

Themelios

An International Journal for Pastors and Students of
Theological and Religious Studies



Volume 29

Issue 2

Spring, 2004

Contents

Should Evangelicals Participate in the 'Third Quest for the Historical Jesus'?

Michael Bird

Gender and God-Talk: Can We Call God 'Mother'?

Richard S. Briggs

Children, Covenant and the Church

David F. Wright [1897-2008]

The Blurring of Time Distinctions in Roman Catholicism

Leonardo De Chirico

How Shall We Sing The Psalms - A Review Article

Jamie Grant

The Last Word

Robbie F. Castleman

Shouldn't Evangelicals Participate in the 'Third Quest for the Historical Jesus'?

Michael Bird

Michael Bird is 28 years old and is a PhD candidate in New Testament at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia as well as Pastoral Intern at Grace Bible Church.

Jesus the ?

In recent times there are literally shelf loads of books out purporting to give the real story on the 'historical Jesus'. It has almost reached the stage where religious studies libraries need to offer a 'Jesus the ...' section with titles such as *Jesus the Exorcist*, *Jesus the Healer*, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, *Jesus the Sage*, *Jesus the Seer*, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian*, *Jesus the Prophet*, *Jesus the Man*, *Jesus the Magician*, *Jesus the Christ*, *Jesus the Jew* and *Jesus the Messiah* to name but a few. If that is not enough it has now reached the point where there are also a plethora of books being written about the scholarly accounts of Jesus.¹ So if you are not reading the books about Jesus you could be reading the books about Jesus. In this labyrinth of scholarship what is an evangelical to make of it? In particular, how should evangelicals react towards what has commonly become known as the 'Third Quest for the Historical Jesus'? Should any historical quest be rejected out of hand as 'dangerous' to orthodoxy or can it be embraced at least in part? It is in the midst of such turbulent questions that I will attempt to steer a course that is hopefully acceptable to evangelical faith and scholarship.

The quest for the historical Jesus and Jesus Christ superstar

With the onset of the Enlightenment in the 1700s the Scriptures came to be scrutinised by critical methods of historical research. The first major study of Jesus in this vain was

¹ Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press, 1994); B.D. Chilton and C.A. Evans, *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Craig A. Evans, *Life of Jesus Research: an annotated bibliography* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Robert B. Strimple, *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995); Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996); Ben Witherington, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (2nd edn.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997); Mark Allan Powell, *The Jesus Debate: Modern Historians Investigate the Life of Christ* (Oxford, England: Lion, 1999).

conducted by H.S. Reimarus (1694–1768) and was entitled *Fragments*.² This presented Jesus as a revolutionary Zealot who was duly executed for insurrection, and the disciples then stole his body and then touted belief in a resurrection. Several other portraits of Jesus followed by scholars such as David Friedrich Strauss, Johannes Weiss, Ernst Renan and William Wrede. The purpose of such studies was twofold: (i) To destroy the orthodox picture of Jesus; and (ii) To erect another view of Jesus that was free from theological influence, that would be acceptable to the modern mind (i.e. nothing miraculous) and be a worthy moral example. This quest for the historical Jesus was brought to an abrupt end by Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), the German NT scholar and missionary doctor, in his book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.³ Schweitzer pointed out that all the various attempts to construct Jesus historically ended up doing little other than projecting their own aspirations onto Jesus. The liberal Jesus who proclaimed the love of God and the brotherhood of man was the imaginative invention of modern theology. Schweitzer's own study of Jesus yielded that of a Jewish apocalypticist who waited for the kingdom of God to come and when it did not arrive, he threw himself on the wheel of history to force its entry, only to have it roll back and crush him in the process.

Following Schweitzer's devastating critique, the intervening years between the First and Second World War saw a marked decrease in interest in historical Jesus study (though interest did not completely wane, especially amongst English-speaking scholars). This is partly attributable to the rise of Karl Barth's neo-orthodox theology and Rudolf Bultmann's demythologisation which made the Jesus of history either irrelevant or irretrievable, although both scholars strenuously denied this it seemed the logical implication of their work. Then in 1953 Ernst Käsemann presented a lecture at the University of Marburg on 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus'.⁴ Käsemann's contention was that Easter did not totally eradicate the continuity between Jesus and the early church. The primitive church never lost its interest in the life history of Jesus as being properly basic for faith. This led to a new impetus in the Jesus research which has subsequently become known as the 'New Quest' for the historical Jesus.⁵ Its notable proponents have included James Robinson, Günther Bornkamm, Norman Perrin, Eduard Schweizer, Ernst Fuchs, Eduard Schillebeeckx. The Jesus Seminar arguably belongs to this camp. The New Questers have felt a little more confident about outlining a life of Jesus by use of form critical tools. Yet they remained sceptical about the majority of material ascribed to Jesus in the gospels and they did not really extend our understanding of Jesus very far. When you introduce your book on Jesus with the words, 'No one is any longer in the position to write a life of Jesus'⁶ you don't really have very far

² H.S. Reimarus, *Fragments*, trans. Ralph S. Fraser, ed. Charles H. Talbert (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985 [1778]).

³ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery (3rd edn.; Great Britain: Unwin, 1945 [1906]). It is available in complete form on the internet at www.earlychristianwritings.com/schweitzer/index.html. For an evaluation of Schweitzer's contribution see, Simon Gathercole, 'The Critical and Dogmatic Agenda of Albert Schweitzer's Quest of the Historical Jesus', *TynBul* 51 (2000): 261–83.

⁴ Ernst Käsemann, 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus', in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W.J. Montague (London: SCM, 1964).

⁵ See, James M. Robinson, *A New Quest for the Historical Jesus* (SBT 25; London: SCM, 1959).

⁶ Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. I. Mcluskey, F. Mcluskey and J. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 13.

to go. Despite constructing a more historically convincing portrait of Jesus, the resultant product was a Jesus who often looked far more like a twentieth-century Jewish existential philosopher than a first-century Jewish Messiah. In retrospect, when one looks at both the first and, to a much lesser extent, the New Quest for the historical Jesus the results appear to resemble a line from the opening song of Jesus Christ Superstar, 'I remember when this whole thing began, no talk of God then we called you a man. And believe me, my admiration for you hasn't died.'

Following the lyrics of Tim Rice, some scholars claim that they can see clearly through the corridors of history, they can see around the naïveté of dogma, they can see beyond the fog of faith and the Jesus they see is not the orthodox one. Jesus is a man, a brilliant man, a religious genius even. He is a man who is also worthy of imitation, but he is not the same man as we find in the gospels. For the gospels have so radically re-worked the tradition that there remains only but the faintest whisper of the authentic voice of Jesus. That is perhaps an overly simplistic and somewhat unfair caricature of previous quests for Jesus, but I would maintain that at the core level it remains an accurate one.

The Jesus Quest Episode III: a new hope

In contrast to the scepticism of the 'First' and 'New Quest', a recent paradigm shift has occurred in historical Jesus studies in the last twenty years that has subsequently been called the 'Third Quest for the Historical Jesus'.⁷ What distinguishes the Third Quest from the New Quest are three main things:⁸

- i. An emphasis on the Jewish nature of Jesus and early Christianity. Whereas scholars in the Bultmannian era attempted to understand Jesus in the context of the theology of the early church, scholars are now studying Jesus within the context of first-century Judaism.⁹
- ii. A general consensus has emerged that Jesus' message was predominantly eschatological. The 'kingdom of God' to which much of Jesus' ministry was directed to does not refer to an egalitarian utopia but must be understood via the matrix of Jewish apocalyptic expectation; and
- iii. A greater degree of optimism concerning the historical reliability of traditions concerning Jesus in the canonical Gospels.¹⁰ One can compare the above statement by Bornkamm with the following statement by E.P. Sanders:

⁷ Stephen Neil and N.T. Wright *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), 379-403; N.T. Wright, 'Quest for the Historical Jesus', in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:796-802.

⁸ Some scholars reject the idea of a 'Third' Quest preferring instead to see some strands of recent Jesus scholarship as simply an extension of the 'New' Quest. They also (rightly) deny that there ever was a moratorium of Jesus research between the First and New Quest. See, John Reumann, 'Jesus and Christology', in *The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters*, eds. E.J. Epp and G.W. MacRae (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 501-64; Dale C. Allison, Jr, 'The Contemporary Quest for the Historical Jesus', *IBS* 18 (1996): 174-80; S.E. Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussions and New Proposals* (JSNTSS 191; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 28-62.

⁹ James H. Charlesworth, 'Jesus Research: A Paradigm Shift for New Testament Scholars', *AusBR* 38 (1990): 22. See further and more extensively on the distinctives of the 'Third Quest', William R. Telford, 'Major Trends and Interpretive Issues in the Study of Jesus', in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current of Research*, eds. Bruce Chilton and C.A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 57-58; Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 10-11.

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.¹¹

Catholic scholar John P. Meier lists what he thinks are the present gains from the Third Quest:

- i. The ecumenical and international dimension to the scholars involved in the research (as opposed to a band of Continental Lutherans);
- ii. A re-examination of various texts as reliable sources for the quest;
- iii. New insights from archaeology, philology and sociology in the illumination of Jesus and his context;
- iv. A more accurate picture of the diverse and variegated nature of Palestinian Judaism;
- v. Clarification of the criteria of historicity which has led to a more balanced appreciation of the historical traditions underlying the gospels;
- vi. A more positive treatment of the miracle traditions in the gospels; and
- vii. Taking the Jewishness of Jesus with seriousness.¹²

In my own view, it is precisely this Third Quest for the historical Jesus that provides the greatest possible hope for a more sympathetic reading of the gospels as historical sources and is likely to provide a reasonable answer as to why the church began, and why it believed what it did and acted how it did.

To Quest or not to Quest, that is the Quest-ion!

In support of the proposition that evangelicals should be actively engaged in the Third Quest I would like to present several lines of argument.

