incompleteness which a Mohammed or a Confucius would fill in.<sup>24</sup>

Much of the early Jewish optimism and enthusiasm faded during the pogroms in Russia in the 1880s, and then also during the Hitler years in Europe, but nonetheless the overall momentum has never been lost. Indeed, many Jewish people see an especial need, since the Holocaust, to find the real Jesus of history, and thus expose the awful sham and shame of the church's Christ. Be that as it may, Christian biblical scholarship has been enormously enriched by the participation of Jewish scholars of the Second Commonwealth, and of the various Judaisms of that period, and to this subject we now turn our attention.

## The major issues

There are five significant issues which will be dealt with here. Rather than present a potted summary of the contributions of selected Jewish scholars, I have decided to look at the main issues involved, and the implications for Jewish-Christian dialogue that arise from them. References to the work of specific scholars will be found throughout.

### (a) Jewish confidence that the real Jesus can be recovered

For most Jewish people, of course, it is experienced as an actual discovery, rather than a recovery, but nonetheless the conviction is clearly expressed that this real Jesus is not only Jewish, but also a Jewish man of his own time and place. From the beginning, there was a definite tendency to see Jesus as in need of rescue from the Christian theological constructions of him. Already in 1888, an American Reform Rabbi, Isaac Mayer Wise, was dismissing Christian biographies of Jesus in no uncertain terms:

All so-called lives of Christ or biographies of Jesus are works of fiction, erected by imagination on the shifting foundation of meagre and unreliable records.<sup>25</sup>

David Flusser, in his 1969 book, *Jesus*, and Geza Vermes, in his 1973 book, *Jesus the Jew*, try to minimize the importance of the fact that they are Jewish. Their intention is to stress that the Jewish Jesus is in fact the only Jesus there is, the only Jesus that historical research can recover for us. For them, the faith or heritage of the historian is actually irrelevant. Vermes went so far as to give to his book the sub-title, 'A Historian's Reading of the Gospels'. He wrote in the opening pages of that work that his intention was

to discover the authentic, original, historical meaning of the words and events reported in the Gospels.<sup>26</sup>

Clemens Thoma, a non-Jewish Roman Catholic scholar who specializes in the issues of Jewish-Christian relations, accepts this view that Christian piety has blurred the historical Jesus from our sight, welcoming Jewish clarification of the situation. It is to the Jewish people that we must turn for proper knowledge of the Israel of Jesus' day, and therefore of Jesus himself:

Christians have torn Jesus from the soil of Israel. They have de-Judaized, uprooted, alienated, Hellenized, and Europeanized him. The consequences of these manipulations and white-washings are hopeless confusion about the person of Jesus, the nature and tasks of Christianity, and the meaning of Judaism in religious history.<sup>27</sup>

The particular advantages accorded to Jewish scholarship are, on the one hand, non-contact with the Christian traditions of christological faith, and on the other hand, knowledge of and familiarity with the prime sources of Jewish history and religious thought from the early centuries of the Common Era. As we shall see, the first matter is rather complex, since Jewish scholars will nonetheless be coming from a position of contact with the Jewish traditions of a priori reductionism *vis-à-vis* Jesus. This is to say that any possibility that there might be any form of quantum leap in knowledge of God with the life and work of Jesus is denied. The traditions are different, but no less significant. This at least is an issue for us to consider together today.

As to the second point, we are now far more aware of the methodological problems involved in trying to use critically the Jewish sources which are regarded as throwing light on Jesus the Jew. The dating and establishing of provenance for the various sayings and traditions in the literature (whether Rabbinic, from Josephus or from the pseudepigraphical materials) is notoriously complicated. Indeed, the severe rejection by the Orthodox communities of any attempts to apply modern critical methods to the Rabbinic sources has made progress in this discipline slow and difficult for Jewish scholars. Those, like Jacob Neusner, who have ploughed this lonely furrow have become *bêtes noires* in traditional Jewish circles. But the truth remains that one simply cannot, as many Jewish writers presume, use sources from the third century onwards to establish the beliefs and practices of the first century. In his latest book on the subject, Neusner criticizes the traditional Jewish position according to which

In the case of the first century, we have been asked to see one Judaism, the orthodox one, and to see that Judaism in the first century as an exact representation of what would emerge in the Talmud of Babylonia seven hundred years later.<sup>28</sup>

In other words, the Talmuds and the Midrashim, *etc.*, are every bit as much confessional documents as are the gospels. Daniel Harrington puts it this way:

There is greater appreciation of the creativity and coherent vision of the rabbis as they worked out their vision of Jewish life in the second and third centuries, and more than a little doubt whether it is proper to look upon them as the lineal continuation of the Pharisaic movement.<sup>29</sup>

Just as gospels specialists insist on the need to sift through the material in order to retrieve the authentic Jesus from the various presentations of him, so the specialists in later Jewish literature are learning the tools for sifting through that material. We are still at the early stages of this research, and must beware the positivist presupposition of those who believe that the real Jesus can be recovered from the Rabbinic literature rather than, or without reference to, the gospels. Here is yet another major issue for us to debate.

*(b) Jewish confidence in the historical value of the gospels*

We are now dealing with Jewish scholars who regard the gospels as valuable (some would say invaluable) first-century works which, generally speaking, reflect faithfully the actual beliefs, customs and practices of the different Jewish communities of Palestine at that period, and which probably reflect much of the actual historical context of Jesus' life (notably not the accounts of the trial of Jesus). It is striking how Jewish scholars often take so-called liberal Christians to task for not crediting enough historical credibility to the gospels, at least to the synoptics. For example, in 1977 Trude Weiss-Rosmarin was able to state that as a rule, Jewish students of Jesus gave more credence to the gospels than their Christian counterparts.

Jewish students of nascent and early Christianity tend to be more 'Gospel true' than modern and contemporary Christian New Testament scholars, who are in agreement that the 'Historical Jesus' is beyond recovery. . . .<sup>30</sup>

Vermes took the same line in his 1973 book, in which he quoted Bultmann's famous words that 'we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus'. In response to this, Vermes said:

My guarded optimism concerning a possible recovery of the genuine features of Jesus is in sharp contrast with Rudolf Bultmann's historical agnosticism.<sup>31</sup>

He spoke with what might be regarded as consummate common sense in his 1981 Riddell Lectures, in which he said:

A theological interest is no more incompatible with a concern for history than is a political or philosophical conviction.<sup>32</sup>

His point, echoed by Jewish scholars generally, is that so long as one is aware of one's theological interest, and allows for it, then one can do responsible history as well as responsible theology. David Flusser, of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, opened his book, *Jesus*, with the words:

The main purpose of this book is to show that it is possible to write the story of Jesus' life.<sup>33</sup>

E.P. Sanders acknowledges the contribution of Jewish NT scholarship, as well as that of various Christian scholars (not uninfluenced themselves by Jewish work on Jesus), when he says in his 1985 book:

The dominant view today seems to be that we can know pretty well what Jesus was out to accomplish, that we can know a lot about what he said, and that those two things make sense within the world of first-century Judaism.<sup>34</sup>

Sandmel is quite atypical of Jewish scholars in this regard, perhaps mainly because he is so influenced by liberal Protestant gospel research. In the years when so much solid work was being done by others, he wrote:

We can know what the Gospels say, but we cannot know Jesus. If our objective is an accurate history of Jesus, then we are more apt to find that the Gospels obscure than reveal him.<sup>35</sup>

While no Jewish scholar would deny that a great deal of work has to be done to recover Jesus from the gospel accounts, Sandmel is more the exception than the rule when it comes to his negative assessment of the possibility of regarding the gospels as reflecting historically acceptable documents of Jewish life at the time of the first half of the first century.

Christians have much to be grateful for in this overall Jewish conviction that the synoptic gospels at least deserve a high 'historicity quotient'. The fourth gospel is, as always, more problematic, but even here there has been a reclamation of its essentially Jewish provenance and pedigree. The way is opening up with some acceleration for all non-Jewish students to reap the rewards of this increased attention to Jewish texts, as well as to the traditional worlds of the Greek poets and the Roman legislators, *etc.*

*(c) Jewish confidence that Jesus can be, and should be, rooted and grounded in the Judaism of his day*

Leo Baeck, the great German statesman of Reform Judaism, opened this century with what became an extremely influential remark:

Most portrayers of the life of Jesus neglect to point out that Jesus is in every characteristic a genuinely Jewish character, that a man like him could have grown only in the soil of Judaism, only there and nowhere else.<sup>36</sup>

In 1913, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise wrote with considerable rhetorical power that Jesus should never have been removed from his only rightful context:

Jesus should not so much be appreciated by us as assigned to the place in Jewish life and Jewish history which is rightfully his own.<sup>37</sup>

Sadly, there has been no shortage of Christian reductionism which has tried (largely successfully, it must be conceded) to deny the significance, and even the very fact, of Jesus' life- and faith-context within first-century Judaism. Jewish scholars are certainly forcing this issue back onto the agenda, insisting that Jesus cannot be alienated from the Hebrew Bible or the Judaism of his day. If one attempts to de-Judaize Jesus by making him an Everyman in his relationship to the Divine Being whom all acknowledge as God, rather than by recognizing the indispensable context of his being a Jewish worshipper of Israel's God, then one commits theological suicide, losing not only the *Jesus of history* but also the theologically unique *Christ of faith*. A non-Jewish Messiah is a contradiction in terms!

Having said this, one is of course aware of the dangers involved in deciding a priori that Jesus could in no way have also transcended the norms of his day. Hagner draws attention to what he calls the hidden agenda of Jewish scholarship at this point:

In demonstrating the Jewishness of Jesus, Jewish scholars thus have an unavoidable interest in vindicating the Judaism of his day. While the methods may vary, the interest is a common one. For these scholars it is impossible that Jesus the Jew could truly

have spoken against the Judaism in the name of which he is being reclaimed in their writings.<sup>38</sup>

Hagner has been accused of cynicism by some, and of paranoia by others, but the general point he makes is valid. We must beware of artificially restricting Jesus to being merely one among many. But on the other hand, we have the equally artificial construct of the so-called criterion of dissimilarity, restricting authenticity to those sayings of Jesus which are judged to be dissimilar to Judaism (and Christianity). Käsemann, for instance, concluded that:

only in a few instances are we standing on more or less firm ground; that is, where the tradition, for whatever reason, can be neither inferred from Judaism nor attributed to earliest Christianity.<sup>39</sup>

Both of these groups of scholars are claiming to be able to find the real Jesus by means of exploiting our increasing knowledge about the Judaism(s) of his day – Jewish scholarship tending to collapse him into that Judaism, and critical Christian scholarship tending to disassociate the real Jesus from that Judaism. A major concern which they have in common is the promotion of research into the Judaism(s) of Jesus' time and place. The major theological concern which follows this research is the issue of how to relate Jesus to his Jewish context(s). Jewish scholars are quite right, however, to highlight the unacceptability of the presupposition of so many Christians that Jesus' religious self-definition is to be determined primarily, if not solely, by what are perceived to be the differences between him and Judaism.

Another quite basic problem in this area of research is the overall methodological problem of determining the nature of Palestinian Judaism in Jesus' day. We are now more aware than at any time since the beginnings of the quest for the historical Jesus of the complexity and creativity of Jewish religious life in Jesus' day. On the one hand, we have more information, and on the other hand, we have matured in our understanding of the issues and of the historical-critical tools used in our research. As Neusner is fond of saying, we are amassing enough knowledge to realize how little we know. Perhaps more caution is needed, then, in trying to assess the confidence with which some Jewish scholars tell us the kind of Jew Jesus was.

(d) *Jewish reduction of Jesus to being simply a great Jewish figure of his time*  
Zwi Werblowski, one of the leading proponents of Jewish-Christian dialogue in Israel, and a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, said in 1978 that:

the activity of Jesus himself and of his disciples is regarded today by most Jewish researchers as being a part, not of the history of Christianity, but of that of Judaism.<sup>40</sup>

This is a very significant statement. Equally important is the confident assertion of Pinchas Lapide:

... since Jesus of Nazareth during his entire life on earth was a pious Jew, and not a Christian – much less a Paulinist, we Jews ought to be allowed to determine for ourselves what this rabbi of Galilee means for us.<sup>41</sup>

The momentum lying behind confidence such as this can certainly be traced back to the pioneering work of Klausner, who was bold enough already in the early 1920s to state that Jesus was 'wholly explainable' by the Judaism of his day.<sup>42</sup> This has gained such currency within the Jewish communities of the West that it is taught almost as a commonplace in school textbooks. Here are two typical examples from North American materials:

Jesus was a Jew and taught the best and noblest that was in the Jewish tradition.

Throughout, we observe that, though somewhat of a mystic, Jesus was nonetheless a loyal Jew.<sup>43</sup>

As far as the Jewish community at large is concerned, the most influential Jewish scholar after Klausner has been Martin Buber. He presented Jesus, as we have seen, as his 'brother', and as a uniquely important Jewish figure, but Buber was no anonymous Christian. *Vis-à-vis* traditional Judaism he elevated Jesus to the level of great brother, but *vis-à-vis* traditional Christianity he reduced Jesus to the level of the Jewish people's great brother. It is true that Buber saw messianic import in the teaching and lifestyle of Jesus, but he did not regard Jesus as Israel's Messiah. He was a paradigm of Buber's I-Thou relationship with God, but fell far short of being the supernatural Son of God of Christian theology.

The issue, then, is whether or not there is in fact a Jewish hidden agenda, setting out to strip Jesus of what is seen by Christians as his full and universal significance. Craig Evans is of the opinion that there might well be.

Jesus is so like his Jewish contemporaries, there is hardly any difference worth mentioning. Could it be that current ecumenical concerns are colouring our assessment of the historical Jesus? Time will tell.<sup>44</sup>

One certainly finds a considerable number of comments which seem to be representing such a Jewish apologetic position. Remarks like the following:

There is a profound difference between a prophet and a teacher. A prophet is an innovative genius who discovers or expresses a spiritual truth above and beyond any that existed previously. A teacher transmits such truth to others. It has already been agreed that Jesus was a great teacher. In our judgement he was not a prophet. Insofar as his teachings were authentically Jewish, they were enunciated eight centuries earlier by Hosea, six hundred years before by Isaiah.

His teaching, where good, was not original, and where original, was not Jewish or good.<sup>45</sup>

Most clearly, the theological impasse occurs at the consideration of the resurrection of Jesus. For Jewish scholars (with one notable exception, as we shall see), this is simply not acceptable as part of the authentic life of Jesus the Jew. In Klausner's programmatic work, he comes to the end of his chapter on the death of Jesus with the famous words:

Here ends the life of Jesus, and here begins the history of Christianity.<sup>46</sup>

David Flusser closed his book on Jesus with the very words:

And Jesus died.<sup>47</sup>

Shalom Ben-Chorin states unequivocally that in his opinion the Jewish image of Jesus quite naturally comes to a close with the death of Jesus on a cross.

The Jewish Jesus-image thus recognizes neither Christmas with the crib and the star of Bethlehem nor Easter with the open grave and the resurrection.<sup>48</sup>

The exception to this Jewish consensus is Pinchas Lapide, already referred to several times in this paper. He asserts that it is quite possible for an Orthodox Jew to accept in principle that God raised Jesus from the dead, since Judaism affirms God as the One who can, in fact, bring the dead back to life. However, this would not of itself constitute proof of Jesus' Messiahship, let alone his divinity, since the Bible itself relates other accounts of mortal men being brought back to life by the power of God. But Lapide's view has not won general acclaim within the Jewish community.<sup>49</sup>

So we are left with the issue as to whether the Jewish reclamation of Jesus can only be shared by Christians at the expense of a Jesus who is allowed to transcend the context and the normal boundaries and constraints of history.

(e) *Are history and theology being hijacked to create a premature rapprochement between Jews and Christians?*

Not only is this the conviction of Christians like Hagner, arguing from a distinctively evangelical basis, but it is also the opinion of the Jewish scholar of the origins of Rabbinic Judaism, Jacob Neusner, whom we have had occasion to quote earlier. Throughout his career, he has maintained that Judaism and Christianity always were, and still are, different religions. In his latest book he puts it like this:

The two faiths stand for different people talking about different things to different people.<sup>50</sup>

He is quite clear in his mind that there is a misguided attempt afoot to blur the differences between Judaism and Christianity, an attempt which implicates both faith communities. The reason for this indisciplined interpretation he sees as a desire to reconcile the two faith communities of today. The belief is that if Jews and Christians could only come to accept each other as different incarnations of the one faith, inviting the other to continue in its own distinct path, then there would at last be peace between them. Therefore

our century has witnessed a fundamental theological error which has, as a matter of fact, also yielded an erroneous

hermeneutics. . . . The theological error was to represent Christianity as a natural, this-worldly reform, a continuation of Judaism in the terms of Judaism.

It is the simple fact that Christianity is absolute and Judaism is unique. . . . The blurring of the boundaries between the one and the other, . . . the representation of Christianity as a kind of Judaism, the appeal to Judaism for validation and judgement of Christianity — these familiar traits of contemporary biblical and theological studies obscure that simple fact.<sup>51</sup>

Neusner is especially contemptuous of the idea that Christianity is best seen as the daughter religion of Judaism:

Christianity came into being as a surprising, unexpected and entirely autonomous religious system and structure, not as a child, whether legitimate or otherwise, of Judaism.<sup>52</sup>

He is, therefore, a severe critic of Jewish scholars like Vermes and Hyam Maccoby, who present Jesus in complete continuity with his Jewish context.

The characterization of Jesus as a Galilean wonder-worker like Honi the Circle Drawer, for example, is a total fabrication, a deliberate misreading of the Gospels, and a distortion of the very character of the rabbinic evidence adduced on behalf of that proposition.<sup>53</sup>

This is a major theological and moral issue, and one which we must take seriously. What is the relationship between Christianity and Judaism? Christian tradition cannot accept that the two are completely autonomous, just as the church maintains that the two Testaments belong together. On the other hand, the traditional Christian theology of replacement, or supersessionism, is no longer acceptable. There can be no doubt that Jesus was, in one sense, a product of his time and place, so that we can say with some confidence that had he been born in a totally different context, then his would have been a different life. Therefore, the search for a more thorough understanding of, and appreciation for, the Jewishness of Jesus, a search in which Jewish scholarship is proving to be of increasing importance, should be encouraged.

## Implications

By way of summary and conclusion, then, let us review the main issues and their implications for the urgent matter of Jewish-Christian relations today and tomorrow.

### (a) Evaluating Jesus as an historical figure from the distant past

This is, of course, a major methodological issue affecting all research into historical personalities. Scholarship is constantly trying to chart the correct course between not one but two sets of Scylla and Charybdis. On the one hand, there are the extremes of continuity and discontinuity. If one sails too close to the former, then the person's unique genius will be lost, allowing no transcending of culture, whereas if one veers too much towards the latter, then the actual person can be lost, leaving one with a disembodied idea, or academic construct, a fate to which Jesus has been subjected more than once. On the other hand, one risks the dangers of particularity and universality. To focus exclusively on the former will make it very difficult for those who belong to other national and social groups, *etc.*, to relate to the person (a problem being felt keenly at the present time, for instance, by Arab Christians coming into contact with the presentations of Christian Zionist interpreters of the Jewishness of Jesus). But of course, to insist on the correctness of the universal image of Jesus is to lose his concretely real life and personality.

Speaking generally, one can state that the church has tended to (over)stress Jesus' discontinuity with his Jewish matrix, and his universal humanity, at the expense of the other dimensions. And yet, if Jesus has nothing to say directly to Jewish people, then how can he have anything to say directly to anyone else? It can easily degenerate into the creation of various Jesuses, each in a different culture's or scholar's image, a state of affairs which has in fact repeatedly occurred. Jewish research into the historical Jesus is helping us to redress the balance with proper regard for Jesus' continuity with, and particular identity with, his own and his community's Jewishness. In good Hegelian fashion, we hope that from this old thesis of alienation and the new antithesis of radical contextualization will come the synthesis of what I have called a 'realistic quest' for the historical, Jewish Jesus.

It is to be hoped that evangelical Christian scholars will be at the heart of this new synthesis. How many of us, therefore, and how many of our students, are involved in disciplined study of the Jewish sources, or in substantial dialogue with Jewish scholars, or are even *au fait* with the Jewish works being published today on Jesus research? One implication of all this is that we *must* be involved in the debate with Jewish scholars.

### (b) Evaluating the historicity of the gospels

The church has caused to be grateful to Jewish scholarship for introducing a new confidence in the historical reliability of the overall presentation of Palestinian life given in the (synoptic) gospels. What one might call credal conflict is obvious when it comes to the accounts of the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus, and considerable mistrust is evident as regards the trial narratives, these three issues being predictably the most sensitive. Needless to say, there is also a different interpretation given to the issue of Jesus' attitude towards the Torah, both oral and written, than that commonly found among Christian exegetes, but this tends to be disagreement of a useful nature. The point to be stressed at this juncture is that the historicity of the bulk of the gospel material is being defended on a non-Christian basis by Jewish people.

In particular, it is through the use of Jewish religious and historical sources, and through Jewish familiarity, indeed intimacy, with those sources, that Jewish scholars are claiming that Christians are being introduced to the life and times of Jesus. The methodological problems associated with this approach can be briefly summarized: the sources come from communities writing generations after the time of Jesus' life, which communities only reflect the *Tendenz* of what became the dominant pre-70 CE religious outlook, and which communities are operating out of their own agenda, and therefore writing for their own purposes, purposes which by definition sometimes run counter to those of the Jesus Movement, if one may use that term in this context. This methodological debate must therefore be enjoined between Jews and Christians, providing what is now a major issue in scholarship.

### (c) Recovering the real Jesus

This point obviously belongs closely with the one above, and the same methodological problems will be involved. It has been refreshing nonetheless to find Jewish scholars expressing confidence that Jesus of Nazareth can be sufficiently recovered from the gospel accounts that it is possible for us to encounter him today. New life has come into the debate, and we are indebted to the Jewish contribution. Is this to be desired unreservedly, or do we, like Hagner and others, detect hidden pitfalls?

Certainly one cannot separate the knower from the known, or in this case, the seeker from what is sought. Jewish people are looking for a different Jesus, a Jesus who will vindicate the Judaism of first-century Palestine. The possibility of Jesus being a divine figure as well as a human personality is denied a priori by Jewish scholarship, whereas traditional Christianity refuses to depart from this fundamental tenet of faith.

Here lies an extremely important issue for us: can one suspend judgment on the divinity of Jesus, or at the very least relegate that conviction to the sidelines for a time, until work is done on his life as a human being, and a Palestinian Jewish human being at that? Or does his divinity influence the kind of Jewish person he was? Did the society in which he grew up, and particularly the synagogue in which he learned the Scriptures and the traditions, actually contribute to his development as a person, in relationship to his Father as well as to others? If the answer to these questions is yes, then we have much to learn about him from the new realistic quest. But this brings us back to the issue at stake here.

If one is able to distinguish clearly between the aspects of Jesus research in which Jewish scholars can help, and those subsequent aspects in which they cannot, then does it follow that Christians will simply have to accept that Jesus will remain only as an important Jewish teacher for the Jewish community? Can Jesus be, at one and the same time, the Christ of the church and a rabbi of the Jewish people? Are evangelicals compromising their faith by being involved in such inter-faith projects?

### (d) Separating Jesus from his disciples

This is another major issue facing the church in its Jesus research. Evangelicals have a particular concern to preserve a relationship of continuity between Jesus and the nascent and emerging church. However, it has become something of a commonplace to find

Jewish scholars driving a wedge between Jesus and, particularly, Paul. They wish to differentiate clearly between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, an attitude and approach not unfamiliar to those who are *au fait* with recent NT scholarship. Hagner sums up this aspect of Jewish scholarship in the following way:

This Christ — indeed, Christianity itself — is regarded as largely the creation of the apostle Paul, who, by importing Hellenistic ideas, subverted the message of Jesus, and so brought a new religion into existence.<sup>54</sup>

This kind of wedge can be seen consistently in the relevant works by Jewish scholars, for example, Klausner, Buber, Sandmel and Vermes.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the very title of one of Hyam Maccoby's books tells the story well: *The Myth-Maker. Paul and the Invention of Christianity*.<sup>56</sup> Is Jesus to be reclaimed at the expense of Paul? Few issues can have more serious implications for Jewish-Christian relations than this.

#### (e) Appreciation of the Jewish agenda

Jewish people are pursuing their own agenda. The status and role of Jesus is an issue for them from within their own context of concerns and perspectives. Judaism's engagement with Jesus is in fact part of the movement towards its own self-confident taking of a rightful place in the modern world as a major world religion in its own right. Rabbi Alan Mittleman has put it this way:

The 'homecoming of Jesus', therefore, is an aspect of the modern Jew's act of historically oriented self-discovery, or of self-recovery. It is an aspect of the modern Jew's search for essence and definition.<sup>57</sup>

To this way of thinking, Christianity has been guilty of deifying and institutionalizing a loyal son of Judaism, and consequently condemning Judaism as it has developed without Jesus to, at best, the status of a failed, unfulfilled and barren religion, and, at worst, a sentence of death and destruction. And so Christians must accept that Jewish people are working from a quite different agenda to themselves.