Apprehensions which evangelicals have about historical Jesus research can be overcome. Some quarters of evangelicalism have reservations about any supposed historical quest for Jesus because it has limitations that are intrinsic to its purely historical character, it implies a discontinuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ who became the object of the church's faith. These people also have a methodological

¹⁰ One should compare the view of Norman Perrin that Jesus research should start with the assumption of the inauthenticity of a text in the Synoptic Gospels unless its authenticity can be demonstrated, with James H. Charlesworth who defends the exact opposite view, viz., that material in the Synoptic Gospels should be afforded the *prima facie* assumption of authenticity unless its inauthenticity can be demonstrated. Charlesworth bases this on three premises:

(i) The intentionality of the texts imply it. (ii) Stories about Jesus were formulated and circulated within a few decades of his death where his followers (including eyewitnesses) attributed sayings, stories and actions to him. In contrast to the Rabbinic traditions (e.g. concerning Rabbi Hillel) that were not recorded till much later, the Jesus traditions took on written form in the same century that Jesus lived. (iii) The polemical context of the first Christians would make it difficult for anyone to deny the major facts of Jesus life (e.g. ministry in Galilee, Temple episode, crucifixion in Jerusalem etc.). Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967), 39; James H. Charlesworth, 'The Historical Jesus: Sources and a Sketch', in *Jesus Two Thousand Years Later*, eds. James H. Charlesworth and Walter P. Weaver (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 101.

¹¹ E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 2. Cf. Joachim Gnilka, *Jesus of Nazareth: Message and History* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 24.

¹² John P. Meier, 'The Present State of the "Third Quest" for the Historical Jesus: Loss and Gain', *Bib 80* (1999): 459-87.

objection against the manner in which such research has been conducted before. These suspicions are warranted but can be assuaged.

First, there are restrictions as to what historical research can do. The historical Jesus is not the 'real Jesus' because historical research is fallible in both its methodology and the degree of subjectivism it requires of the historian. The 'historical Jesus' is the picture of Jesus that emerges from the application of various historical tools and by the formation of hypotheses. By the same token what historical research can do is help us to understand the meaning of a saying or event in its historical context and also to probe as to what grounds we have for thinking that this saying or event is historically authentic. It also serves to weave together a unified and coherent portrait of Jesus that makes sense in a Jewish milieu and establishes the basis and direction for the beliefs of the early church.

Second: Historical study of Jesus does not necessarily imply a discontinuity between the 'Jesus of History' and the 'Christ of faith'.¹³ Lamentably, some scholars in former quests did (and still do) take this line. The Third Quest is more willing to posit a meaningful and genuine connection between Jesus and early Christianity. This premise is already impregnated in Käsemann's agenda for the New Quest but it is methodologically prosecuted by proponents of the Third Quest. For instance Markus Bockmuehl writes, 'It is historically legitimate to see Jesus of Nazareth in organic, causal, continuity with the faith of the early church'.¹⁴ Any study of Jesus that does not take into account the follow-on effect that he had with his followers is historically deficient. This should warn us about making any unnecessary disjunction between a pre-Easter and post-Easter Jesus.

Third, evangelicals regard so-called 'criteria of authenticity' with a degree of suspicion. Often the various criteria (e.g. multiple attestation, dissimilarity, coherence) are employed to isolate authentic fragments of the Jesus tradition away from the various developments and accretions of later tradition.¹⁵ Scepticism towards this approach is justified over against the scissors and paste approach some scholars have taken in relegating certain material to be secondary accretions of tradition. The classic example of this stems from the Jesus seminar who are quick to relegate anything remotely eschatological in Jesus' teachings to later development. We, however, cannot disprove the authenticity of any passage with any degree of certainty thus the role of such criteria should be confined to that of a positive examination of the traditions underlying a saying or narrative. Notably, Hooker, Calvert, Stein, Jonge, and Blomberg all apply the criteria in this way.¹⁶ Additionally, talk of 'criteria' is misleading as it requires some degree of falsification or verification of which we cannot in reality adjudicate upon. It is

¹³ See the well known work by Martin Kähler, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ*, trans. Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964).

¹⁴ Markus Bockmuehl, *This Jesus: Martyr, Messiah, Lord* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 8.

¹⁵ A helpful example of a positive employment of these criteria is in Paul Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 172-73.

¹⁶ Morna D. Hooker, 'Christology and Methodology', *NTS* 17 (1971): 486; D.G.A. Calvert, 'An Examination of the Criteria for Distinguishing the Authentic Words of Jesus', *NTS* 18 (1972): 218; Robert Stein, 'The 'Criteria' of Authenticity', in *Gospel Perspectives*, eds R.T. France, David Wenham and Craig Blomberg (Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), 1:225-63; Stewart C. Goetz and Craig L. Blomberg, 'The Burden of Proof', *JSNT* 11 (1981): 39-58; Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 63-67.

¹⁷ The term 'index' is indebted to Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 85-87; cf. too Rainer Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer* (WUNT 2.7; Tübingen: Mohr, 1981), 86-87; Scot McKnight, *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 66-69; Dale C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 7.

far better to speak of an 'index' rather than 'criterion' as it denotes an indication of authenticity rather than a litmus test for historical truth.¹⁷ Biblical authority is then not endangered by historical research – on the contrary, provided one commences with a presupposition that does not exclude the supernatural, it can actually enhance it. Furthermore, it is of no benefit to rest on our theological laurels and simply to assert the historical nature of Biblical texts, rather, as Bruce Chilton wrote, 'A primary evangelical and critical task is, not to peddle our assumptions, but to encourage the sort of open, detailed inquiry which will vindicate them.'¹⁸

Christianity is a historical religion and by necessity it must remain open to historical inquiry or it will otherwise degenerate into docetism.

On one level, historical study of Jesus has an important place in terms of the church's witness to the world. If you could prove that Buddha never existed little would change in Buddhist religious practice; the four noble truths would still be noble and the eight-fold path would remain the only means to attaining nirvana. Christianity, by contrast, stands or falls with its claim to historical character. Christianity appeals to the theatre of history as the domain of God's activity, and thus it is to historical study that we must go.¹⁹ There can be no question about it. At this point we cannot insulate ourselves from historical criticism by crying out for a different set of rules: that Jesus is 'supra-historical' or Easter is 'eschatological history' and therefore not verifiable according to canons of historical study. The result of such a retreat is that God is either so transcendent that he possesses no genuine relation to the space-time universe or else Christianity's key moments of revelation (e.g. Creation, Exodus, Calvary, and Pentecost) are abstracted from history. Lesslie Newbigin pointed out that the gospel is a public truth. It is therefore open to public inquiry. It is the evangelicals, including laity, ministers and scholars, who should be out there guiding this inquiry by their own interaction so as to point writers and readers to the Jesus who proclaimed and now embodies the gospel. William Lane Craig states:

For the evangelical church to remain silent at such a time as this and to allow the caricature of Jesus propounded by the Jesus Seminar to go uncontested would be an ill-conceived strategy indeed. Even if few people become Christians as a direct result of an apologetic argument, such defences do help to shape and preserve the intellectual milieu in which faith in the Jesus of the New Testament is still a rational alternative for most persons in our culture.²⁰

On another horizon, historical Jesus research also safeguards church belief and practice against ahistorical and docetic christological formulations. Luke Timothy Johnson chastises Questers (of all kinds) by asserting that the real Jesus is not discovered by historical inquiry but is the one experienced in the faith and worship of the

¹⁸ Bruce D. Chilton, 'An evangelical and critical approach to the sayings of Jesus', *Themelios* 3.3 (May 1978), 85.

¹⁹ G.B. Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation* (London: Athlone, 1965), 3; N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 11.

²⁰ William Lane Craig, 'Resurrection and the Real Jesus', in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up: A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan*, ed. Paul Copan (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 178.

²¹ Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, ch. 6.

contemporary church.²¹ No card carrying evangelical would want to dispute that, but at the same time, we need a check and balance against this view unless it degenerates into religious solipsism (i.e. the real Jesus is the one 'I' experience). After all, whose experience of Jesus should be considered authoritative or normative for faith and piety? Should it be the Jesus of Jim Jones, the Jesus of ultra-Pentecostals, the Jesus of the Catholic Mass, the Jesus of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Jesus of American Fundamentalism, the Jesus of the Crusades? The danger is, to borrow William Lane Craig's colourful turn of phrase, that we add a little bit of pixie dust, make a wish and believe anything we like about Jesus.²² In addition, we must be cautious of the recent trend in literary and reader-orientated studies that they do not relativise Christianity's historical origins. The gospels tell a ripping good story but the story has a referent beyond itself in the historical figure of Jesus. It is crucial to remember this, for if Jesus is not to become the product of our own minds and aspirations we must vigilantly ensure that the Jesus of creeds, of worship, of faith, of scholarship, of liturgy, of devotion, of sermons and piety is the one and the same Jew who walked the plains of Palestine.

*As N.T. Wright has proposed, historical study of Jesus is a necessary task of discipleship.*²³

How so? Sooner or later we must all ask the epochal question, 'Who is Jesus?' Even if you're an atheist you need to ponder 'Who is this Jesus I don't believe in?' For those of us who grew up in the household of faith sooner or later we make our faith our own by responding to Jesus for ourselves. If we have a passion to know Jesus and to make him known that will invariably draw us to the historical nature of his life and times.

Critical or non-conservative scholarship needs to be engaged, not ignored by evangelicalism.

I applaud the efforts of books that present dialogue between conservatives and non-conservatives, that promote interest in the study of Jesus and an understanding of opposing interpretations of Jesus. In particular the book, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* by N.T. Wright and Marcus Borg²⁴ represents a sterling effort by two very different, but learned scholars on how their scholarship impacts their faith. Another reason for reading and dialoguing with critical scholars is that we cannot refute their views without first reading them. We must also be seen to be disagreeing with them which provides an impetus for publishing books that interact with these scholars. That does not justify an *ad hominem* rejection but a well thought out gracious critique. By the same token we need to concede that it is possible to learn a great deal about Jesus from liberal and critical scholars. For example, John Dominic Crossan's, *The Historical Jesus*,²⁵ despite its erroneous conclusion, is a lucid and well written book in which one can learn much about the social, political and cultural climate of the Mediterranean in

²² William Lane Craig, 'Opening Address', in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up: A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan*, ed. Paul Copan (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 32.

²³ N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2000), 14-15.

²⁴ N.T. Wright and Marcus J. Borg, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998).

²⁵ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991).

Jesus' day. Similarly, Marcus Borg's, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus*,²⁶ is another book with several glaring errors and poignant insights. The danger is that by studying these scholars we may come under their spell and be induced to worship at the altar of scholarly respectability. That is simply the risk and reality of living in an unredeemed world. The alternative, withdrawal and estrangement, is not acceptable. Evangelicals cannot be the salt of the earth in absence. In this regard one can take lessons from several scholars of evangelical persuasion who are involved in the Third Quest including N.T. Wright, Richard Bauckham, Darrell L. Bock, Markus Bockmuehl, Scot McKnight, Peter Stuhlmacher, Graham Twelftree, Craig A. Evans and Ben Witherington to name a few. These scholars have interacted with the best of contemporary scholarship and have still been willing to put up their hand as retaining their orthodox beliefs.²⁷

Historical study of Jesus Christ reminds us that knowing Christ is not just a matter of knowing the benefits of his death and resurrection as applied to the believer in the doctrine of redemption but pertains also to understanding the various facets of his earthly existence.