Is the church secure enough and humble enough to acknowledge the help it needs from Jewish scholarship, and, what is more, to accept it on the Jewish community's terms? Hagner comments:

Jewish scholars are in a particularly advantageous situation to understand the teaching of Jesus. Familiar with the Old Testament, the development of early Judaism, the Jewish background of the Gospels, and often learned in the difficult world of rabbinic literature, they are often able not only to place Jesus in historical context, but also to enter the mental world of Jesus, and to capture every Jewish nuance in his words. . . . For this, Christian scholars, though sensing an incompleteness in the Jewish approach, continue to be grateful.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps the issue is most controversially presented by the Roman Catholic theologian, Clemens Thoma, who argues that, in fact, Christians positively need to hear Jewish theological critiques of the church's Christology. In 1980 he wrote:

Christian theologians would be well advised . . . to consider Jewish exceptions to their theological and Christological statements. Taken altogether, Jewish ideas are not mere negations, opposition for opposition's sake, but warnings of potential perversions of faith in the God of Israel.<sup>59</sup>

Can the church accept such a perspective on contemporary Jewish-Christian relations?

#### (f) Identification with Jewish believers in Jesus

As far as I am concerned, the most tragic aspect of modern Jewish-Christian relations is the total marginalization of those Jewish people who are our brothers and sisters in the faith. Down the centuries, the synagogue has told Jewish believers that they are no longer Jewish, having betrayed the Jewish people to join the Gentiles and their religion. This was all based on the presumption that Jewish people could not come to faith in Jesus from conviction alone, reflecting also the Jewish community's terrible treatment at the hands of Christians. For its part, the church has also demanded that Jews reject their Jewishness if and when they become baptised members of the church. Its agenda has been dominated by varieties of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism.

However, can Christians today do other than affirm Jewish faith in the Jesus of history, faith that he is indeed Israel's Messiah

and the Saviour of the world? The Jewish scholarship which we are examining here denies the possibility, viability and integrity of such faith. Will the church compromise its commitment to these brothers and sisters to save the dialogue? This must be a major issue when we are discussing Jewish reclamation of Jesus.

These, then, are some of the major issues facing the church in the current phase of the modern quest for the historical Jesus. There is so much to be grateful for. The questions before us, in the light of the concerns of Hagner and others, are whether there are hidden costs involved in terms of Jewish-Christian relations, and if so, whether they are worth the price.

<sup>54</sup>Donald A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus. An Analysis and Critique of the Modern Jewish Study of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984).

<sup>55</sup>Charles H. Talbert edited an English translation called *Reimarus: Fragments* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

<sup>56</sup>Craig A. Evans, 'Jesus of Nazareth: Who Do Scholars Say That He Is?', *Cruz* Vol. 23 No. 4 (1987), pp. 15-19.

<sup>57</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: Eine Geschichte des Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1906). The English translation of 1910, by James M. Robinson, was entitled *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (London: A. & C. Black, 1910). Within the middle period, Evans cites, as an exponent of the 'No Quest', Rudolf Bultmann's *Jesus* (Berlin: Deutsche Bibliothek, 1926; ET, *Jesus and the Word*, N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958). Ernst Käsemann's 1953 paper was entitled 'Das Problem des historischen Jesus', later published in 1954 in *ZTK* 51, pp. 125-153. Its ET, 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus', was published in Käsemann's book, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1964), pp. 15-47. James M. Robinson's famous review of the whole movement was called *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959). Further criticism of this 'new quest' is given by the Jewish scholar B.F. Meyer, in *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979).

<sup>58</sup>N.T. Wright, 'Constraints and the Jesus of History', *Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol. 39 No. 2 (1986), pp. 189-210. He cites as examples of this new phase, Ben F. Meyer, *op. cit.*; M.J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984); E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985); Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (London: Collins, 1973); John K. Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980).

<sup>59</sup>Representative examples are: S.G.F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (N.Y.: Scribner's, 1967); G.R. Edwards, *Jesus and the Politics of Violence* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1972); Elbert Hubbard, *Jesus Was An Anarchist* (N.Y.: Revisionist Press, 1974); Luise Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemen, *Jesus von Nazareth — Hoffnung der Armen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978); Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978); Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985); E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*; Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1978).

<sup>60</sup>See, respectively, Hyam Maccoby, *Revolution in Judaea. Jesus and the Jewish Resistance* (London: Orbach and Chambers, 1973); Harvey Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee. A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1985); Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew. A Historian's Reading of the Gospels*, *op. cit.*

<sup>61</sup>Julius Wellhausen, *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien* (Berlin: 1905), p. 113.

<sup>62</sup>James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism. New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (London: SPCK, 1989), pp. 5 and *passim*.

<sup>63</sup>Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times and Teaching* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1925), p. 414.

<sup>64</sup>Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (ET, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1961), p. 81.

<sup>65</sup>Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

<sup>66</sup>Pinchas Lapide and Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul, Rabbi and Apostle* (ET, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984, from a 1981 original), p. 31.

<sup>67</sup>Of immediate interest in the Talmudic material are the following passages: Yeb. 4:13; Yeb. 49b; Sanh. 43a, 106a, 107b; Gitt. 56b, 57a. Basic research work has been done by Gustav Dalman, *Jesus Christ in Talmud, Midrash, Zohar, and the Liturgy of the Synagogue* (ET, Cambridge: CUP, 1893; reprinted N.Y.: Arno Press, 1973); R. Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1903; reprinted Clifton, N.J.: Reference Book Publishers, 1966); Johann Maier, *Jesus von Nazareth in der Talmudischen Überlieferung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978).

<sup>68</sup>An English translation of Toldot Yesu is readily available in H.J. Schonfield's book, *According To The Hebrews* (London: Duckworth, 1937).

<sup>69</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>70</sup>Quoted in David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue. A Jewish Justification* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), p. 78.

<sup>71</sup>See Novak, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>72</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>73</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>74</sup>James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jews and Christians. Exploring the Past*,



*Present, and Future* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1990), p. 46.

<sup>22</sup>Indeed, in 1966 an eminent Orthodox Jewish philosopher, Eliezer Berkovits, wrote an extremely influential article called 'Judaism in the Post-Christian Era', in which he listed five clusters of reasons why Jewish people should not become involved in dialogue with Christians. These reasons came under the headings Emotional, Philosophical, Theological, Practical and Ethical. See *Judaism* 15 (1966), pp. 76-84.

<sup>23</sup>This is quoted in Novak, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>24</sup>Samuel Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus* (N.Y.: OUP, 1965), p. 111. See also pp. 44, 46f.

<sup>25</sup>Isaac Mayer Wise, *The Martyrdom of Jesus of Nazareth* (N.Y.: 1888), p. 132.

<sup>26</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 16. He closes the book by summing it up as a 'first step in what seems to be the direction of the real man' (p. 224).

<sup>27</sup>Clemens Thoma, *A Christian Theology of Judaism* (N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 107.

<sup>28</sup>Jacob Neusner, *Jews and Christians. The Myth of a Common Tradition* (London: SCM, 1991), p. 21.

<sup>29</sup>Daniel J. Harrington, 'The Jewishness of Jesus. Facing Some Problems', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987), p. 7.

<sup>30</sup>Trude Weiss-Rosmarin (ed.), *Jewish Expressions on Jesus. An Anthology* (N.Y.: Ktav, 1977), p. ix.

<sup>31</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 235, n. 1.

<sup>32</sup>Geza Vermes, *The Gospel of Jesus the Jew* (Newcastle: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1981), p. 4.

<sup>33</sup>David Flusser, *Jesus* (N.Y.: Herder & Herder, 1969), p. 7.

<sup>34</sup>E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup>Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>36</sup>As quoted by Shalom Ben-Chorin in 'The Image of Jesus in Modern Judaism', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 11 No. 3, Summer 1974, p. 408.

<sup>37</sup>Wise wrote in the 7 June edition of the magazine, *The Outlook*.

<sup>38</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>39</sup>Ernst Käsemann, *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen* (Göttingen, 1965), pp. 206f.

<sup>40</sup>'Jésus devant la Pensée Juive Contemporaine', in *Les Grands Religions* (1978), p. 36.

<sup>41</sup>Lapide and Stuhlmacher, *Paul, Rabbi and Apostle*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>42</sup>*Jesus of Nazareth*, *op. cit.*, p. 363.

<sup>43</sup>William B. Silverman, *Judaism and Christianity: What We Believe* (1968), p. 93; Milton G. Miller, *Our Religion and Our Neighbours* (rev. ed., 1971), p. 59.

<sup>44</sup>Craig Evans, *art. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>45</sup>Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn, 'Jews for Jesus—Are They Real?', in Gary D. Eisenberg (ed.), *Smashing The Idols* (London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1988), p. 167; C.G. Montefiore, 'Jewish Conceptions of Christianity', in *The Hibbert Journal* 28 (1929-30), p. 249. See also Gerald Friedlander, *The Jewish Sources of the Sermon on the Mount* (N.Y.: Ktav, 1969), pp. 226-238, esp. pp. 237f.; Klausner, *op. cit.*, p. 127; David Flusser, 'Jesus', in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 10, 1972, p. 10; Rabbi Randall M. Falk in the recently published *Jews and Christians. A Troubled Family*, by Walter Harrelson and Randall M. Falk (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), p. 103.

<sup>46</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 355. Klausner deals with the NT account of the resurrection in only 4 pages.

<sup>47</sup>Flusser, *Jesus*, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>48</sup>*Art. cit.*, p. 427.

<sup>49</sup>For Lapide's views, see Hans Küng and Pinchas Lapide, 'Is Jesus a Bond or Barrier?: A Jewish-Christian Dialogue', in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 14 (1977); Pinchas Lapide, *Auferstehung. Ein jüdisches Glaubensverlebens* (2nd edn, Stuttgart and Munich, 1978). See also Randall Falk, *op. cit.*, pp. 111f.

<sup>50</sup>Neusner, *op. cit.*, p. 1 (and *passim*).

<sup>51</sup>*Op. cit.*, pp. 18, 94.

<sup>52</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 120. For other contemporary rejections of this simplistic model, see Charlesworth, *Jews and Christians*, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-43; A.F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (London: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 1f., 179ff.; Norman Solomon, *Division and Reconciliation* (London: The London Diocesan Council for Christian-Jewish Understanding, 1980), pp. 2f.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>55</sup>Joseph Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul* (ET by W.F. Stinespring, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1943, of the 1939 original), pp. 580f.; Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, *op. cit.*, p. 55; Samuel Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 161; Geza Vermes, *The Gospel of Jesus the Jew*, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>56</sup>Hyam Maccoby, *The Myth-Maker. Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1986).

<sup>57</sup>Quoted in Harvey Cox, *Many Mansions. A Christian's Encounter with Other Faiths* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p. 111.

<sup>58</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>59</sup>Clemens Thoma, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

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# The social work of the Clapham Sect: an assessment

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Nigel Scotland

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The Clapham Sect was a small group of upper-class, influential, evangelical men and women who congregated in Clapham, which was then a small village just a few miles south of Westminster, in the late eighteenth century. There was little that was sectarian about them. They were all members of the Anglican church and enjoyed the ministry and counsel of John Venn (1759-1813), who became Rector of Clapham in 1793. The designation 'sect' may possibly have derived from a verbal jibe by the literary critic and wit, Sydney Smith (1771-1845).<sup>1</sup>

The group's origins seem to follow the acquisition of a mansion on Clapham Common by Henry Thornton (1760-1815), MP for Southwark. William Pitt designed a beautiful oval library for the house and Sir James Stephen, in his *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*, suggests that this became the headquarters for Clapham social action. He wrote:

... the Chamber he had thus projected became the scene which, amidst his proudest triumphs, he might well have envied and witnessed the growth of projects more majestic than any which ever engaged the deliberations of his cabinet.<sup>2</sup>

The central figure of the group was William Wilberforce (1759-1833), who experienced his evangelical conversion in 1785. Another prominent figure was the banker Henry Thornton. They became close friends and the 'sect' began to form around them. There were several other prominent members of the group. Granville Sharp (1735-1813), a scholar and pamphleteer whose work resulted in the 1772 decision to fight slavery in England, became Chairman of the Anti-Slavery Society and was active in the work of Sierra Leone Project and the British and Foreign Bible Society. James Stephen (1789-1859) had seen the evils of the slave trade first-hand, and on his return to England he made contact with Wilberforce and the Claphamites. Zachary Macaulay (1768-1838) had gone to work as an estate overseer in the West Indies at the age of 16. He returned to England obsessed by the evils of the slave trade and threw in his lot with the 'saints'. Charles Grant (1746-

*Present, and Future* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1990), p. 46.

<sup>22</sup>Indeed, in 1966 an eminent Orthodox Jewish philosopher, Eliezer Berkovits, wrote an extremely influential article called 'Judaism in the Post-Christian Era', in which he listed five clusters of reasons why Jewish people should not become involved in dialogue with Christians. These reasons came under the headings Emotional, Philosophical, Theological, Practical and Ethical. See *Judaism* 15 (1966), pp. 76-84.