Any study of Jesus Christ should involve rigorous appraisal of his aims and agendas in their historical context. Sadly, Protestant theology with its emphasis on the crucified, risen and exalted Jesus has led to a reading of Jesus in the Gospels which is skewed. We are given a picture of a sinless birth, a sin-bearing death and a lot of moralising in between. The entire life and teaching of Jesus becomes little more than an overture to Calvary.²⁸ Christology in essence becomes reducible to soteriology. Without jettisoning the crucial meaning and significance of the cross-resurrection we need concurrently to recognise that Jesus came in a certain period, to a certain people, with a certain message that carried certain connotations for his hearers. Things that Jesus said may well have been tied in some way to the socio-political climate of his day. We need not resort to spiritualising in order to make Jesus relevant to the modern world. The message of the kingdom of God meant that the climatic moment Israel has been waiting for was about to come to its gripping conclusion. The Messianic community left in the aftermath of Jesus' life and death has a crucial role in the continuing story of how God intends to repossess the world for himself. Historical Jesus research can also assist in answering questions concerning Jesus not naturally answered by simply amassing an assortment of proof texts from the gospels. Such questions might include: who did Jesus think he was? Did Jesus envisage a future mission to the Gentiles? What was Jesus' position vis-à-vis Israel? How did Jesus relate to the major Jewish sects of his day? Answers to these questions are implicit within the gospel tradition but they need to have the gaps in our knowledge filled out in order to form a more coherent grasp of who Jesus was. In this sense historical Jesus research makes an invaluable contribution to a biblical theology by demonstrating the link between Israel, Jesus and the church *historically* as well as *theologically*.

In the manner I am proposing, historical research is a type of 'Christology from below' and it provides a crucial presupposition to 'Christology from above' as it seeks to

²⁶ Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998).

²⁷ Evangelical participation in historical Jesus research could potentially reach a new high with the forthcoming *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* where, I hope, evangelical voices will be heard in the midst of scholarly discussion.

²⁸ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 14.

anchor the (dogmatic) theology of the church in historical realities. There should be no bipolarisation between history and theology: historical study must be performed with some theological presumption and the history of Jesus emits far-reaching theological significance.²⁹ Theology without history degenerates into docetism, whilst history without theology is reduced to an inane and prosaic catalogue of biographical facts.

The most suitable response evangelicals can make to the Third Quest is 'critical appropriation'.

Many valuable insights can be taken on board from proponents of the Third Quest. Yet at the same time many of the views being propounded in its wake should not be digested uncritically. Sadly, the Third Quest has produced its own share of questionable accounts of Jesus. Bruce D. Chilton's recent book *Rabbi Jesus* comes immediately to mind as he (untypically) makes some outlandish inferences about Jesus.³⁰ S.G.F. Brandon's book *Jesus and the Zealots*³¹ (incipiently a part of the Third Quest) attempted to resurrect the hypothesis that Jesus was a Jewish revolutionary. The problem with this thesis is that it poses a radical discontinuity between Jesus and his followers that is hard to fathom for if Jesus was such a revolutionary then why didn't his early followers continue in the attempted liberation of Palestine? Instead they took their message to the Gentiles that the God of Israel could redeem the pagans and make them his people. As with other religious movements in Palestine we should expect a close connection between a charismatic religious leader and his followers. The Essenes at Qumran persisted in the tradition of the *Teacher of Righteousness*. The ideals of Judas the Galilean were preserved in like like-minded insurgents until their mass suicide at Masada around AD 73; disciples of John the Baptist spread as far as Ephesus keeping the ascetic prophet's name alive (Acts 18:25; 19:1-7); the Pharisaic school of Hillel continued propagating the teachings of their leader well into the Rabbinic era. For this reason, asserting that Jesus was a Zealot poses a problem of historical discontinuity that is roughly analogous to trying to explain why a group of Al-Qaeda terrorists have traded their guns for guitars and have established a hippie commune in down-town Manhattan.

We must be cautious before diving into the Third Quest and be wary of exactly how shallow the scholarly waters can be. We should read with care and alertness, learn from and even engage in the renewed study of the Galilean peasant from Nazareth who changed the world. As 1 Thessalonians 5:21 says, 'Test everything; hold fast on that which is good'.

Conclusion

In the foregoing arguments I have attempted to legitimise the involvement of the evangelical church in the Third Quest for the historical Jesus. The basis of this is quite

²⁹ On theological significance of the historical quest for Jesus see, John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1:198-200; Colin Brown, 'Christology and the Quest of the Historical Jesus', in *Doing Theology for the People of God: Studies in Honour of J.I. Packer*, eds. Donald Lewis and Alister McGrath (Leicester: Apollon, 1996), 67-83; Leander E. Keck, *Who is Jesus: History in Perfect Tense* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2000).

³⁰ Bruce D. Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).

³¹ S.G.F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967).

simple: historical study of Jesus is a necessary task of discipleship and mission. The Third Quest also provides us with the right kind of tools we will need to undertake the project and it gives us an area of discourse to draw upon. Moreover, historical study of Jesus gets both Christians and non-Christians to ask the right question, namely who is Jesus? Amongst the myriad of answers available on book shelves, the internet and on television we need to offer a compelling alternative to the pseudo-lives-of-Jesus being presented to the public. The tragedy is: books which masquerade as scholarship often filter down into popular thinking. I have conversed with many non-Christians about Jesus and have been informed of some interesting facts that contemporary biblical scholarship is yet to appropriate. I have heard about the Jesus who went to India to study transcendental meditation. One gentleman tried to convince me that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. I lament further that most book stores that I frequent usually have in their religion section a Good News Bible, a biography of the Dalai Lama, a collection of poems by Helen Steiner Rice and inevitably some highly imaginative book about Jesus by the likes of Bishop Spong, A.N. Wilson or Barbara Thiering. Thus I contend that the only acceptable alternative is to studiously engage in our own quest for Jesus, as each generation must do for itself. In the press, in the pulpit and in person we must force a pluralistic world and a lethargic church to be confronted once more by the man and his message: Jesus Christ and the reign of God. As I. Howard Marshall urged us to do nearly three decades ago, we need to boldly confess, 'I believe in the historical Jesus'.³²

³² I. Howard Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977).

Gender and God-Talk: Can We Call God 'Mother'?

Richard S. Briggs

Richard Briggs teaches Old Testament at Cranmer Hall, St John's College, in Durham, and has previously taught courses in both Gender Studies and Hermeneutics. His book, *Reading the Bible Wisely* was published recently by SPCK.

Can we, should we, or should we not call God 'Mother'? Although originally the preserve of self-consciously radical theologies and church traditions, it is by no means uncommon now, across large parts of the theological spectrum, to see Christian liturgies and prayer-practices adopting the form of address 'God, Father and Mother of us all', or some such equivalent term. The question as to whether God is Father or Mother can rapidly become a contentious debate about whether or not God is male, and indeed whether God is female. Such debates often generate more heat than light, and various good points are thrown indiscriminately at the 'other side' without much genuine communication. In the words of Gail Ramshaw: 'About God's gender it is far easier to hold an impassioned opinion than to articulate a reasoned argument or a reasonable solution.'¹

'Is God male?' is, of course, the wrong question. God is, as all parties are likely to agree, neither male nor female. The real question is to what extent we are proscribed in our language about God. Must we restrict ourselves only to masculine terminology, or are we at liberty to adopt feminine terminology also? To put it more simply: if we can pray to God as Father, can we also pray to God as Mother?² There is evidently a third option: that we should drop all gender-specific language about God, and I will consider that briefly at the end. However, the aim of this article is not so much to answer the question about the appropriateness of using masculine and feminine language and imagery to talk about God, rather it is to clarify the different levels on which the discussion needs to be carried out, and thus to provide a framework for the debate. It will be helpful to proceed through this discussion by wearing two different hats, which for convenience I will label A and B.³ What follows is a dialogue on three levels:

- A. What the Bible says;
- B. What the Bible says when it is viewed in its historical context;
- C. What the Bible could possibly say i.e. how language about God works.

¹ Gail Ramshaw, 'The Gender of God', in Ann Loades (ed.), *Feminist Theology: A Reader* (London: SPCK, 1990), 168–80, here 169.

² Praying to God as Father can also, in certain circumstances, be problematic. The suitability of 'father' language in cases, e.g., of paternal abuse, is an important issue, but it is not the one I wish to address.

³ No reference to Barth's celebrated 'A and B' discussion is intended, where he takes man and woman, for better or worse (but undoubtedly for poorer) as 'not an A and a second A' but as 'an A and a B' — Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/4* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark), 169.

All these levels are important, but it is a matter of some frustration that people tend to respond to arguments pitched at one level with counter-claims pitched at another level, thus creating the effect of talking past each other. It is important to consider what the Bible says on this issue, even if it is equally important to recognise the various hermeneutical implications of accepting the point that the Bible did not set out to address this question directly, and that we are therefore engaged in the process of reading against its major intentions in an exercise such as this one.⁴ It, however, is equally important to note that biblical texts cannot be the whole of the matter. Biblical texts work within certain cultural and linguistic conventions and possibilities which also need to be explored:

Naming God truthfully is important, since to name God untruthfully is to delude ourselves and worship an idol. Naming God truthfully is especially important if language shapes and angles thinking and behaviour ... the fact that almost all our naming and depicting of God is in male terms (*he, king, father*) is either irrelevant or crucially significant, depending on our assumptions about language.⁵

What possibilities are there, then, for calling God 'Mother' in addition to (or perhaps instead of) 'Father'? We will at least begin with the Bible.

What the Bible says

The first claim (which we might label A1) is that the Bible contains many feminine images for God. Ruth Edwards conveniently brings together many of the most striking verses in her discussion of 'God as Father and Mother':⁶

As a mother comforts her child,
so I will comfort you;
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem
(Is. 66:13).

Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you.
(Is. 49:15)

For a long time I have kept my peace,
I have kept still and restrained myself;
now I will cry out like a woman in labour,
I will gasp and pant.
(Is. 42:14)

⁴ I develop this hermeneutical point with respect to gender-related issues generally in Richard Briggs, *Gender and the New Testament* (Grove Biblical Booklets 21, Cambridge: Grove Books, 2001).

⁵ Brian Wren, *What Language Shall I Borrow? — God-Talk in Worship: A Male Response to Feminist Theology* (London: SCM, 1989), 61.

⁶ The title of ch. 9 of Ruth Edwards, *The Case for Women's Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1989), 133–43. Edwards also gives several other examples.

In this third verse the voice speaking is that of God. All of these examples derive from the richly textured theology of the later sections of Isaiah. The next example is from Deuteronomy, and relates to Psalm 90:2, which also uses the strongly female image of child-bearing:

You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you;
you forgot the God who gave you birth.
(Deut. 32:18)

The final example uses the image of a mother bird, an image also picked up by Jesus in Matthew 23:37 (//Luke 13:34), when he says 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!' In Isaiah the image is:

Like birds hovering overhead, so the LORD of hosts
will protect Jerusalem;
he will protect and deliver it,
he will spare and rescue it.
(Is. 31:5)

In addition to this array of selected verses we might note that the image of wisdom, personified in Proverbs 8:22–31 as 'dancing with the Lord at creation' is typically a feminine image, and that the spirit is often characterised in feminine terms in the OT, a point given resonance (though of course not in any way proved) by the fact that the word *ruah* is feminine.

This is an impressive array of biblical images and citations which underlines the claim that female language about God is not just possible, but is actively modelled in the biblical tradition. Here in the prophets, in the wisdom literature, in the *torah*, and in the gospels, are examples of language which conceptualise God in feminine and even female terms.⁷

The counter-claim (B1) is to acknowledge that all the above is true, but that what is far more obvious and consistently emphasised in the biblical traditions is the strong predominance of masculine imagery for God. We can be brief here: God is king, father, shepherd and warrior. God is husband, judge, and many others. B1 does not deny the verses listed in A1, but makes the obvious point that the weight of evidence leans heavily, even overwhelmingly, in the other direction. The verses cited in A1 work with implications and unstated images, suggesting feminine characteristics of God without actually taking the step of naming God as Mother, or as female. On the other hand, masculine imagery does lead to the explicit naming of God as Father or as Warrior, for example, and hence the two cases are not at all parallel. In his discussion of this issue, Brian Wren coins the somewhat odd expression 'KINGAFAP' as a short-hand designation for the way that Christian worship language adopts the 'dominant metaphor system' of God as 'King-God-Almighty-Father-Protector'.⁸ Wren may have strong reservations about it, as his book does indeed make clear, but he is accurate in his analysis of the predominant imagery, and for good reason: this is the major tradition of the biblical text too.

⁷ Female is usually taken as a term of sex differentiation (we are physically either male or female), while feminine is a gender/role-related term. See Briggs, *Gender*, 3–6.

⁸ Wren, *What Language*, 119 and 124.

What the Bible says – read in historical context

Thus far, the two sides of the argument have done little more than lob verses at each other. In order to go deeper than this somewhat superficial level of argument, the claim A2 might now be put: that while B1 is correct in pointing out the predominance of male imagery for God in the Bible, what is significant is that given the patriarchal setting of the Bible, there is any feminine imagery at all. This is an argument which moves to the level of reading the Bible in its historical context. It has the merit of accepting the evident imbalance of evidence in the A1/B1 argument, but of clarifying where the emphasis should fall in assessing that imbalance. The emphasis should lie not on a counting of heads (or texts, in this case) since such an approach always favours the *status quo*, but on those indications amidst the majority view that there are other ways of speaking too.

The name often given to this kind of claim is that it follows the 'trajectory' of the biblical text: the kinds of thought processes lying behind Isaiah's language set in motion a type of theological reflection which eventually concludes, many centuries later, that while biblical evidence remains overwhelmingly one-sided, there are significant contextual factors to take into account. These contextual factors suggest that a counter-cultural way of thinking has been unleashed which will eventually prove to be of enduring value, even to the point of overcoming the preponderance of evidence pointing the other way.

Thinking in terms of trajectories is both promising and problematic. It makes sense to suggest that ideas essentially alien to biblical writers can in time germinate and produce fruit in new ways of theological thinking. Many would argue that this is precisely what happened historically with the church's eventual opposition to slavery despite an impressive wealth of evidence that biblical writers not only took it for granted, but actually supported it as part of the God-given order.⁹ The 'trajectory' approach gained ground in evangelical thinking with the bold use made of it by John Goldingay in his attempt to tackle theological diversity in the OT,¹⁰ but in fact it was mainly articulated in the wake of the discovery of the *Nag Hammadi* documents, by Robinson and Koester in their analysis of *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*.¹¹ It is not too far-fetched to suggest that they developed this approach in order to emphasise heterogeneity in the early Christian movement, in ways that were highly sympathetic to the (proto-) Gnostic tendencies of the most famous *Nag Hammadi* document, *The Gospel of Thomas*.¹² Trajectories can thus be both creatively flexible and problematically open-ended: slavery and gnosticism arguably being two test cases for their various positive and negative implications.

Even if we grant A2 for a moment, there is a response (B2) which makes its conclusions problematic. Allowing that one should read the biblical texts in historical context, it turns out that once we understand those contexts properly, the Bible is

⁹ On which see Kevin Giles, 'The Biblical Argument for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead? A Case Study in Hermeneutics', *Evangelical Quarterly* 66.1 (1994), 3–17; Willard Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 31–64.

¹⁰ John Goldingay, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 40–43.

¹¹ See James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

¹² Robinson helped to bring these documents to prominence when he edited *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3rd edn (1988, orig: Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977).

actually remarkably *male-orientated* in its talk of God. The OT world was a world full of goddesses, and there was indeed an abundance of conceptual resources to hand for describing God in feminine terms, or indeed for taking God as female – as Goddess. Read against this background, claims B2, the biblical text is in fact resolutely male-orientated in its depiction of deity.

The evidence for this claim is thought provoking. Fertility cults were common in Canaanite religion, where Baal had his female consort Astarte (or *Ashtoreth*), one of the many Canaanite goddesses of whom the most well-known is possibly Asherah, whose cult object was the 'asherah pole' and littered the horizon as a constant rebuff to the attempts of the leaders and prophets to bring the Israelite people back to monotheism. Jeremiah 44 is a key text here, a chapter wherein the prophet offers a sustained critique of idolatry, and promises that disaster will surely follow. (This passage, we may note in passing, includes the somewhat odd gender-pointed verse (24) where Jeremiah spoke 'to all the people and all the women'.) The men who see their wives as the source of the idolatry problem (15) waste no time in assessing this prophetic claim on their lives: 'we are not going to listen to you. Instead, we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out libations to her' (16–17). Failure to worship the queen of heaven is the problem. Jeremiah, in contrast, sees this as the very weakness of the people: the heart of idolatry. In the complex political world of determining which prophetic voice is the true voice of God, biblical tradition landed on the side of Jeremiah against the people. Here, we could say, is as clear a case as one could wish for of a direct confrontation with feminine-orientated God-worship in the name of the God of Israel, and it is roundly condemned.

Thus it simply does not stand up to scrutiny to say that the remarkable feature of Israelite religion was any appearance at all of feminine imagery for God. All the necessary ways of thinking were manifestly there, and they were consciously rejected. In a world of polytheism and gods with divine consorts, Genesis 1 spoke a profoundly monotheistic word of the one single God who created everything: no pantheon of male and female goddesses here. Patriarchy this may be, but it is not ignorance of other possibilities, as Deuteronomy 4:15–16 makes clear: 'do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure – the likeness of male or female'. In full awareness of what it was doing, Israel restricted itself to the one male god.

The next step will be to respond to this claim by moving to a new conceptual level, but first a brief word about a possible response on this level itself. If B2 were put first as the relevant claim about God-language in the Bible as read in its historical context, what would a counter-claim (A2*) be? In this case the counter-claim at this level is to argue that it is precisely this set of historical data that actually explains why the Israelites avoided female imagery for God: it was to avoid any sense of identification with these idolatrous practices in the surrounding nations. The issue was not that this proved that only masculine language was appropriate for God. It is since God was neither male nor female it was not possible, in context, to use female language for God because it would have been subsumed into this idolatrous goddess-thinking. On this account, the historical context argument points the other way.

My own view is that this particular claim (i.e. A2*) is weak, which is why I did not present it as the main case at this level of argument. In general the biblical writers are willing to run the risk of being misunderstood if what they are defending, to their minds, is the truth about God, and in general they would not have avoided some truth about God simply because it could have been misconstrued. It is doubtful whether this argument gives reasons for saying why the writers avoided feminine imagery for fear of

misunderstanding but then did not avoid masculine imagery which could equally have been co-opted into thinking that the God of Israel was a deity similar in nature to others. So in this particular instance, the historical evidence seems more susceptible to a B2 type of explanation than an A2* one, and a response to the claim of B2 will need to press on to other grounds.

What the Bible could possibly say – how religious language works

The third level at which the debate needs to be articulated is at the level of what the Bible could possibly say: the nature of religious language about God. Here, clearly, while we still wish to take seriously the biblical text, we are also asking more philosophical questions about the conceptual schemes available to the biblical authors in their talk about God.

On this level, we might consider a claim (A3) about the way that all language about God works: it is all metaphorical (or perhaps *analogical*), an attempt to capture what cannot really be said, or rather what cannot be said by direct reference. Such a claim trades implicitly on the reorientation of our understanding of metaphor that has taken place over the past thirty years or so. The old view, which goes back to Aristotle, saw metaphor as 'ornamental', a 'deviation' from supposedly normal language, and fundamentally concerned with using one word to stand for another in a creative or illustrative way.¹³ This is still perhaps a dominant conception of metaphor in much popular thinking, and its essence could be caught by saying that it portrays metaphor as 'mere metaphor'. The late twentieth century saw a gradual reconsideration of metaphor towards the realisation that it is not simply a substitutable stylistic flourish, but rather can play an irreplaceable role, as a cognitive phenomenon in language.¹⁴ What does this mean? It means that metaphors can provide us with a language we could not otherwise have, and that they allow 'epistemic access' to regions beyond literal language.¹⁵

Fundamentally a metaphor locates item A in context B, and does so in unexpected and/or unfamiliar ways (until the habit of language use so familiarises us that we say that the metaphor has become a 'dead metaphor' and we no longer notice it, as in, perhaps, 'the salt of the earth', a phrase we now take as a unit to mean 'dependable, reliable and great to have around', although such an understanding is probably insufficient to help us unlock the multiple imagery of its live usage in Matt. 5:13.¹⁶) Thus we say 'John was a tower of strength to me', and we both do and do not compare John to a tower, in the process perhaps suggesting the sense of a tower rising above the landscape in the way that John stood out from the pack (another metaphor?), but

¹³ See the helpful summary account of Dan R. Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol and Story* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 112–33.