<sup>23</sup>This is quoted in Novak, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

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<sup>25</sup>Isaac Mayer Wise, *The Martyrdom of Jesus of Nazareth* (N.Y.: 1888), p. 132.

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<sup>32</sup>Geza Vermes, *The Gospel of Jesus the Jew* (Newcastle: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1981), p. 4.

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<sup>56</sup>Hyam Maccoby, *The Myth-Maker. Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1986).

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The Clapham Sect was a small group of upper-class, influential, evangelical men and women who congregated in Clapham, which was then a small village just a few miles south of Westminster, in the late eighteenth century. There was little that was sectarian about them. They were all members of the Anglican church and enjoyed the ministry and counsel of John Venn (1759-1813), who became Rector of Clapham in 1793. The designation 'sect' may possibly have derived from a verbal jibe by the literary critic and wit, Sydney Smith (1771-1845).<sup>1</sup>

The group's origins seem to follow the acquisition of a mansion on Clapham Common by Henry Thornton (1760-1815), MP for Southwark. William Pitt designed a beautiful oval library for the house and Sir James Stephen, in his *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*, suggests that this became the headquarters for Clapham social action. He wrote:

... the Chamber he had thus projected became the scene which, amidst his proudest triumphs, he might well have envied and witnessed the growth of projects more majestic than any which ever engaged the deliberations of his cabinet.<sup>2</sup>

The central figure of the group was William Wilberforce (1759-1833), who experienced his evangelical conversion in 1785. Another prominent figure was the banker Henry Thornton. They became close friends and the 'sect' began to form around them. There were several other prominent members of the group. Granville Sharp (1735-1813), a scholar and pamphleteer whose work resulted in the 1772 decision to fight slavery in England, became Chairman of the Anti-Slavery Society and was active in the work of Sierra Leone Project and the British and Foreign Bible Society. James Stephen (1789-1859) had seen the evils of the slave trade first-hand, and on his return to England he made contact with Wilberforce and the Claphamites. Zachary Macaulay (1768-1838) had gone to work as an estate overseer in the West Indies at the age of 16. He returned to England obsessed by the evils of the slave trade and threw in his lot with the 'saints'. Charles Grant (1746-

1823) and John Shore (1751–1834), who later became Lord Teignmouth, both had careers in India and later, as ‘Claphamites’, became strong supporters of missions there. These men were the Clapham core, but there were other associates. Thomas Gisborne (1758–1846), the Squire of Yoxall in Staffordshire and Prebend of Durham, spent part of every year with Wilberforce labouring for their common causes. Hannah More (1745–1833) at Cheddar was linked strongly to the group and is chiefly remembered for her educational work in the Mendips and the production of countless cheap repository tracts. Thomas Babington (1758–1837) joined the Sect’s activities, as did Sir Thomas Fowell-Buxton (1786–1845), as an avid fighter against slavery. Although John Venn only involved himself in the specifically religious Clapham projects, he was nevertheless one of the inner core and his advice and counsel were frequently sought.

Surrounded by such a fraternity, William Wilberforce was able to lead the parliamentary campaign against the slave trade, a crusade which lasted for the whole of his life. In addition, he gave much prayer, money and time to a whole range of causes. He was keen to see the suppression of vice and the reformation of manners in Britain. He showed concern for the education of men, women and children, and together with others of the group was instrumental in establishing a *Christian Observer* magazine in 1802.

Although the abolition campaign was the central Clapham concern and demanded the bulk of their energies, the ‘saints’ also engaged in a variety of other social and philanthropic concerns. Among the most notable were revision of the penal code, the abolition of the press gang, improvements in the care of the mentally ill, the relief of climbing boys, the regulation of factory conditions and the promotion of schools and other educational ventures.

It is this social action of the Clapham Sect which this article sets out to examine. It seeks to analyse and assess the motives, methods and scope of their work and concludes with an evaluation of their achievements.

## The perspectives of the writers

The literature on the Clapham Sect begins with Sir James Stephen’s *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*, written in 1875. Stephen, the son of a Sect member (James Stephen, 1789–1859) and an evangelical, held the group in great esteem. He wrote favourably about each of the prominent members, most of whom he knew personally. He says of their religion: ‘It was a hardy, serviceable, fruit-bearing and patrimonial religion.’ He says of them: ‘... if not more than men, they were not less.’<sup>4</sup> He was convinced of their worth: ‘In short, they, if any men could, might bear the test, by their fruits ye shall know them.’<sup>4</sup>

In general terms, those who have written on the Clapham Sect have adopted one of three perspectives towards their social action. Following Stephen, a number of writers, for the most part evangelicals or evangelical sympathizers, have spoken in positive terms of the achievements of the Clapham Sect. Others, particularly those who view the Claphamites from a liberal theological or Marxist standpoint, have tended to be disparaging or condemning of their motives for action. A further group of writers has tended to be somewhat more ambivalent and, whilst acknowledging the positive Claphamite successes, has focused on the limited scope of their activities.

Following shortly after Stephen, John Overton published *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century* in 1878, in which he wrote of the Clapham fraternity that ‘they learned and practised thoroughly the true lessons of Christianity’. In a later volume, the same writer asserted that ‘the just sentiments and eloquence of the leaders of this movement won respect and admiration’. John Telford wrote *A Sect that moved the world* (1907).<sup>5</sup> His volume is descriptive and uncritical and hails the Clapham Sect as having done ‘a work in their own generation, the influence of which is still felt throughout the world of philanthropy and religion’.<sup>6</sup> In the earlier years of the twentieth century, George R. Balleine (1933) admired ‘the almost monastic self-discipline by which these well-to-do Christians ordered each day of their lives’. Balleine made a brief summary of their work and urged that we are indebted to them for their accomplishments and ‘the ideal of strenuous service which they handed down’. Ernest Howse (1952) was unequivocal that ‘their labours were of supreme significance to the world and were accomplished in the spirit of disinterested devotion to high

principles’.<sup>6</sup> Michael Hennell, who published *John Venn and the Clapham Sect* in the same year, was similarly positive. He pointed out that their sense of accountability to God gave the Sect integrity and their concern with a future heaven resulted in a desire to produce the nature of heaven on this present earth.

Two recent authors, Bebbington (1988) and Hylson Smith, have also written in positive terms of the Clapham Sect. Bebbington expresses a high regard for the evangelical movement in the following comment: ‘Stirring the elite in Church and State to care for the poor may have had the effect of reinforcing the social order, but its primary purpose was to ensure that the privileged took a humane interest in the welfare, secular and spiritual needs of those committed to their charge.’<sup>9</sup> He believes the Clapham Sect were dedicated and earnest in their work and seems disappointed by ‘a tendency in contemporary historiography to play down the Evangelical contribution to anti-slavery’.<sup>10</sup> Hylson Smith urges that the Sect ‘cannot justifiably be dismissed as repressive and reactionary’,<sup>11</sup> and he asserts that ‘they had given an example of what Christian zeal, compassion, devotion and co-operation could accomplish, and they had established the practice of politics as a true Christian vocation’.<sup>12</sup>

The Clapham Sect evoked early opposition. Among their earliest contemporary critics were the essayists Sydney Smith and William Hazlitt. Smith, who achieved something of a reputation as a literary wit, warned against ‘that patent Christianity which has been for some time manufacturing at Clapham, to the prejudice of the old and admirable article prepared by the church’.<sup>13</sup> He continued: ‘I would counsel my Lords and Bishops to keep their eyes on that holy village, and its hallowed vicinity.’<sup>14</sup> Hazlitt, in a collection entitled *The Spirit of the Age* (c. 1824), said of Wilberforce, ‘he preaches vital Christianity to untutored savages, and tolerates its worst abuses in civilised states’.<sup>15</sup>

Twentieth-century critics of the Saints have centred their attack on the unlaudable motives which they suggest prompted their work. Ford K. Brown, in *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (1961), presented a mass of material in an attempt to prove that Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect had no humanitarian motives. He suggested that in all their campaigns, the first aim was to advance ‘evangelism’. He wrote: ‘... the Evangelicals were concerned with no reform but the reform of vice and sin. Their object was to have a nineteenth century peopled by Evangelical Christians leading moral lives of a puritanical kind.’<sup>16</sup> Brown was particularly severe on Hannah More’s work. He maintained that her output of tracts was to urge subordination among the lower classes, and that the education which she provided was nothing less than indoctrination.<sup>17</sup> Very recently, Boyd Hilton, in *The Age of Atonement* (1988), has argued that a major Clapham weakness was that they considered soul-saving to be more important than alleviating poverty and social injustice.<sup>18</sup> He also suggests that part of the motivation for the abolition campaign was that slavery was opposed to free agency.<sup>19</sup>

Other writers have exhibited a certain ambivalence in their views of Clapham achievements. In the main, such writers have been impressed or at least ready to acknowledge the results of their work, but then have either pointed out the limitations in its scope or identified condescending attitudes on the part of the group’s membership. J.R.H. Moorman (1952), for example, was impressed with their considerable achievements and wrote that ‘the success of Wilberforce and his friends shows what religious and moral conviction can do even against the heaviest odds’.<sup>20</sup> He nevertheless noted that they appear ‘intolerably condescending’.<sup>21</sup> Vidler (1961) made the point that the Clapham Sect worked ‘for the poor rather than with the poor’.<sup>22</sup> He also observed that they ‘consecrated themselves to good works and noble causes’, they were indeed ‘full of benevolence and philanthropy towards the poor’.<sup>23</sup> Bradley made a similar point in *The Politics of Godliness* (1976) and stated that: ‘For all their protestations about the cruelties inflicted on the negro slaves and other groups in the far-flung corners of the world, the Evangelicals generally, and the Saints in particular, seemed to be singularly unconcerned with the sufferings of those at home.’<sup>24</sup>

## Motivational factors

A major pre-occupation, particularly of the more recent writers regarding Clapham social work, has been with questions concerning their motivation. As attempts are made to probe in this area, it is evident that these are not easily disentangled. There were a number of significant motivating factors which lay behind the Saints’ campaigns for reform. On some occasions, several of these

combined together to generate action. In other instances, different individuals were urged to the same course of action but for rather different reasons.

A major root of evangelicalism lay in the Wesleyan revival and what John Wesley termed 'personal religion', in which the believer entered into what Hilton had called 'the all-important contractual relationship with Christ'. Sir James Stephen recounted the depth of devotion to prayer and meditation from which the Claphamites drew their strength and inspiration. Sect members frequently spoke of an 'inner conviction' by which they believed God was calling them to action. Bebbington encapsulates their point in the following sentence: 'Evangelicalism as a whole taught that good works are a fundamental element of Christian duty.'<sup>25</sup>

Closely allied to this motivation is the suggestion of Ford K. Brown and others that the Sect used their social work as a vehicle for evangelism. Brown quoted Sydney Smith, who once said: 'Wherever they gain a footing, . . . proselytism will be their main object; everything else is a mere instrument.'<sup>26</sup> There would certainly appear to be a substance in Brown's view. Henry Venn, for example, considered education as a 'preparation evangelical'. In the schools which they founded, Venn urged that 'the soil may be cultivated and prepared for the reception of heavenly seed'.<sup>27</sup> After the same pattern, the rules of the Clapham Bettering Society required that all who received financial aid should regularly attend public worship.<sup>28</sup>

A number of writers have suggested that 'fear of judgement both personal and national lay behind a good deal of Clapham social action'. Sir James Stephen, reflecting in 1875 on the abolition of the slave trade, wrote: 'Time has shown that to that law we may now confidently ascribe the deliverance of our own land from this blood-guiltiness for ever.'<sup>29</sup> In a speech to the house in May 1789, Wilberforce claimed that the Irish ceased to trade in slaves in the reign of Henry VII when 'a great plague infested the country'. They were 'struck with panic' and suspected, Wilberforce commented, '(I am sure very properly), that the plague was a punishment sent from heaven, for the sin of the slave trade'.<sup>30</sup> Wilberforce continued: 'All I ask, therefore, of the people of Britain, is that they would become as civilised now, as Irishmen were four hundred years ago.'<sup>31</sup> In his celebrated *Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade to the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of Yorkshire*, Wilberforce wrote: 'Of all the motives by which I am prompted to address you which operated on me with greatest force, is . . . that the sufferings of nations are to be regarded as the punishment of national crimes; and their decline and fall are to be regarded as the execution of his sentence.'<sup>32</sup>

The background to the formation of the Society of the Suppression of Vice was to some extent fear of national judgment. An early report on Society activities in the *Christian Observer* reflected that 'this nation, on account of its irreligion and vices, has just reason, rather to dread the displeasure, than to rely on the favour of the Almighty'.<sup>33</sup>

The view has been expressed, notably by Hilton, that the Clapham Sect were to some extent motivated by their millenarian ideas.<sup>34</sup> It is likely that, as heirs of Wesley, the Claphamites were post-millenarians, as Hilton suggests. Post-millenarians, unlike the pre-millenarians, believed that the world would gradually improve and that finally the millenium would be reached. Post-millenarians were therefore happy to play their part in hastening the arrival of the New Jerusalem on earth by engaging in reformist activity.