¹⁴ Two key works here are Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); and more generally Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies in the Creation of Meaning in Language* (London: RKP, 1978), the subtitle of which is especially significant.

¹⁵ The phrase 'epistemic access' is cited in Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 31, as coming from Richard Boyd.

¹⁶ See the helpful discussion here of Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC 33A, Dallas: Word, 1993), 99.

allowing this to remain a secondary sense of the metaphor, which centres around the idea of support and reliability. Of course in many ways John is totally unlike a tower of strength.

With this understanding of metaphor it is important to note that there is both an 'is' and an 'is not': John is and is not like the tower. In the same way, and perhaps especially so, religious language works cognitively with this 'is' and 'is not': 'God is my Father' is both a comparison and a separation of the two ideas, since it does not refer to God going to work at the office, etc., but does claim that God loves, cares and nurtures me. That some fathers are not like this is not the point, at least in theory. Similarly, 'God is my shepherd' contains both an 'is' and an 'is not', as a moment's reflection demonstrates. The recontextualisation of A in terms of B requires an act of creative judgement, and deeply metaphorical expressions cannot be 'flattened out' into non-metaphorical expression without considerable loss of (cognitive) point.

That metaphor, on this account, is richly creative, is the heart of the argument for A3. The claim is that all these masculine images for God in the biblical text are working metaphorically, of necessity, since to talk of God is to try to put God into a context where we consider the divine nature from some suggested angle and see where the image leads us: thus 'God is my rock' or 'shepherd' are two different ways of saying God is like A or B, but in each case it is one angle only on divine reality. Likewise, 'God is my Father' does not have any necessary implication that God is male or masculine. It thus follows that the demarcation drawn by B1 between explicit attribution of masculine characteristics to God and only a few inferred feminine characterisations of God does not stand up to scrutiny from a linguistic point of view. That God is described as like a nursing mother, rather than as 'mother', turns out to be of minimal significance. Even if God had been 'mother' directly, as it were, the metaphorical point would still stand (and in passing we need to note that metaphors and similes are not fundamentally different in this respect, it is simply that one signals its intentions more clearly than the other¹⁷).

The claim of A3 is that the Bible mandates us to see God in terms appropriate to both masculine and feminine characterisations, and thus invites us to our own creative task of trying to find appropriate ways of speaking of God in, perhaps, a world where we might never have seen a shepherd, but are familiar with other protective roles, such as (arguably) customer support, or counsellor, in whichever context such a label might be used. It is not that a recontextualised metaphor will capture precisely an earlier one (this being the great problem facing all Bible translators). It is that there is no alternative than to seek out new and relevant ways of speaking of God, and in the light of contemporary understandings of male and female and God as beyond gender roles, we should seek non-gender-specific ways of so doing.¹⁸

In theory it might be possible to respond to A3 by arguing that its understanding of metaphor is deficient, or that it needs a better grasp of the distinction between metaphor and simile. Indeed some have taken this route, but let it suffice here to say

¹⁷ Despite the blank assertion to the contrary of James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 111–15 in an appendix entitled 'On Human Language for God, Simile, Metaphor, Analogy, Parable, Name' (though note his generally helpful discussion of 'Gender, Sexuality, and the Trinity', 84–110).

¹⁸ We should note that A3 is not the same as the typically Eastern 'apophatic' or 'negative' theology which affirms that no truths can be asserted of God, but that the solution is not metaphor but clarification of the negative, i.e. saying only what is not true of God. This is beyond my competence to judge, but in any case I doubt that such a theologian would find our question very interesting.

that the linguistic and philosophical evidence seems likely to go in its favour, and is as accurate an account of the matter as can be reasonably hoped for at present.¹⁹ The real question is whether such an account of language is all there is to say on the matter, and here is where we can articulate a counter-response, B3.

A possible way to respond to A3 is to argue that while this is a fair enough account of how human language works, it fails to deal seriously with the difference it might make that it is God who is talking in the Bible.²⁰ The notion that the biblical text is not simply human speech but is also revelatory is the main point here. Consider the much discussed text, Ephesians 3:14–15:

I bow my knees before the Father (*pros ton patera*), from whom all fatherhood/every family (*pasa patria*) in heaven and on earth takes its name.

There is a play on words here which renders the translation slightly difficult, but it is easy enough to grasp in principle: human fatherhood derives its name from the Father in heaven. It is not the name as such which is at issue. Rather the claim of Ephesians 3 is that we know what true fatherhood is from our Father in heaven, and human fatherhood is an imperfect rendering of that divine reality. Traditionally at this point theologians have liked to distinguish between the *order of being* and the *order of knowing*. This is a distinction between how we come to understand God as Father, and how God's Fatherhood stands as the revealed truth which makes human fatherhood possible and meaningful. Clearly we work our way up through a knowledge of human fatherhood to grasp divine fatherhood, but in reality, or in 'the order of being', it stands the other way around. This view has a distinguished pedigree in the early church, articulated by, for example, Athanasius (c. AD 300–373): 'God as Father of the Son is the only true Father, and all created paternity is a shadow of the true',²¹ and Tertullian (writing around AD 200): 'Whereas other analogical terms like Lord and Judge indicate a merely functional relation to the world, the names Father and Son point to an ontological relation of distinct persons within the godhead itself'.²²

The discussion of analogy which is at work here (i.e. the question of how divine reality can be taken analogously with human reality) threatens to detain us for even longer than the foregoing discussion of metaphor, but does highlight the all-encompassing nature of the conceptual arguments needed to tackle the questions about God-talk. Suffice to say that many have argued that divine fatherhood is not an analogy derived from our conception of human fatherhood, but is revealed here as a fundamental aspect of the divine nature. Further, as Andrew Lincoln points out, in the context of Ephesians 3:14 (where 'I bow my knees' is a 'kneeling' which signifies subordination in worship), 'The God who is Father of all families is the same God who is Father of Jesus Christ' strengthening with the Spirit. Thus we have here the Trinity as

¹⁹ Specialists will forgive such an immense generalisation, in the interests of staying with the main topic.

²⁰ For a subtle defence of the idea that one could literally ascribe speech to God in the 'appropriated' biblical text see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 75–129.

²¹ Athanasius, *contra Arian*, 1.23, 24; cited by Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42, Dallas: Word, 1990), 203.

²² Tertullian, *adversus Praxean*, 9–10; quoted by Donald G. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 295, n. 77.

a revealed reality and about as far as one could imagine from being a metaphor.²³ To conclude, A3 confuses general language with revelation, because actually God is revealed using 'Father' language in Scripture in a way that 'Mother' language never reveals God in Scripture.²⁴

Further options and paths not taken

Where do we go from here? I have attempted to set out fairly the two views (A and B) with their own frameworks and assumptions, their own appeal to different biblical texts and theological schemes, and I am inclined to think that having reached A3 and B3 we have articulated these arguments as far as they will go. Is there an A4? If there is then it might be an argument which challenges whether (or how far) seeing biblical language as revelation actually requires us to hold fast to its form, or whether it is possible to honour it as revelation without needing to repeat its form. Conceptually this seems more likely to be best understood as a rejection of B3 on its own terms, and I cannot see a deeper conceptual level of argument which is available at this point.

To avoid the impression of giving the last word to B3, we should note a critique of one of the planks of its argument: that Jesus himself 'revealed' a certain understanding of the nature of God, in his use of so-called 'Daddy' language (*abba*) in prayers which are recorded in Scripture as prayed by Jesus. This view has been roundly attacked by James Barr as at best not proven, and most likely as forever unprovable, in an article the full force of which still appears not to have been felt.²⁵ One can take the notion of revelation seriously without supposing that this resolves the God-language issue.

Donald Bloesch, who appears to argue himself reluctantly into the view that we must call God Father, manages to say 'The God of the Bible completely transcends sexuality, but he includes gender within himself'.²⁶ I am not in fact persuaded that Bloesch demonstrates that one could defend a view of God as sexless but masculine (he actually seems to use a B3 type argument to respond to A2, which I suggest is bound not to work), but in theory there might be scope to turn the sex/gender distinction to this use, although I would tend to side with the linguists who see this as unlikely.²⁷

A final path not taken is the one offered by 'feminist theology', a phrase which sadly requires bracketing with 'scare quotes' if only because it means such widely disparate things to different people, and as such does little argumentative work for us. I have wanted to address the topic of gender and God-language on the merits of the various arguments concerned, and not in terms of whether they are labelled 'feminist' or not.²⁸

²³ The quote, although not the main point, is from Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 203.

²⁴ For a full, heavyweight defence of this view see Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Christian Apprehension of God the Father', in Alvin F. Kimel, Jr (ed.), *Speaking of the Christian God. The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 120-43. Many of the essays in this book are relevant to our topic.

²⁵ James Barr, 'Abba, Father and the Familiarity of Jesus' Speech', *Theology* 91 (1988), 173-79, summarising the full scale critical assault of his 'Abba Isn't "Daddy"', *JTS* 39 (1988), 28-47.

²⁶ Bloesch, *Theology*, 91.

²⁷ E.g. Brian Wren, 'Language change and male repentance' in Richard Holloway (ed.), *Who Needs Feminism? Men Respond to Sexism in the Church*, (London: SPCK, 1991), 135-48.

²⁸ One central feminist work on this issue is Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), claiming that it is appropriate and necessary to reclaim the divine self-revelation of Exodus 3:14 of 'the God who is' for the purposes of feminist God-talk, as 'She Who Is' (see esp. 13 and 241-43). A more muted wrestling with the issue is Janet Martin Soskice, 'Can a Feminist Call God "Father"?' in Kimel (ed.), *Speaking of the Christian God*, 81-94.

Towards an answer

My own view is that having worked our way through to the well-articulated positions A3 and B3, we have reached the end of the argument, and are in a position where we have to exercise our *judgement*, in the Aristotelian sense of 'prudence' or 'practical wisdom' (*phronesis*). There are no conclusive reasons for taking either A3 or B3 as a final view: both are coherent and respectable positions which take account of how language works and what the biblical evidence is, and which take the Bible seriously in Christian life and thinking.

My presentation of 'A' and 'B' has not been meant to imply that either one is on the offensive or that either is simply a defensive reply to the other. Where I do hope to have clarified matters is in showing how easily defendants of either position can fail to address the appropriate points being made by the other side. Obviously not all theological issues can be separated out into two polar opposite positions, and there is always a danger that such an organising grid will ride roughshod over the delicacies of the issue at hand. In this case, however, if we did in fact succeed in formulating the key question accurately enough, viz 'Can we call God Mother?', then I think it is fair to suggest that most considerations will fall on one side or the other.

What practical steps can be taken at this point? A friend of mine who considered this issue said that she once brought herself to the point of lying in bed at night and praying into the darkness: 'Are you my mother?' This, unfortunately, is the title of a delightful Dr Seuss book concerning the quest of a little bird, who hatches while its mother is away, to find its mother, enquiring of various animals, machines and inanimate objects along the way 'Are you my mother?' She could not after this take the question with due seriousness, and simply reverted to her former 'Father'-orientated practice. Are we, in the end, in the same position?

Philosophers, more than theologians, have tried out the development of a new reflexive pronoun 'Godself' to replace the gender specific 'himself' (or equally 'herself') in relation to God. This takes some getting used to, but is in principle no different from the ways in which we have tended to train ourselves out of saying 'man' as a generic term for all people, a change in linguistic habit which ends up seeming entirely natural to those who adopt it. Gail Ramshaw suggests that judicious use of the adjective 'divine' is also a possible way forward: e.g. 'God shows us the fullness of divine love in ...'.²⁹ It has not been difficult to write this article without referring to God as 'he' or 'him', and Walter Brueggemann has demonstrated the possibility of large-scale writing in this way in his nearly 800 page work of OT theology.³⁰

Despite all these efforts, one is inclined to accept, with Janet Martin Soskice, that 'the masculine terminology of the New Testament will be with us as long as the New Testament is with us.'³¹ Finally, in the light of this can one pray to God our Mother? In the absence of there being a clear right answer to this question, this is probably a matter best left to the individual. It is tempting to suggest that in matters of public prayer, one should follow the principle of avoiding giving offence, although in the NT this principle usually relies on one party being strong and one weak, and it is not clear which side of the debate would like to label itself as weak on this matter, or indeed, where this consideration gets us in practice.³² My own practice encapsulates my ability to defend both sides of the matter: I continue to pray to God as Father, but believe that God would not in fact mind if I did otherwise. If those of both opinions were equally at ease with each other in this matter then perhaps that would be appropriate to the complexity of sorting out the question of gender and God-talk.

- ²⁹ Ramshaw, 'The Gender of God', 178.
- ³⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), though interestingly I had not noticed this feature of it until reading the review article of Donald E. Gowan in *HBTh* 20.2 (1998), 89–98 (noted on p 97 n 6).
- ³¹ Janet Martin Soskice, 'Trinity and Feminism', in Susan Frank Parsons (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 135–50, here 142.
- ³² Note here Craig Blomberg's discussion of the 'professional weaker brother' syndrome, in his *1 Corinthians* (NIV Application Commentary, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 167–71 and 205–206. The issue in 1 Corinthians in any case is sin, and not offendability.

Children, Covenant and the Church

David F. Wright

David Wright is the Professor of Patristic and Reformed Christianity at New College, Edinburgh University. Amongst his specialist areas for teaching and research are infant baptism, Augustine and the Reformation.

This was given as the *John Wenham Lecture* at the Tyndale Fellowship Triennial Conference, Summer 2003.

This lecture starts with a story, the history in outline of the use of the Gospel account of Jesus' blessing of the children in Mark 10:13–16 par.¹ A widespread feature of recent orders of service for infant baptism has been the omission of this pericope altogether, as in the Church of England's *Common Worship* (2000; and earlier in the *Alternative Service Book*, 1980) and the *Methodist Worship Book* (1999), or its drastic demotion in prominence, as in the Church of Scotland's *Common Order* of 1994. This contrasts markedly with an earlier generation of such service books, represented by the 1928 *Book of Common Order* of the (Scottish) United Free Church, where infant baptism begins with 'The sanction of the ordinance is to be found in the words of our Lord, who spake, saying, "Suffer ..."' (Mark 10:14–16). The Gospel passage now commonly appears in services of Thanksgiving for, or Blessing of a Child.

This recent consensus, which declines to see in Jesus' blessing of the children any connection with the baptism of children, in fact reflects the mind of the early church fathers almost to a man. It was the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers who brought the account into the baptism of infants, probably not fully understanding what they were doing but finding it a useful shield against Anabaptist protests. Its apologetic value in favour of paedobaptism reached a peak in the mid-twentieth century when, in writers like Joachim Jeremias, Oscar Cullmann and T.F. Torrance, by way of the so-called *koluein*-formula it furnished even liturgical evidence of apostolic practice. As the Church of Scotland's Special Commission on Baptism put it: 'the Evangelists intend us to interpret that blessing [by Jesus] in terms of [the children's] baptism'.

This late-twentieth-century departure from the Reformation tradition belongs to the recovery of infant baptism as an ordinance or sacrament of the gospel, rather than a rite of babyhood. It is also one instance of the continuing reassessment of the biblical and historical evidence for infant baptism. The latter's connection with the subject of this lecture scarcely needs explication. Among evangelicals, especially of a Reformed hue, the most standard argument for paedobaptism has been covenantal. The continuity between Israel and the church within the one Abrahamic covenant renewed in Jesus

¹ For documentation see David F. Wright, 'Out, In, Out: Jesus' Blessing of the Children and Infant Baptism', in S.E. Porter, A.R. Cross (eds), *Dimensions of Baptism. Biblical and Theological Studies* (JSNTS 234; Sheffield Academic Press, London, New York, 2002), 188–206.

Christ finds particular expression in the parallel between circumcision and infant baptism. As the Westminster Confession of Faith states it:

Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace ... The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New (par. 27).

The practice of baptising the newborn is the most obvious and common way in which visible testimony is given to the conviction that children of believing parents 'have by their birth an interest in the covenant of grace', in the words of an earlier *Book of Common Order*.

The binding of infants to the covenant in baptism undoubtedly gathers strong *prima facie* support from the essential evangelical insistence on grounding theology on both Testaments together. Yet the tradition has rarely escaped damaging ambivalence. In the first place, do the infant-baptised become (or are they recognised as already being) members of the church, of the covenant people of God? Communion which both baptise babies and several years later admit to communicant membership are often in the toils at this point. The impression is sometimes given in my own church that baptism designates membership of the body of Christ for infants but not of the Church of Scotland. For that they must wait until their teens or later, and very few do so. Secondly, does baptism, or more accurately the Holy Spirit through baptism, effect anything for babies or merely mark them out as future recipients? Does baptism, for example, confer specific covenantal blessings on babies, such as new birth or remission of sin, specifically original sin, as Augustine influentially argued?

Behind such questions lies a much more important one: can the NT's presentation of Christian baptism, which I take in decidedly realist terms, be applied to baby-baptism? The issue is less pressing if baptism, whatever its subjects, is understood only in symbolic terms, but I must insist that this approach does scant justice to the NT texts. As a general method of construing baptism it most certainly owes something, and perhaps a very great deal, to the demands of encompassing infants as its commonest recipients.

The phrase 'Christian initiation complete in baptism', associated in the Church of England with Colin Buchanan and others, is intended to deny that baptism administered to infants needs 'completion' by some later rite incorporating personal profession of faith. The assertion evokes decades of debate over the relation between baptism and (episcopal) confirmation. The diminishing importance assigned to confirmation is in part the result, as well as a major cause, of the admission of baptised children to the Lord's supper – an action which at one time attested powerfully to the conviction 'Christian initiation complete in baptism'. A somewhat different, yet not irreconcilable, path to infant communion has followed the rediscovery of the early Christian pattern of initiation set out in the Hippolytan *Apostolic Tradition*, in which admission to the supper follows immediately upon baptism, even for the infant newly-baptised, so it seems. In this setting initiation for none of the baptised is complete without their sharing in the other dominical ordinance of the covenant community.

It may be the case that most evangelical ministers or churches have not endorsed the admission of young children to the communion table. It surely merits more serious consideration than it commonly receives. In its favour is the weighty argument that it takes the baptism of infants genuinely as baptism, as making them truly members of Christ's people. Thus it has the virtue of putting both ordinances of the new covenant

on an equal basis, dissolving the anomaly that the infant-baptised have been welcomed into the Christian community but are debarred for years from its communal meal celebration. It should be noted also that the change in practice relates also, again partly as cause and partly as effect, to a re-evaluation of the Lord's supper itself, more as food for the journey of growing up in Christ, rather than as the privilege of those who have 'arrived'. We are seeing, I suggest, a continuation of the desacralisation of much that the Reformers carried over without radical questioning from the old church. Finally we must take account of the fact that in the early church infant communion is recorded almost as early as infant baptism is indisputably attested, in the mid-third century in Cyprian of Carthage. It is apparently assumed a generation or so earlier in the *Apostolic Tradition* ascribed to Hippolytus.

When we seek the wisdom of Scripture on my subject, the OT proves more obviously helpful than the NT. Therein, however, lies a good part of the problem. At this stage it will be useful to unpack the problem at some length.

We are in a circle, whether vicious or virtuous, compounded as much of tradition as of Scripture, with the 'tradition' element deriving in large measure from the Reformation – which makes it unpalatable or uncomfortable to question. Let me spell this out more fully. We are mostly products of a western Christianity or Christendom in which infant baptism has been virtually universal for some millennium and half, since around 500. The grounds for infant baptism espoused in the evangelical community are in the main those espoused by the Reformers, and especially the parallel with circumcision within the context of a covenantal framework for salvation-history. Few of us accept the Augustinian theology of original guilt as eternally fatal in infants dying unbaptised, a theology which lay behind the universality of infant baptism from the early medieval era onwards. Augustine did not need to defend the practice of baptising babies, and made limited reference to the precedent of circumcision.