The paradox in Hilton's suggestion is that the Claphamites made little if any attempt to articulate any form of post-millenarian scheme in their writings. Furthermore, they seem to have been possessed by fears that the world was going to get worse rather than better. For example, early in 1795 Wilberforce gave Pitt support which was perhaps decisive in passing two severe measures of repression, the *Treasonable Practices Act* and the *Seditious Meetings Act*.<sup>35</sup> The *Christian Observer*, in 1802, commenting on Hannah More's numerous tracts, declared: 'She has done more, perhaps, and certainly as much, to repel the dark and menacing tide of levelling and anarchical principles, as the ablest among the very able rulers either of the Church or State.'<sup>36</sup> It was for the same reason that about this time the Clapham-sponsored Proclamation Society prosecuted Thomas Williams, a practising Christian, for publishing Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*. The poor man's family were completely ruined but the Society stood firm.<sup>37</sup>

Since the time of William Cobbett, critics of the Clapham Sect have been very ready to accuse them of being motivated by a desire for social control. Cobbett himself once asserted: 'The mission of the Saints . . . was to teach the people to starve without making a noise and keeping the poor from cutting the throats of the rich.'<sup>38</sup> There is, without doubt, truth in his accusation. It was epitomized in a prayer in Henry Thornton's collection for families: 'Give to the poor contentment with their lot, and to the rich a spirit of compassion and benevolence.' The Society for the Suppression of Vice 'strongly recommended it to all persons, who employ servants or apprentices, to take means for regulating their conduct, and infesting the streets in the evening of the sabbath'. Such behaviour, it continued, exposed servants to 'great temptation, and is highly injurious to their morals'.<sup>39</sup> Gisborne, in his volume entitled *An Inquiry into the Duties of Men in the Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain* published in 1795, urged employers to put down, albeit mildly, all combinations on the part of their workmen.<sup>40</sup> Of all the Clapham group, perhaps Hannah More has been felt to have been the most motivated by social control. Her scheme for education was a narrow one, with each child being taught only what was appropriate to his or her social class. For example, the son of a farmer might be taught 'the beneficial and appropriate knowledge for the boy of his class'. However, the children of day labourers 'must be given no writing, nor any reading but the Bible, the catechism, and such little tracts as may enable them to understand the church service'.<sup>41</sup>

Over against these seemingly rather self-centred motivations, the case can be put that members of the Sect were also motivated by Christian values and genuine feelings of compassion for the sufferings and the condition of the poor. In a letter to a friend, Wilberforce wrote: 'Where anything is directly contrary to the laws of God, there we ought to resist as stubbornly as possible.'<sup>42</sup> In his attacks on the slave trade, Wilberforce most frequently rested his case on the plain principles of Scripture. For example, on the title page of his celebrated volume *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade addressed to the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of Yorkshire*, Wilberforce put the text 'There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, . . . bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.' Later in the volume itself, Wilberforce attacked the denigrating views of the negro expressed in Long's *History of Jamaica*. Against Long's stupid and bland prejudice that 'an Oran-outang husband would be no dishonour to a Hottentot female', Wilberforce urged: 'Christ has done away all distinctions of nations, and made all mankind one great family, all our fellow creatures are now our brethren.'<sup>43</sup>

Wilberforce and his fellow labourers were also men and women of deep feelings and compassion, and this, as much as other considerations, frequently motivated their campaigns. For example, in 1808 the *Christian Observer* gave a heart-rending account of how Susanna Whitfield, together with an older servant, forced one of her servant boys to climb up into a chimney against his will. The boy, Nicholas Realy, became stuck and died, but no legal action was taken against the mistress of the house.<sup>44</sup> Again, in his *Letter on the Abolition*, Wilberforce displays a deep compassion over the suffering of the slaves. He particularly identifies insufficiency of food; their defective clothing and lodging, their working under the whip and their cruel and indecent punishments.<sup>45</sup>

It is clear therefore that the Clapham Sect were motivated to their social action by a variety of impulses. Some of these may strike us as less laudable than others. However, it will be apparent from these considerations that motivation is a complex issue. So much is this so that it is probably not as easy to be as precise about Clapham motives as some critics would have us believe. Having made this point, however, it does seem reasonable to assume that evangelical religion was a basic underlying root factor. Evangelical religion was central to the whole of Clapham; indeed, without it there would have been no Sect and no social action.

## The scope of Clapham social action

Another aspect of Clapham social work with which historians have concerned themselves is its scope. In particular, several accusations have been made that its scope was too limited — both in its extent and in its philosophy. The view has been put by several writers that the Sect were overly concerned with black slavery, and not enough given to the miseries of the white slaves at home.<sup>46</sup>

It is a fact that the abolition campaign became an all-engrossing concern. Clearly, the time which the Saints invested in

this cause was out of all proportion to any of their other projects. For Wilberforce, the abolition was essentially a lifetime's work. The group, and most notably Clarkson, Wilberforce and Sharpe, gave themselves untiringly to research, writings and the organization of public meetings. Zachary Macaulay actually travelled on a slave ship in 1795 so that he could view the plight of the slaves at first hand. At the height of the campaign, Wilberforce was working nine-and-a-half hours a day gathering and sifting evidence.

Perhaps, if it is true that the Saints were all over-engrossed in the abolition crusade, it could be justified. The enormity of the trade was such that in 1786 100,000 slaves were taken from Africa, of which 42,000 were carried by English ships. Of these, only half lived to become labourers on the other side of the Atlantic.<sup>47</sup> The wickedness and the inhumanity of the slave trade should not be underestimated. It was without doubt the greatest single evil in the world of the early nineteenth century. It could be argued that without the attention which the Sect gave it, they would not have succeeded.

Yet when the evidence is assessed in detail, the picture is not as one-sided as has often been supposed. The men and women of Clapham engaged in wide-ranging campaigns on behalf of the nation's poor and disadvantaged. In an age when there was no government system of public education, the Sect were great promoters of day and Sunday school education. At the end of his life, John Venn was gratified that by the enlargement of the parochial school 'every child in the parish may be gratuitously taught to write'.<sup>48</sup> What Venn accomplished in Clapham itself became the vision for other places. One area where the Saints supported day schools strongly was the Mendips, where they gave much money to the village institutions run by Hannah and Martha More. Thornton personally supported schools in Southwark. Thornton, Sharp and Hannah More were all prominent figures in the Sunday School Society, which promoted the organization of hundreds of schools and provided funds for them. The *Christian Observer*, reporting in May 1809 on the previous six months, noted that 8,995 spelling books and 1,666 Testaments had been distributed.<sup>49</sup> Hannah More became a pioneer in providing suitable literature for the poor. She produced three *Cheap Repository Tracts* each month which were to educate and guide the poor.

A number of other home concerns occupied the Sect's attention. Time was given to helping the prisoner. Henry Thornton was chiefly responsible for the establishment of The Society for the Relief of Persons Imprisoned for Small Debts. In just over five years, this Society released 14,007 people who had been jailed for small debts. In February 1818, Thomas Fowell-Buxton published his work entitled *An Inquiry whether Crime be produced or prevented by our present system of Prison Discipline*. On entering Parliament, he directed his initial attention to the different forms of judicial punishment.<sup>50</sup> In 1809 the Sect became involved in the founding of The Society for the Refuge of the Destitute, which aimed to help and provide for persons discharged from prisons or the hulks.<sup>51</sup> Wilberforce was hostile towards 'our numerous laws', 'our bloody laws' and the 'barbarous custom of hanging'. In 1819 he spoke out in a Commons debate against the severity of the criminal code.<sup>52</sup> Thomas Clarkson published *The Grievances of Our Mercantile Seamen: A National and Crying Evil* in 1845. In this work he attacked and exposed the brutality and cruelty of the way in which British sailors were treated at sea and in port. Such was the harshness of life at sea that 'at least one quarter of all the crews were on the dead list before returning home', and at least another quarter were lost to their country, 'discharged' or 'deserted'.<sup>53</sup> Once back in port in England, the sailors were frequently induced into 'long rooms' at the back of public houses, where evil girls put drugs in their drink, induced them back to their lodgings and often robbed them of every penny they possessed. Clarkson became a staunch campaigner for the mistreated British sailor and even took ships' captains to court for their brutality.<sup>54</sup>

The group gave their energies to attacking the use of small boys to sweep chimneys, and to the needs of the unemployed in the manufacturing districts. In 1801, Wilberforce demanded medical and financial public aid 'for the relief of individual distress'.<sup>55</sup> Thomas Gisborne addressed advice to the unemployed of the manufacturing population of Great Britain.<sup>56</sup> Clapham interests also embraced hospital treatment, and their concern led them to support the Indigent Blind Institution and the Foundling Hospital. It further extended to 'war widows' and The Refuge for the Destitute.

In a similar vein, charges have been brought against the Clapham Sect that they concerned themselves with the vices of the

poor but not the conditions of the poor. As with the black slavery/white slavery debate, the accusation seems at first sight to be justly made, yet when the evidence is more closely scrutinized, it is less convincing. It is a fact that a number of the issues with which the Saints concerned themselves directly affected the social life and leisure of the poor. The most obvious example would be the keeping of the Lord's Day. This was a major aspect of the Vice Society's work. The Hull branch, for example, stated that 'the principal evils against which the society is to direct its effort is the profanation of the Lord's Day, disorderly houses of every description, lewdness, drunkenness and profane swearing'.<sup>57</sup> Campaigns were also mounted against obscene publications,<sup>58</sup> cock fighting<sup>59</sup> and bull and bear baiting.<sup>60</sup>

Against this position, it can be countered that the Clapham Sect certainly did stand against some of the practices of their own class. Prominent among these was the question of duelling. Granville Sharp wrote a tract against duelling,<sup>61</sup> and the *Christian Observer* pronounced against it as 'manifestly at variance with the precepts of Christianity'.<sup>62</sup> Although they did not succeed in changing the law, the Sect certainly influenced the tide of public opinion against what was widely recognized as an evil and unnecessary practice. Attacks were also made against horse-racing, hunting,<sup>63</sup> the over-use of horses,<sup>64</sup> Sunday newspapers and Sunday posting, as well as cock-fighting, which the *Christian Observer* described as a 'diabolical amusement' of which 'men of fortune and rank' should be ashamed.<sup>65</sup>

The Sect have been charged with working in such a way as to deal with the manifestations of poverty but not the roots of poverty. Similarly, it has been suggested that they worked for the poor rather than with the poor. Both of these criticisms are hard to refute, yet it needs to be asked: 'Would any other group of social reformers of this period have been capable of answering this criticism?' Care must be taken not to assess the Clapham Sect with twentieth-century hindsight. It was not until a generation later that Christian Socialists even began to grapple, albeit inadequately, with these issues. The education which the Claphamites promoted among the poor was clearly insufficient to enable them to pass beyond their appointed station and to break free from their cycle of poverty. Nevertheless, few people in the early years of the nineteenth century regarded education as a necessity for the poor. The 'bettering' envisaged by the Bettering Societies was of a limited nature; nevertheless, it could be seen as a form of self-help. Even the hero and heroines of Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* made some small advance in life as a result of their turning to Christian principles — witness the case of Betty Brown, the St Giles' Orange girl, who rose at length to keep that handsome sausage-shop near the Seven Dials.<sup>67</sup>

## Methods of Clapham social work

One other aspect of Clapham social work which deserves scrutiny is their methods of working. Some of the techniques which they utilized in their campaigns contributed in no small measure to their successes and effectiveness. The Saints extended their efforts through 'networking', by means of both family and church connections. Howse commented on the family and friendship links: 'The Clapham Sect', he wrote, 'developed subsidiary ties of blood and kinship . . . Henry Thornton was Wilberforce's cousin; Gisborne married Babington's sister; and Babington married Macaulay's sister'.<sup>68</sup> These close bonds not only created solidarity and loyalty but also provided links with other geographical localities which could be influenced for the cause. For example, Fowell-Buxton was a relative of Elizabeth Fry, and this undoubtedly aided him in his campaign for penal reform and in the search for information for his pamphlet on *Prison Discipline*, which he published in 1817.

The Sect were skilled in the art of campaigning through books, pamphlets and tracts. All of the inner core of the group wrote at least one substantial volume on an aspect of their social concern. Buxton, Clarkson, Sharpe, Stephen and Wilberforce made significant contributions to the literature on slavery. Clarkson wrote on *The Grievances of our Mercantile Seamen*, whilst Granville Sharpe produced several important works on the British legal system. Hannah More was perhaps the most fertile author, and her tracts certainly helped to popularize the group's goals and objectives. In their own journal, the *Christian Observer*, they had an ever-growing readership to imbibe and spread their views. The Sect were also past masters of the parliamentary pressure group. This included public meetings, petitions and speeches.