The sixteenth-century Reformers, on the other hand, were confronted with the urgency of justifying the rite in the face of Anabaptist protests which took *sola Scriptura* more strictly than did the likes of Luther, Calvin and company did. Covenantal parallelism proved the most sophisticated and durable of their apologiae which in turn made the assumption of universal paedobaptism (made legally binding in some Reformation strongholds, such as Geneva) a factor in the rise of covenantal theology to prominence in the later sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries.² Although covenantal continuity is not, I suppose, the only respectable biblical-theological matrix for infant baptism, I judge that it remains the most satisfying approach for most evangelical apologists. The Church of Scotland's Panel on Doctrine in 2003 based its justification heavily on the household paradigm without enlisting a covenantal framework for this – and was criticised in the General Assembly for doing inadequate justice to the covenantal argument.³

- 2 Cf. the judgement of John W. Riggs, *Baptism in the Reformed Tradition. A Historical and Practical Theology* (Columbia Studies in Reformed Theology; Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, London, 2002), 122: 'From a historical perspective, the Reformed use of covenant to interpret Christian baptism first arose, almost always, when arguing for infant baptism. In other words, its origin was not in theological or exegetical reflection on baptism as such but as a specific response to the challenge to a long-held practice of infant baptism.'
- 3 Church of Scotland, *Reports to the General Assembly 2003* (Board of Practice and Procedure, Church of Scotland, Edinburgh, 2003), 13/1–17, especially 13/12–15.

Against this summary sketch of the circle, vicious or virtuous, in which, so I would argue, much of the paedobaptist evangelical constituency is now placed, we must focus in on a couple of segments of the circle, and first on the analogy with circumcision. Here is one writer's estimate:

The very centre of Calvin's theology of infant baptism rests upon the view that there exists an anagogic relationship between circumcision in the Old Testament and infant baptism in the New Testament.⁴

And the context of that relationship is, for Calvin, the one covenant of grace. Yet how securely is this relationship grounded in the NT? More securely, I suggest, in general than in specific terms. Overall there is not much evidence that the parallel commended itself to Christian writers before about 200 – although thorough research on early Christian attitudes to circumcision remains to be done. For most of the first two or three centuries the common Christian stance towards circumcision was polemical. It was frequently linked with the Sabbath as elements of the Jewish order superseded by the coming of the Messiah Jesus. This was a most unpropitious climate in which to advance circumcision as a typical anticipation of infant baptism, or of baptism as a whole. Remember that all the explicit NT patterns of baptism present faith-baptism or conversion-baptism.

By the time of Cyprian in the mid-third century, the analogy with circumcision is clearly established, to the extent that his *Letter 64* responds to a bishop uncertain whether it was permissible to baptise a baby before the eighth day indicated by the precedent of circumcision. But we have already noted Augustine's relatively low use of the link, and Augustine is by a massive distance the most expansive patristic writer on infant baptism. A dossier of patristic sources without Augustine would be thin indeed.

There is, of course, Colossians 2:11–12. My reading of this discerns no direct connection between circumcision and baptism but rather each related separately to Christ's death. It is arguable that circumcision is spiritualised as Christ's death in Colossians and in Galatians, just as elsewhere it is spiritualised as rebirth. I was struck by the NRSV translation of these verses:

In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

The fact that it is so singular a text does not aid exegesis. The juxtaposition of baptism and circumcision and the density of the verses would make the development of an interpretation paralleling the two understandable, but this seems not to have happened until around 400. A review of the patristic evidence concludes that it:

does not suggest that the analogy between circumcision and baptism gave rise to the practice of infant baptism, nor that Colossians 2:11–12 were initially understood to imply infant baptism. It suggests rather that this analogy was not used as an argument for infant baptism until after the practice has arisen on

⁴ Egil Grislis, 'Calvin's Doctrine of Baptism', *Church History* 3 (1962), 46–65, at 51.

other grounds.⁵

The invocation of circumcision with its covenantal context was generally not an original feature in Reformers' baptismal teaching. It emerges in general terms when, having nailed their colours to the mast of *sola Scriptura*, they had to row back from an initial emphasis on the necessity of faith for beneficial reception of baptism. This repositioning occurred when the opposition against whom this emphasis was directed, the old Roman Church, was supplanted by the new foe of Anabaptism. We should not underestimate the seriousness of the challenge posed by Anabaptist radicals. More than one of the magisterial Reformers had to overcome early doubts about infant baptism, independently of Anabaptist protests. It can be seriously argued that the baptism of babies was the single most significant constitutive element of church order that the Reformers preserved without explicit biblical warrant.

It is instructive to track the movement of baptismal thought in Luther and in Calvin as they confronted first one and then a different set of opponents. In 1521 Luther produced a *Defence and Explanation of All the Articles Which were Unjustly Condemned by the Roman Bull* – the bull of excommunication, 'Exsurge Domine', of June 15, 1520. The first Article Luther defends is his denial that 'the sacraments give grace to all who do not put an obstacle in the way' and his assertion that the worthy reception of the sacraments also requires 'genuine repentance for sin' and 'a firm faith within the heart'. When he comes to baptism, Luther first quotes Mark 16:16, 'He who believes and is baptised will be saved'. There follows a series of apparently unqualified statements:

[Christ] puts faith before baptism for where there is no faith, baptism does no good.

[W]ithout faith, no sacrament is of any use, indeed it is altogether deadly and pernicious.

[T]here must be an unwavering, unshaken faith in the heart which receives the promise and sign and does not doubt that what God promises and signifies is indeed so.

[I]t is better, if faith is not present, to stay far away from these words and signs which are the sacraments of God.

For this reason, he who is baptised must hold these words [of Mark 16:16] to be true and must believe that he will certainly be saved if he is baptised as these

⁵ See J.P.T. Hunt, 'Colossians 2:11–12, the Circumcision/Baptism Analogy, and Infant Baptism', in *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 (1990), 227–44, at 244. This valuable article, which includes a survey of selected patristic sources, is based on the author's unpublished Durham University MA thesis, 'The History of the Interpretation of Colossians 2:11–12 up to the Council of Chalcedon, with particular reference to the Uses of these Verses as an Argument for Infant Baptism' (1988). His conclusion that 'It was not until the mid-fourth century that Colossians 2:11–12 were used explicitly in connection with infant baptism' (art. cit., 241) requires revision since the source he has in view, Asterius, has more recently been dated later, c. 400.

words say and the sign signifies.⁶

Luther does not forget infants altogether:

[E]very day ... wherever in the whole world baptism is administered, the question is put to the child, or the sponsors in his stead, whether he believes, and on the basis of this faith and confession, the sacrament of baptism is administered.⁷

But apart from this one reference, the whole article reads as if it concerned believers' baptism.

Then came the Zwickau prophets to Wittenberg in December 1521. Luther sent a revealing letter to Melanchthon on 13 January 1522. The prophets were citing Mark 16:16 and arguing that, since children could not believe in their own person, they were not to be baptised. Luther advances two responses, *fides infantium* and *fides aliena*. Without the latter, he reflects, 'there is nothing else to be debated, and baptism of small children simply has to be rejected'.⁸

Luther has no difficulty citing Scripture in support of 'extrinsic faith', that is, faith exercised by someone else on my behalf. Such faith

belongs to me personally but is really also someone else's faith ... Christ never rejected a single person who was brought to him through someone else's faith ... The testimonies and examples of the whole Scripture are on the side of extrinsic faith, that is ... personal faith, which attains faith, and whatever is desired for someone else.⁹

As for children's lack of faith, how will the prophets prove it? 'Perhaps by the fact that children do not speak and express their faith.' But we are silent during sleep and do not stop being believers. 'Can't God in the same way keep faith in small children during the whole time of their infancy, as if it were a continuous sleep?' But does the church believe that 'faith is infused into infants'? There is no Scripture passage which would force the church to believe this. The church has the authority not to baptise infants at all. 'Baptism is free and not compulsory like circumcision.' Perhaps Augustine and the subsequent church have erred on this point – for it is 'a special miracle of God that the article that infants are to be baptised is the only one which has never been denied, not even by heretics'. The letter reads like Luther's conversation with himself. He comes back to Mark 16:16; opponents who cite it cannot prove from it that children do not believe.¹⁰

By the time of his most extensive treatment of the subject, *Concerning Rebaptism* in 1528, Luther insists that the onus is on the Anabaptists to prove the negative, that children cannot have faith. He is content to show from Scripture that they may have faith.¹¹

⁶ Transl. and ed. George W. Forell, *Luther's Works*, vol. 32: *Career of the Reformer II* (Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, 1958), 12–16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸ Transl. and ed. Gottfried G. Krodel, *Luther's Works*, vol. 48: *Letters I* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1963), 368.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 369.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 367–71.

¹¹ Transl. and ed. Conrad Bergendoff, *Luther's Works*, vol. 40: *Church and Ministry II* (Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, 1958), 241–42.

There are Scripture passages that tell us that children may and can believe, though they do not speak or understand. So, Psalm 72 [106:37f.], describes how the Jews offered their sons and daughters to idols, shedding innocent blood. If, as the text says, it was innocent blood, then the children have to be considered pure and holy – this they could not be without spirit and faith. Likewise the innocent children whom Herod had murdered were not over two years of age [Matt. 2:16]. Admittedly they could not speak or understand. Yet they were holy and blessed. Christ himself says in Matthew 18 [19:14], 'The kingdom of heaven belongs to children.' And St John was a child in his mother's womb [Luke 1:41] but, as I believe, could have faith.

Yes, you say, but John was an exception. This is not proof that all baptised children have faith. I answer, wait a minute, I am not yet at the point of proving that children believe. I am giving proof that your foundation for rebaptism is uncertain and false inasmuch as you cannot prove that there may not be faith in children.¹²

Furthermore, he commands us to bring the children to him. In Matthew 19 [14] he embraces them, kisses them, and says that theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The misled spirits like to fend this off by saying, Christ is not speaking of children, but of the humble. This, however, is a false note, for the text clearly says that they brought to him children, not the humble. And Christ does not say to let the humble come to him, but the children, and he reprimanded the disciples not because they kept the humble, but the children away. He embraced and blessed the children, not the humble, when he said, 'Of such is the kingdom of heaven.' So also Matthew 18 [10], 'Their angels beheld the face of my Father', is to be understood as referring to such children, for he teaches us that we should also be like these children. Were not these children holy, he would indeed have given us a poor ideal with which to compare ourselves.¹³

By 1528 and *Concerning Rebaptism*, Luther's earlier vacillation of mind has passed and he trots out a series of vigorous claims and arguments. He repeats what he had written elsewhere, that 'the most certain form of baptism is child baptism', for an adult might deceive on coming forward and a child cannot. If God has not commanded the baptism of children, nor 'has he specifically commanded the baptism of adults, nor of men or of women, so we had better not baptise anybody'.¹⁴ In this work Luther also develops his distinctive argument that faith is so uncertain a quality ('Always something is lacking in faith') that none should base their baptism on it but only on the command of God. So an adult wanting to be baptised should say:

I want to be baptised because it is God's command that I should be, and on the strength of this command I dare to be baptised. In time my faith may become what it may. If I am baptised on his bidding I know for certain that I am baptised. Were I to be baptised on my own faith, I might tomorrow find myself unbaptised, if faith failed me, or I became worried that I might not yesterday have had the faith rightly.¹⁵

¹² *Ibid.*, 242.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 244, 245.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 253.