Beyond their own core membership, the Saints counted on the fairly consistent support of a wider group of evangelically minded MPs. In addition, they knew how to win friends and influence people in high places. Prime Ministers Pitt and Perceval were among those whose friendship was courted in support of their various causes. Clapham influence was also spread through church links, Society meetings (including clerical societies) and, on occasion, by means of the pulpit.

By the standards of the early years of the nineteenth century, the Clapham Sect were clearly advanced in their social thinking. In particular, their campaign against slavery, their educational endeavours, their proposals for poor relief and their efforts to secure the proper treatment of animals were without parallel. The slave trade was without doubt one of the greatest moral evils of the period, yet it was widely regarded as a necessary part of the British economy and justified on religious and social grounds. Notwithstanding, despite enormous opposition, the Sect persevered to achieve abolition of the trade in 1807 and the ending of slavery as an institution in 1833. Ultimately, they achieved what William Lecky, in his work *European Morals*, categorized as one of 'the three or four perfectly virtuous acts recorded in the history of nations'.

By today's standards, the Sect's outlook and provision of education would be regarded as indoctrination, propaganda and social control. In their generation, however, with its fear of revolution, it was thought by most to be the safest policy to leave the lower classes uneducated. To enable them to read and write would open them to the spirit of the French Revolution and radical thinking. In the end, it could alter the entire social structure. The limited education that the Sect provided was, on the whole, better than nothing, and marked the beginnings of what was to become a universal system. No-one can defend their prosecution of Thomas Williams for publishing the *Age of Reason*, or their support of repressive legislation. Their campaign for Sabbath observance could, however, be defended for the reason that it gave one day of relief for the labourers from the harsh environment of factory and mine. It also made time available to the working class for sport and recreation.

In general, the work of the Saints to improve the conditions of the poor was advanced compared with the standards of their day. And whilst it is true that the Clapham Group tended to work 'for' rather than 'with' the poor, they inspired a whole generation of later, nineteenth-century philanthropists which included figures such as Lord Shaftesbury, William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, and Hugh Price Hughes, the leader of the Wesleyan Methodist 'Forward Movement'. It was such individuals, together with the work of several hundred evangelical societies, which it has been argued formed the basis of the twentieth-century welfare state.

<sup>1</sup>E.M. Howse, *Saints in Politics* (Allen & Unwin, 1952), pp. 187-188.

<sup>2</sup>J. Stephen, *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography* (Longman, 1885), p. 524.

<sup>3</sup>C.J. Abbey and J.H. Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1878), Vol. II, p. 216.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>5</sup>J.H. Overton, *The English Church in the Nineteenth Century* (Longmans, 1894), p. 78.

<sup>6</sup>J. Telford, *A Sect that Moved the World* (Charles Kelly, 1907).

<sup>7</sup>G.R. Belleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* (Longman, Green & Co., 1933), p. 148.

<sup>8</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>9</sup>D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 70.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>11</sup>K. Hylson Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734-1984* (T. & T. Clark, 1988), p. 91.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>13</sup>Cited in A. Bell, *Sydney Smith* (Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 78.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>15</sup>Cited in A. Brockett, *Evangelicalism and Social Concern in the 18th and 19th Centuries* (UCCF, 1974).

<sup>16</sup>F.K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>18</sup>B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement* (Clarendon, 1988), p. 208.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>20</sup>J.R.H. Moorman, *A History of the Church of England* (A. & C. Black, 1952), p. 320.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>22</sup>A. Vidler, *The Church in An Age of Revolution* (Pelican, 1961), p. 37.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>24</sup>L.C. Bradley, *The Politics of Godliness*, p. 192.

<sup>25</sup>D.W. Bebbington, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>26</sup>Cited in F.K. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

<sup>27</sup>M. Hennell, *John Venn and the Clapham Sect* (Lutterworth, 1952), pp. 136-137.

<sup>28</sup>Cited in *ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>29</sup>Sir James Stephen, *op. cit.*, p. 546.

<sup>30</sup>E. M. Howse, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-36.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup>*Christian Observer*, 1807, p. 250.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, October 1803.

<sup>34</sup>B. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup>E.M. Howse, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

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<sup>38</sup>Cited in A. Smith, *The Established Church and Popular Religion* (Longmans), p. 51.

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<sup>40</sup>T. Gisborne, *An Inquiry into the Duties of Men in the Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain* (London, 1795), Vol. II, p. 375.

<sup>41</sup>E.M. Howse, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>42</sup>R.I. Wilberforce and S. Wilberforce, *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, Vol. I, pp. 43-46.

<sup>43</sup>W. Wilberforce, *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade addressed to the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of Yorkshire* (London: T. Cadell, 1807), pp. 26-28, 149-150.

<sup>44</sup>*Christian Observer*, March 1810.

<sup>45</sup>W. Wilberforce, *op. cit.*, pp. 55, 57, 66-67.

<sup>46</sup>See, for example, A. Vidler, *op. cit.*, p. 37, and I. Bradley, *op. cit.*

<sup>47</sup>J. Telford, *The Sect that Moved the World* (Charles H. Kelly, 1907), p. 131.

<sup>48</sup>J. Venn, *Pastoral Farewell Address to his People*, in *Sermons by the Rev. John Venn, MA, Rector of Clapham* (London: J. Hatchard and S. Revington, 1814), Vol. I, p. xxvii.

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<sup>50</sup>C. Buxton (ed.), *Memoirs of Sir Thomas Fowell-Buxton* (London: John Murray, 1848), p. 83.

<sup>51</sup>*Christian Observer*, June 1809.

<sup>52</sup>E.M. Howse, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>53</sup>T. Clarkson, *The Grievances of our Mercantile Seamen: A National and Crying Evil* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Co., 1845), p. 3.

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# Christian mission in Europe

Peter Kuzmic

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Our problem is, therefore, how to get in touch again with the masses of the 'unfaithful faithful'. Prof. Regin Prenter, Denmark

The life and death question for Europe is, then, whether it can rediscover its own specific mission. Dr W.A. Visser't Hooft

## From *Corpus Christianum* to a New Europe

There was a time when 'Europe' and 'Christendom' were almost synonymous terms. The symbiosis of the two is summed up in H. Belloc's epigram, 'The faith is Europe, and Europe is the faith' (Will 1981:6). A contemporary of Martin Luther, the geographer Wachelus published in 1537 a woodcut map of Europe called 'The Queen Virgin'. It was to illustrate the unity and integrity of 'Christian Europe' as conceived by medieval Catholic totalitarianism. Wachelus' map shows Spain as the head of the virgin, Italy as the right arm and Denmark the left; Germany, France and Switzerland are the breast; Poland, Hungary, 'Illyricum', Albania, Greece, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria and others are all identified on the virgin's illustrious gown.

Already at that time, however, the transition from the monolithic, religious 'Christendom' to the secular 'Europe' was in progress. Though the rise of Islam initially strengthened the idea of Christendom, the 15th-century Ottoman Islamic push westward almost broke it when some Christian powers, for selfish reasons, aligned with the enemy against other Christian nations. When Erasmus made his appeal for the crusade against the Turks, he did not appeal to the members of Christendom but, noticeably, to 'the nations of Europe'. The Reformation and the following developments only speeded up the process of transition. In the 17th and 18th centuries, science came into its own and the secular state established itself. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the industrial revolution and the birth of Marxist socialism completed the process of the disintegration of *Corpus Christianum*. The post-Enlightenment culture became a major European 'missionary problem' (Newbigin 1986).

The European map today is in a state of political and economic, as well as cultural and religious, flux. This chapter is written at a time of rapid changes and an intensive search for a 'new Europe'. Presently, Europe lives in the intensive period 'between 1989 and 1992', the year 1989 marking the beginning of the wholesale collapse of Communism and 1992 the beginning of a 'United States of Europe', initially a West European economic and political integration. The European Community's (EC) move toward a closer union has been accelerated recently in response to dramatic events in Eastern Europe. The demand for change in the East European countries has been promoted and strengthened by the political freedoms and economic success of Western Europe, which have acted as a magnet drawing the East toward the West.

Today, Europe seems to be fully alive and bursting with visions, programmes and activities which make it again 'the most important theatre of contemporary world events' (Burstein 1991:11). Western Europe is in the process of dismantling its frontiers and gearing itself for new economic growth, energetically engaged in overcoming the two interrelated diseases of the early 1980s — 'Eurosclerosis' and 'Europessimism'. For a while, these often-lamented twin ills threatened to make Europe a largely unimportant, uninteresting and conceivably even an irrelevant continent. Europe was for a while playing only a minor and increasingly diminishing role in the global geopolitical game. The constant complaints that Europe is an 'economic giant and a political pygmy' and 'merely the chessboard over which American and Soviet masters made their strategic moves' (Burstein 1991:37)

became somewhat obsolete when the oil-shocked 1970s and the alarming growth of unemployment resulted in economic collapse along with political impotence.

Where did the new vision and will come from? Are there analogies to be drawn and lessons to be learned due to a somewhat similarly discouraging religious situation in Europe? Many diagnose the European churches as suffering from similar conditions of 'sclerosis' (stagnation) and 'pessimism' (loss of will and power to stem the tide of decline).

The turning point in the transition from the 'old' to the 'new' Europe was an almost 'spiritual' event. Jacques Delors, the incoming president of the European Community's executive commission, acted as a visionary prophet when in December 1984 he summoned other commissioners to Royaumont Abbey (outside Paris) for a crucial contemplative retreat. Delors analysed the crisis of Europe and the failed dream of a new, united Europe with analytic precision, brutal frankness and prophetic vision. He warned his fellow commissioners that if Europe did not recognize its *kairos*-time (this author's expression) and failed to seize the historic moment, it could anticipate a 21st century in which it would be little more than a 'museum to be visited by American and Japanese tourists who like our cuisine and culture'.

'Europe's choice is between survival and decline' was the challenge of Delors as he called the EC to undertake a 'solemn commitment' to a strategic plan for recovery (Burstein 1991:36). The facts of a structural crisis had to be faced squarely and basic structures remade so as to become an efficient servant of the new Europe. Lessons were to be learned from others — even from ideological opponents! — especially in the area of removing government barriers for free trade. There was also to be a willingness to forget and forgive the animosities of the past (see the amazing 'metanoia' from Franco-German enmity to Franco-German amity!) in order to pave the way for a more viable future.

Does this brief survey contain any lessons and discernible seeds for change in the European spiritual climate? While relying on centuries of Christian history and benefiting from inherited traditions and institutions, the future of the European church should not become a hostage of its glorious past. Neither should the present lack of spiritual vitality, denominational divisions, religious indifference and other 'Christian ills' allow the church to reconcile itself to a *status quo* position and thus incapacitate itself for its God-given mission in and on behalf of the new and spiritually revitalized Europe.

## The spiritual crisis of Europe

In his introduction to a popular and largely pessimistic assessment of Europe's Christianity, a North American evangelical missiologist writes: 'Europe appears to be a continent on the verge of moral collapse. Decades of anaemic Christianity and humanistic philosophies have eaten the spiritual interior of this continent and Europe now stands at crossroads. Can it be saved?' (Henley 1978:9). This sounds very similar to the question, 'Can the West be converted?', asked by Lesslie Newbigin (1987:2), an author known for his perceptive analysis of post-Enlightenment Western culture as a specific missionary challenge. A European missiologist begins his survey 'The Church in Europe' with the sentence: 'There is a general agreement that the Church in Europe is in a poor state of health.' He collaborates this diagnosis with, among other things, the statistical statement that 'some 1.8 million people in Europe leave the Church each year' (Cotterell 1989:37). The late Bishop Stephen Neill, writing at the time when he was a professor of ecumenics and missions at the University of Hamburg, was equally pessimistic: 'Church attendance in Europe is everywhere declining; the lack of ordained ministers is grave in every country, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant. The secularization of life

proceeds apace. We seem to be watching a steady diminution of the spiritual capital of Europe, the disappearance of the old synthesis of religion and culture, and a desiccation of the human spirit, as a result of which men not merely are not religious, but can see no reason why they should concern themselves beyond the world of the senses.' In 1970 (2 April), *TIME* magazine reported of the progressive paralysis of European religious life and of 'a secular-minded culture that suggests eclipse rather than the presence of God' (cf. Detzler 1979). Addressing the West European Consultation on Evangelism in 1977, Dr Visser't Hooft pointed out, 'European culture has become a debate between three forces: Christianity, scientific rationalism and neo-pagan vitalism' (1977:355). For a long time, the impression was created that scientific rationalism was victorious. Recent decades with the negative results of the technocratic civilization, nuclear threat, and ecological devastation have, however, changed the picture and given rise to a growth of a new irrationalism, Europe's neo-paganism. Visser't Hooft seems to agree with Gustav C. Jung, who claimed that the Christian message has neither reached nor transformed the soul of the European man and that Christianity in Europe is like a cathedral built on the foundation of a pagan temple. His conclusion: 'Now there is surely need for evangelism, revival and renewal. There are millions of lapsed Christians who need to hear anew what the Gospel has to offer them. But there are today in Europe even more millions who are not adequately described as lapsed Christians, because they have in fact turned to another religion' (1977:350).

The real status and strength of the Christian faith in Europe today cannot be ascertained by review of its historical role nor by present-day statistics of church membership. Europe is far less 'Christian' than its history, religious institutions and statistical figures seem to indicate. There is now a growing realization among churches in Western Europe that a baptized person or a person who pays church taxes is not necessarily a Christian. Nominal Christians among the Protestants in central and northern Europe, the Catholics in France and southern Europe, as well as among the Orthodox in south-eastern Europe and the USSR, are increasingly seen, not only by evangelical mission activists from North America, but in many cases by their own concerned bishops, as 'unreached people groups' in need of evangelism. In that very context, the questions about the role of baptism in the appropriation of salvation and about the assurance of salvation are increasingly pushing themselves onto the agenda of theological debates and ecclesiastical practices.

Any discussion of the future of Christian mission in Europe must take into account a growing indifference to anything religious such as is found in no other continent in the world. Bishop Hanns Lilje (at the time the presiding bishop of Germany's Lutherans and president of the European Council of Churches), in his *Christianity in a Divided Europe*, distinguishes between three types of atheism: *atheismus militans* (militant atheism, especially of the communist type associated with Eastern Europe), *atheismus subtilis sive philosophicus* (subtle or philosophical atheism of rationalistic intellectuals), and *atheismus practicus* (practical atheism). The last term is borrowed from the well-known biblical scholar, Johann Albrecht Bengel, who in his famous commentary, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, points out that the rich man in the Lord's parable (Lk. 16:19-31) was not condemned for wrong belief or heresy but because he lived by a certain *atheismus practicus*, ignoring God and eternity. Lilje is convinced that though this formula is more than 200 years old, it is 'an excellent description of the most difficult, spiritual phenomenon in the Western world today. For it suggests what it says: not an explicit antitheistic theory but the actual and practiced disregard of God. Here is not apostasy but weakness, not an open revolt but the silent paganism' (1965:32-33). This is a biblical picture of modern Europe which seems to see no need for God or any theistic concepts. This widespread phenomenon echoes the attitude expressed in Jean Paul Sartre's philosophy: 'What man needs is to find himself again and to understand that nothing can save him from himself, not even a valid proof of the existence of God' (1956:311). Whether God exists or not does not matter any longer, for it seems to make no difference to the average European, who may be a culturally conditioned 'nominal Christian' but is actually a 'practising atheist'. By this European majority, God is completely disregarded and the Christian church largely ignored.

For most West European Christians, faith does not make much difference in life. Sunday is not a day of worship (as it still seems to be in North America) but only a welcome break between two working weeks. The process of secularization was the

breeding ground of Christian nominalism, which was in turn followed by a marked shift from nominal Christianity to varying degrees of pragmatic atheism throughout Europe. As a result, the church is now largely disregarded and seems to have no significant influence on individuals, families and public life. 'Despite the various degrees of influence presiding in different countries, at no point can it be said that Christian conviction — divorced from political pretension — is giving decisive direction to the trends of events in Europe' (Herman 1953:198). There is a general lack of clarity about what Christianity stands for, and widespread ignorance of the most basic facts and values of Christian faith.

The workshop on 'Nominalism Today' at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Manila estimated that 75-80 per cent of professing Christians — at least 1 billion — are nominal. The conclusion was that this is 'the largest religious group in need of evangelization today' (Douglas 1990:446). The workshop divided nominal Christians into four categories: 'ethnic-religious identity' nominal, second-generation nominal, ritualistic nominal, and syncretistic nominal. The Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches in Europe are in themselves a complex mission field in which all four types of nominals exist and should become priority concern for intentional and comprehensive programmes of evangelization. Awakening the religiously indifferent and those who have found false security in a superficially sacramentalistic, cultural and/or nationalistic and yet only nominal Christianity is a very complex challenge. Evangelism in Europe must also take into account large numbers of those who have been 'disappointed by Christianity or have remained at a level of a merely psychological piety or legal morality' (Weber 1979:78).

In 1978, the Lutheran World Federation sponsored a Regional Consultation (for North America, the Nordic countries of Europe and Germany) on Mission and Evangelism. The consultation was a significant step beyond the traditional understanding that mission is something the churches and missionary organizations in Europe and North America, which are relatively rich in qualified personnel and financial resources, do in the poorer countries of the southern hemisphere in the Third World, considering them as their sole mission fields. It concluded, as did other recent gatherings, that 'mission is indivisible', and began grappling seriously with the thesis that 'mission begins on our doorstep. And for the superficially large churches it is precisely here that there is a vital need for mission' (Lutheran World Federation 1979:vi). The West European churches need to take a hard look at themselves and face the realities of their spiritual crisis in order to realize that they themselves have become a mission field. 'Folk and state churches are conscious of the paradox of their empty churches on the one hand, and their solid church institutions on the other; the evidence of secularization; religious frustration; materialism with all its ramifications in western societies; the invasion of new religious and pseudo-religions; . . .' (*ibid.*). These realities are descriptive not only of the more secularized Protestant West European countries but also of their Catholic counterparts, as evident from the recent Vatican encyclicals and repeated calls of Pope John II for 're-evangelization' of Europe.

## The challenges of a new Eastern Europe

Whatever is written about the future of Eastern Europe at this time must be written in pencil. All across Eastern Europe, and in the Soviet Union, monumental changes are taking place at a breathtaking speed and in most dramatic and unpredictable ways. The impact of *glasnost* and *perestroika* has put into reverse process the revolutionary events of 1917 and post-World War II European developments. The massive collapse of communism in Eastern Europe at the end of 1989 and in the Soviet Union in August 1991 have removed from the European scene the most impressive competitor to Christian faith and its most powerful opponent.

It is a well-known fact that wherever Communists came to power, their long-term goal was not only a classless, but also a religionless, society. Christian faith was viewed as a superstitious, obscurantist, obsolete, pre-scientific and thus totally irrelevant way of thinking. Christian institutions were treated as a reactionary remnant of the old order and a hindrance to the progress of the new society and full human liberation of their citizens. Since Communists had monopoly on both power (which they abused) and truth (which they distorted), they developed comprehensive strategies and powerful instruments for the eventual elimination of religion. This included restrictive legislation, total atheization of educational institutions and media,



control of selection and activity of church leaderships, etc. Policies and methods have differed from country to country and in different periods even within the same countries, depending on what was politically expedient during various historical periods and in different regions. Generalizations are impossible, for Eastern Europe has never been totally monolithic in the treatment of religion due to the complexity of its national, cultural and religious history of different nations and depending on international relationships and considerations. At best, however, Christian faith was barely tolerated and Christians marginalized and discriminated against as 'second-class citizens', and at worst, they were brutally persecuted. In Albania, for example, all visible expressions of religion were totally eradicated from 1967 onwards as that small country prided itself on becoming the 'first atheistic state in the world'. The story of Christian persecution under Stalin in the Soviet Union and during the Khrushchev era is well known (Hill 1991:69ff.) and does not need to be retold.

With the collapse of communism, a new spirit of hope has filled the widened horizons of new freedom. Today we are witnesses of the historical fact of the title of the latest book by Michael Bourdeaux — *The Gospel's Triumph Over Communism* (1991). Though the dramatic changes contain many elements of unpredictability, followers of Christ all across Eastern Europe are aware that this is the work of the Lord of history who has seen their suffering and longing for freedom, answered their prayers and provided them with a special *kairos* period to call their nations back to God and to the spiritual foundation for a free and truly 'new society'.

The general euphoria of East Europeans with a newly found freedom is, however, very quickly giving place to a sober encounter with the grim realities that threaten the prospects of a free, peaceful and prosperous future society. Eastern Europe is presently going through a very difficult political transition, moving away from one-party totalitarian regimes toward some kind of multi-party parliamentary democracy. Mistakes are being made as the ABCs of democracy first have to be learned, and new institutions and traditions of democracy have yet to be established. The transition is equally painful economically as Eastern Europe moves away from the centrally planned 'command' economy toward some kind of a viable free-market economy. Economic recovery will be slow as the huge bureaucratic apparatuses have to be dismantled, many state-subsidized factories closed (causing potentially massive social unrests and thus bringing instability to the society) and the mindset of the people changed. Re-education for formerly stifled creativity and initiative, so important for the free-market economy, may take considerable time. Social unrest, disillusionment of the impoverished masses and the general mentality of dependence may create environments conducive to new dictatorships, or at least tempt politicians to control the economy in similar ways to those of the Communist period.

The major problem for the Christian church and its mission may be the temptation to return to a quasi-Constantinian model of church-state co-operation. In the process of replacement of Communist ideology by nationalistic ideologies there is an intense and valid rediscovery of national-religious identity. The churches are given the rightful recognition for having historically preserved the sense of nationhood, language and culture, especially in the Balkans under the centuries of the Islamic Ottoman-Turkish imposition. They are also rightfully credited for their opposition to the Communist system and for keeping alive certain endangered national and spiritual values. On the negative side, however, the discernible shifts 'from totalitarianism to tribalism' (issuing in inter-ethnic conflicts and wars) and 'from rights to roots' threaten the democratic processes in most of the East European countries. They also present a dangerous resurgence of new national-religious totalitarianisms. National churches (especially Orthodox in several republics of the Soviet Union, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia, and Catholic in Poland, Hungary and Croatia) reassert their claims of monopoly on religious life and activity in their nations. In these countries, belonging to the national church is becoming less a question of theological persuasion and allegiance to Christ and more a question of patriotism and bona fide citizenship.

Protestantism in general is looked upon with great suspicion as that radical movement which in the past has divided Christendom and as a modernized, Western faith and thus a foreign intrusion which in the present in its various fragmented forms threatens the national and religious identity and unity of the

people. Democratically and ecumenically illiterate clergy, and militant fanatics among laity, are frequently opposed to Protestant evangelicals as disruptive sectarians involved in dangerous proselytizing and unpatriotic activities. It is not inconceivable that some evangelical and other leaders of religious minorities could become the new 'dissidents' of the post-Communist era in Eastern Europe.

## The new Europe: what is to be done?

The religious situation in Europe is a peculiarly complex one and generalizations are hardly possible since situations and status of the church(es) differ from country to country and there are significant variations between different parts of the same countries. Christian institutions play a prominent part in some countries, while in others they are virtually ignored. The following proposals are in no way exhaustive and need to be both expanded and further elaborated if the gospel is to make a significant impact in post-Christian Western and post-Communist Eastern Europe.

First, the church must *reclaim the historical reliability and truthfulness of the Christian gospel*. The spiritual crisis of Europe is also an intellectual crisis, a crisis of truth which is in the very centre of the 'modern eclipse of God'. In our age of relativity, atheism, agnosticism and denial of all absolutes, when the very truth of any truth is under suspicion, the validity of the gospel truth is either outrightly denied or largely ignored. All across Europe, the proclamation of the gospel has to become once again communication of knowledge of the foundational facts of Christian faith as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and centred in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: 'By this Gospel you are saved, that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared' (1 Cor. 15:2-5). The faithful, brave and creative proclamation of the gospel must be grounded in these foundational facts of the universally valid truth, for truth is foundational for trust. Or, as Stephen Neill puts it in his *Call to Mission*, 'The only reason for being a Christian is the overpowering conviction that the Christian faith is true' (1970:10). Whether it is in the context of a Western relativity of all religions or in the encounter with the Marxist-type 'scientific atheism', it is necessary to remember William Temple's dictum: 'The Gospel is true for all, if it is true at all' (1937:82). This gospel must be unashamedly proclaimed all across the lands of Europe as not only the truth about God and our own lost condition apart from Christ but also as 'the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes' (Rom. 1:16).

Secondly, we must *renew the credibility of the Christian witness*. Missions and evangelism are not primarily a question of methodology, money, management and numbers, but rather a question of authenticity, credibility and spiritual power. For a significant impact of the Christian gospel in Europe, both West and East, the question of world evangelization, 'How shall they hear?', can be rightly answered only after we have answered, 'What shall they see?'. The biblical logic demands for *being* to precede *doing*. Newbigin is right when he concludes his *Foolishness to the Greeks* with the chapter 'The Call to the Church' focused on the question, 'What must we be?' (1986:124ff.). In Eastern Europe we have learned that Marxist criticism of religion is not always wrong, for the Christian religion has a long and heavy historical ballast that presents a serious hindrance for the re-evangelization of our continent. The rise and spread of both Western and Marxist atheism seems to be proportionally related to the shrinking credibility of the Christian church. In going out to evangelize in Yugoslavia, I frequently tell our seminary students that our main task may be simply to 'wash the face of Jesus', for it has been dirtied and distorted by both the compromises of institutional Christianity through the centuries and the antagonistic propaganda of atheistic communism in recent decades. The mission and the message of the Christian church have no credibility apart from their visibility as expressed in the quality of new life, mature and responsible relationships in the believing community and a loving concern and sacrificial service on behalf of the needy in society. The renewal of the credibility of the Christian witness goes hand in hand with the recovery of the whole gospel, which implies a joyful celebration of God's gift of salvation and continuous openness to the Holy Spirit to authenticate the Word of God. As I have stated elsewhere, 'The whole Gospel covers proclamation of truth and exhibition of love, manifestation of power and integrity of life. In the task of world evangelization, it will also require less competition and more co-operation, less self-sufficiency and more self-denial, less ambition to lead and more willingness to serve, less of a

drive to dominate and more of the desire to develop' (Kuzmic 1990:201).

Thirdly, one of the central and most urgent tasks for both Western and Eastern European churches is to *recover a practical missionary ecclesiology, the missionary character of the believing community* (Newbigin 1989). European churches have to recognize that faith is not automatically inherited from generation to generation and that the main task of the church is not its institutional and mechanistically sacramental self-perpetuation. The church's mission in the world should not be reduced to isolated political statements and good deeds, as if the church were just a religio-social agency. Neither should the ministry of the clergy be reduced to the serving of baptisms, weddings and funerals. The churches need to be internally renewed by the Holy Spirit in order to become recognizable as 'the spontaneous overflow of a community of praise . . . the radiance of a supernatural reality . . . a place of joy, of praise, of surprises, and of laughter — a place where there is a foretaste of the endless surprises of heaven' (Newbigin 1986:149). This will also require, as Newbigin puts it, 'the energetic fostering of a clericalised lay theology' (1986:142), the rediscovery of the priesthood of all believers along with the discovery of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the related idea of Christian stewardship. The recognition that the congregation is the proper agent for missionary and evangelistic activities and that the task should not be relegated to outside agencies, specialized ministries and zealous, evangelistically minded individuals is an imperative. The post-Reformation institutional divorce between church and mission which made the voluntary groups rather than the churches responsible for mission has to be overcome by new theological and structural developments. In conjunction with this, one of the crucial questions to be studied is, 'Are parish and congregational structures in Europe sufficiently flexible to be missionary congregations?' (Senft 1978:96).

Fourthly, the recovery of historical reliability and truthfulness has to be accompanied by an effort to *renew the intelligibility and relevance of the Christian faith for contemporary secularized and religiously indifferent Europeans*. The gospel of Jesus Christ 'is not something that man made up', for it was received by 'revelation from Jesus Christ' (Gal. 1:11-12). This is why the NT never uses the word 'gospel' in the plural. It is important to recognize, however, that Jesus and other NT evangelists portray considerable flexibility and creative freedom in adapting, translating and variously communicating the gospel in different political and cultural settings. While the basic content of the message is always recognizable and unchanging, the presentations are never the same. There are no pre-packaged, universally applicable formulations of the gospel given for either indoctrination or as if there was some magic power in the language itself. The missionary vocation of the church is to build bridges across the wide gap between the ancient world of the true and powerful biblical story and the modern secularized, technological age which is biblically illiterate. Helmut Thielicke, that rare example of a German theologian who was also an effective preacher and creative communicator, reminds us that 'the Gospel must be preached afresh and told in new ways to every generation, since every generation has its own unique questions. This is why the Gospel must be constantly forwarded to a new address, because the recipient is repeatedly changing his place of residence' (1970:10). The potential recipients of the gospel in Europe, both East and West, have been 'changing their address' ideologically, philosophically and culturally in this century more frequently and drastically than in any other area of the world. The radical, ideologically inspired secularization of Eastern Europe and the similar cultural developments in the pluralist and materialistic West European countries have produced new generations of biblically illiterate Europeans. The message of the cross and salvation have very little meaning for the relativistic and pluralist, consumer-oriented Western societies and even less meaningful significance for those who grew up in a system which denied that Jesus ever existed and 'scientifically' argued that any belief in God and spiritual realities is superstition. The Soviet government, for example, claimed only a few years ago that one of the successes of its educational system and atheistic propaganda was evident in the fact that around 90 per cent of their young people aged 16-19 adhered to atheism as their world-view. Though these figures need to be relativized and conclusions qualified, they remain, however, indicative of a major missionary challenge in the new Europe.

Missionary outreach to these spiritually impoverished and disoriented generations will require an ability to understand their beliefs and prejudices and to translate the gospel into their thought categories with intelligence, clarity and relevance. In this process of

incarnating the gospel in the new European culture, the pitfalls of some of the Western Protestant 'apostles of modernity' must be avoided, for in their almost neurotic anxiety about the relevance of Christianity they have frequently amputated, rather than adapted, the biblical message and thus rendered it powerless. Transcendenceless 'this-worldliness', with a concern for relevance and modernity (a liberal Protestant and, to a lesser extent, a modern Catholic temptation), must be avoided. Equally, total theological and communicative rigidity and over-pious 'other-worldliness' in the name of historical faithfulness (the temptation of the Eastern Orthodox and evangelical fundamentalists) is not the way ahead for Christian mission in contemporary Europe. Both betray the gospel of Jesus Christ: the first, in its attempt to make it more attractive and palatable to secularized minds, renders it powerless, and the second renders it meaningless in its refusal to enter into dialogue with the world and its inability to translate contextually the message of salvation to its secularized contemporaries.

Fifthly, in spite of relative failures of the 20th-century ecumenical dreams and efforts, *the quest for Christian unity remains an imperative* in the light of both biblical and contemporary missionary requirements. Churches need to continue to ask themselves the painful question: 'How can a sinful and divided church announce to the world the gospel of salvation and reconciliation?' The mainstream Christian churches in Western Europe, but especially in Eastern Europe with the recent political openness and the 'attractiveness' of that 'mission field', will increasingly face competition from new groups and denominations, both the indigenous and the imported kind. The unco-ordinated and, at times, culturally and religiously ill-prepared and insensitive missionary activities from North America will create confusion, unnecessary duplication and growth of new denominations and independent groups with various theological emphases, ecclesiological models and missionary practices. Sects and cults will also flourish, taking full advantage of the spiritual void, political freedom and the abysmal ignorance of the basic tenets of the Christian faith by so many Europeans. In light of the cultural and ecclesiastical history of East European nations, the creation of a competitive, free religious market will not be without pain and conflict. If the question of biblical unity, co-operation, mutual trust and integrity — all under the biblical umbrella of the Lordship of Jesus Christ — are not properly addressed, this process can become counter-productive and result in discrediting the message and the mission of the church at the time of their greatest opportunity and need.

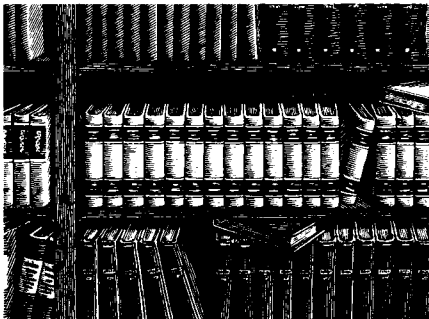
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# BOOK



# REVIEWS

## 2 Samuel (Word Biblical Commentary 11)

Arnold A. Anderson

Dallas: Word, 1989, xl + 301 pp., \$24.99.

Anderson's volume joins the growing corpus of literature on the books of Samuel. The approach is that of a traditional commentary, involving textual and exegetical analysis combined with discussion of literary 'strata' allegedly discernible in the narrative. Anderson does not employ to any great extent the methods of the more recent discourse-oriented analyses which emphasize the artistry of the writer, although occasionally he does utilize insights derived from authors such as Fokkelman and Gunn.

Although Anderson questions the 'local text theory' of Frank M. Cross, accepted by both Klein (*1 Samuel*, WBC) and McCarter (*1, 2 Samuel*, 2 vols., AB), he quotes McCarter's observation that 'none of the ancient witnesses to the text of Samuel has a monopoly on primitive readings' (p. xxiii). For this reason, Anderson concludes that each 'variant should be considered on its own merits' (p. xxiii). In general, he seems to propose fewer reconstructions of the text based on the DSS material or the LXX than either Klein or McCarter, although he is ready to utilize these text traditions when there are good reasons for doing so. The sections on 'Translation' and 'Notes' are, in this reviewer's opinion, the greatest strength of the commentary.

On questions of authorship and composition, Anderson moves in the mainstream of contemporary scholarship. He accepts the

general consensus that 2 Samuel is made up from four main blocks of material: 1. The History of David's Rise (HDR, 1 Sa. 16 (or 15)-2 Sa. 5); 2. The Ark Narrative (1 Sa. 4-6 + 2 Sa. 6); 3. The Succession Narrative (SN, 2 Sa. 9-20 + 1 Ki. 1-2); 4. The Appendices (2 Sa. 21-24).

early in the reign of David when questions concerning the legitimacy of his kingship were most acute (p. xxxi). He dates the SN to early in the reign of Solomon and views it as 'intended to show that David was not under a curse in spite of the past events, and that Solomon was the rightful heir contrary to popular expectations (*cf.* 1 Ki. 2:15) and despite his youth and parentage' (p. xxxiii). In Anderson's view, the 'succession narrative' was 'not written to answer the question, "Who of David's sons will be king?" (as Rost has argued), because by the time the SN was composed, the answer to this question was already an accomplished fact. It is far more likely that the question on the lips of many people was, "Is any of David's sons fit to sit on the throne of Israel?"' (p. xxxiii). In addition to this modification of the traditional understanding of the purpose of the SN, Anderson also suggests that it may begin as early as 1:1-16.

Anderson's commitment to the Deuteronomistic History theory affects many parts of his commentary and leads him not only to identify numerous 'Deuteronomistic' additions to earlier material, but also to find material that was reshaped at various stages in its tradition history. This, of course, affects the question of historicity and whether or not things really happened as they are reported in the narratives of 2 Samuel. Anderson of necessity concludes that we cannot assume that all the events and dialogues contained in the book happened just as the present text suggests.

This review is hardly the place to engage the questions of the date of Deuteronomy, the putative existence of the Deuteronomistic History and the Succession Narrative, but all of these issues need to be addressed in assessing Anderson's commentary, because they are not just theoretical but affect interpretation. These matters also raise the basic question of the methodology to be utilized in writing an 'evangelical' commentary. Anderson's methodology seems to lie more in the mainstream of contemporary critical scholarship than in an approach governed by the constraints of an evangelical view of Scripture.

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## Job 1-20 (Word Biblical Commentary 17)

David J.A. Clines

Dallas: Word Books, 1989, cxv + 501 pp., \$25.99.

The author of this exhaustive commentary thinks his work on Job may be the longest since that of Gregory the Great (p. xiii). When finished, it will be one of the few multi-volume commentaries on the book of Job in this century. He is too wordy but probably successful in his attempt to balance theology and linguistics. Dhorme's massive volume makes greater use of the Septuagint and other versions, but Clines begs off from this arduous task, 'using them only when they promise to shed light on the Hebrew text' (p. xxxii). This appears wise since the LXX leaves out a third of the book and gives lavish glosses on some passages.

His Introduction consists of a series of orientation essays, half of which is a large bibliography of books about Job, beginning with patristic and Jewish commentaries and including more than scholarly works. He presents other bibliographies by modern scholars at the beginning of each section. Despite all this, he has chosen to ignore works that are part of larger commentaries and occasionally important material is overlooked in his discussions of certain passages.

Clines claims to speak with different voices (points of view), sometimes that of Job and sometimes of his counsellors or of the author of the book, but the Explanations are obviously his own voice. He tries to be sympathetic to the counsellors. The translations tend to reflect his voice more than is desirable because he doesn't hesitate to add words that enhance his unique interpretations. I seriously question, for example, his translation (and therefore interpretation) of 16:20, as well as his interpretation of 19:25.

Clines, at points, seems to lack discernment about what belongs in a commentary and what might be fine for a group discussion about the book of Job. This fits with his assessment that there are numerous valid meanings to be wrung from every passage. This attitude is displayed on p. 52 where he quotes a lengthy section from the novel, *The Only Problem*, by Muriel Spark, who reads modern romance into the brief words about Job's wife. Clines thinks this is 'not a reading forbidden by the text'. There may be a hundred readings not forbidden because a particular text is so short, but is that what exegesis of a text is all about? This commentary would not be so wordy and therefore more valuable if this kind of material were omitted.

It is refreshing that Clines does not follow the weak and worn-out view that the book of