And one who had been baptised as a child might say:

I thank God and am happy that I was baptised as a child, for thus I have done what God commanded. Whether I have believed or not, I have followed the command of God and been baptised and my baptism was correct and certain. God grant that whether my faith today be certain or uncertain, or I think that I believe and am certain, nothing is lacking in baptism.¹⁶

Luther has come a long way since he argued that there had to be 'an unwavering, unshaken faith in the heart' to receive the promise and sign of baptism. In the course of *Concerning Rebaptism* we scarcely notice the following statement among such a varied case:

If they now believe that through the covenant of circumcision God accepts both boys and girls and is their God, why should he not also accept our children through the covenant of baptism?¹⁷

Calvin's movement of faith is comparable to Luther's, with this difference, that while the shift in Luther's thinking is observed in separate writings over a spread of years, in Calvin's case it is discernible in the different editions of one work, the *Institutes*. What in the final 1559 edition is Book 4:15 is derived mostly from the first 1536 version directed chiefly against the Catholic Church, whereas Book 4:16 comes from the 1539 edition and was originally aimed at the Anabaptists. As a number of scholars have recognised, Book 4:15 defines baptism in such terms that it might almost have been written of believers' baptism only. There is only one explicit reference to the baptism of infants (4:15:22), and at a couple of other places where the argument seems to invite mention of it, it is absent (4:15:9, 4:15:10). At the outset the chapter declares that baptism was given for two ends, 'first, to serve our faith before him; secondly, to serve our confession before men'.¹⁸ The rest of the chapter unpacks this initial statement.

[The Lord] wills that all who believe be baptised for the remission of sins [Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38].

[T]he chief point of baptism ... is to receive baptism with this promise, 'He who believes and is baptised will be saved' [Mark 16:16] (4:15:1).

Peter ... adds that this baptism is not a removal of filth from the flesh but a good conscience before God [1 Pet. 3:21], which is from faith (4:15:2).

[T]hose who receive baptism with right faith truly feel the effective working of Christ's death in the mortification of their flesh, together with the working of his resurrection in the vivification of the Spirit [Rom. 6:8] (4:15:5).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹⁸ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols (Library of Christian Classics 20-21; SCM Press, London, 1961), vol. II, 1304. All quotations are from this translation.

[O]ur faith receives from baptism the advantage of its sure testimony to us ... John first baptised, so later did the apostles, 'with a baptism of repentance unto forgiveness of sins' [Matt. 3:6; 11; Luke 3:16; John 3:23; 4:1; Acts 2:38, 41] (4:15:6).

[T]hose whom the Lord has once received into grace, engrafts into the communion of his Christ, and adopts into the society of the church through baptism – so long as they persevere in faith in Christ ... are absolved of guilt and condemnation (4:15:12).

[Baptism] is the mark by which we publicly profess that we wish to be reckoned God's people; by which we testify that we agree in worshipping the same God ... by which finally we openly affirm our faith (4:15:13).

[Baptism] is given for the arousing, nourishing, and confirming of our faith (4:15:14).

[F]rom this sacrament, as from all others, we obtain only as much as we receive in faith (4:15:15).¹⁹

Near the beginning of Book 4:16, which from the very first embarks on an assault against Anabaptist rejection of paedobaptism, Calvin gives a fresh account of the 'force and nature' of baptism.

Scripture declares that baptism first points to the cleansing of our sins, which we obtain from Christ's blood; then to the mortification of our flesh, which rests upon participation in his death and through which believers are reborn into newness of life and into the fellowship of Christ. All that is taught in the Scriptures concerning baptism can be referred to this summary, except that baptism is also a symbol for bearing witness to our religion before men (4:16:2).²⁰

The *Institutes* continues immediately with a section on baptism and circumcision. There is no difference, argues Calvin, between the two 'in the inner mystery, by which the whole force and character of the sacraments has been weighed' – he means God's fatherly favour, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, regeneration – but only in the 'very slight factor' of the outward ceremony (4:16:4).²¹ Hence:

If the covenant still remains firm and steadfast, it applies no less today to the children of Christians than under the Old Testament it pertained to the infants of the Jews (4:16:5).²²

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, 1304, 1305, 1307, 1308, 1313, 1313–14, 1314, 1315.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. II, 1325.

²¹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, 1327.

²² *Ibid.*, vol. II, 1328. A little further on in this section Battles' translation reads 'since the word "baptism" is applied to infants', but inaccurately. The Latin *baptismi verbum* denotes what Calvin has just called 'the inner mystery' of baptism declared in the word of the sacrament. This is evident when Calvin proceeds immediately to talk of the sign, i.e. outward baptism, as 'the appendage of the word'. Henry Beveridge's translation has 'the word of baptism is destined for infants'. The French of the 1560 *Institution* reads 'la parole du Baptesme s'adresse aux petits enfans' (ed. Jean-Daniel Benoit, vol. IV, 343).

After devoting a brief section to Jesus' blessing of the children, Calvin turns to a lengthy rebuttal of Anabaptist objections against the baptism-circumcision parallel (4:16:10–16). He next asserts that infants are quite capable of being regenerated, as Christ's own infancy demonstrates. Without regeneration, dying infants must surely perish.

To the further objection that infants were incapable of hearing preaching and hence of faith, the Reformer advances various counter-arguments. God can use other means than preaching to grant illumination. What danger is there:

if infants be said to receive now some part of that grace which in a little while they shall enjoy to the full? (4:16:19).²³

In a passage whose complex construction over three editions reflects Calvin's continuing struggle with this question, he expostulates:

[W]hy may the Lord not shine with a tiny spark at the present time on those whom he will illumine in the future with the full splendour of his light – especially if he has not removed their ignorance before taking them from the prison of the flesh? I would not rashly affirm that they are endowed with the same faith as we experience in ourselves, or have entirely the same knowledge of faith – this I prefer to leave undetermined (4:16:19).²⁴

In another variation on the same theme:

Infants are baptised into future repentance and faith, and even though these have not yet been formed in them, the seed of both lies hidden within them by the secret working of the Spirit (4:16:20).²⁵

More than one issue of coherence is raised by Book 4:16 of the *Institutes*. One which will not be pursued here is the coherence of 4:16 within itself. On the one hand Calvin insists on the regeneration of elect baptised infants, but on the other hand asserts that:

In infant baptism nothing more of present effectiveness must be required than to confirm and ratify the covenant made with them by the Lord. The remaining significance of this sacrament will afterward follow at such time as God himself foresees (4:16:21).²⁶

More serious is the charge of incoherence between 4:15 and 4:16, in the light of the marked emphasis in the former on baptism's purpose as serving faith and public confession. The disjunction between the two chapters is sharply evident in the use of Scripture: 4:15 mostly cites the NT, 4:16 the Old. Part of Calvin's argument in the latter denies that NT statements which require faith and repentance before baptism apply to infants. Running through 4:16 is the principle that considerations advanced against the baptism of baby children would count equally against circumcision – and are thereby

²³ *Ibid.*, vol. II, 1342.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. II, 1343.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. II, 1345.

automatically disqualified.

The heirs of Calvin have largely focussed on Book 4:16 because it is there that he provides his apologia for infant baptism, and for churches in the Reformation tradition baptism has continued to be overwhelmingly infant baptism. But it says a great deal for Calvin's fidelity to Scripture that 4:15 retains its place into the final edition of the *Institutes*, even though the impression is given that there is one theology of baptism and another of infant baptism. Too much of the later tradition has either lost sight of the former or simply collapsed it into the latter and hence worked with a doctrine of baptism that to all intents and purposes has been a doctrine of infant baptism alone. This has happened despite Calvin and despite the influential Westminster Confession of Faith, whose chapter on baptism preserves a commendable balance.

Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptised (28:4).

If such a statement had been borne in mind, it would have been impossible to equate baptism with infant baptism *simpliciter* or to approach baptism through infant baptism. Yet in the Church of Scotland the Special Commission on Baptism under Professor T.F. Torrance, surely the most extended and paper-productive investigation of baptism in the whole history of the Christian church, issued in a revised Act on baptism in 1963 which envisaged solely infant baptism. When in 2000 the Kirk sought to consolidate its various legislative enactments on the sacraments into a single Act, it was discovered that never since the Reformation had it made any provision in the law of the Church for baptism on profession of faith.

There is no need to spell out the difficulties which such an approach lands one in. There is the NT, for example! Among evangelicals, it has been directly and indirectly responsible for a massive baptismal reductionism. Infant baptism has been practised, of course, but with little confidence in talking of it in the baptismal tones of the NT. Countless hordes of babies have been baptised without ever coming into living membership of the covenant community of Christ. In Scotland, and I feel sure in England also, the population includes far more unchurched baptised people than the membership of the national church.

Significant changes in theological reflection on baptism have been afoot for some years, not least in paedobaptist communions, with the still emerging consensus that if there is a baptismal norm it is faith-baptism. This holds true for Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, some Reformed churches, including the Church of Scotland as of May 2003, and more broadly in ecumenical circles in the wake of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982). This consensus does not entail the abandonment of infant baptism but rather that, in terms of the reception of baptism, baptismal theology starts with baptism on profession of faith and provides for the baptism of non-respondent babies within this framework.

This major sea-change in the churches' attitudes to baptism points forward to a position not generally held since the age of the Fathers – as far as the Latin West is concerned, the era before Augustine of Hippo. When we look closely at the Reformation, we can still recognise a foreshadowing of this nascent consensus in the movement of baptismal teaching in Luther and Calvin sketched above. The post-Reformation succession built one-sidedly on the anti-Anabaptist slant that finally determined the Reformers' writings, but particularly in Calvin, the sequence of Book 4:15 followed by 4:16 in outline embodies the kind of way into understanding baptism,

inspired by the NT, which informs much contemporary baptismal thought and revision of baptismal orders of service.

This also links up with early Christian liturgical practice. If we grant that some infants were baptised from at least the late second century, the dominant pattern in teaching and rite remained baptism on profession of faith. The first known liturgical adjustment to cope with the baptism of infants is attested around 400. The questions were addressed not to the child but to parent or sponsor in the form 'Does he/she believe?', with the response 'He/She believes'. There is hardly any theology of specifically infant baptism before Augustine. Vast reaches of preaching and catechesis on baptism, in John Chrysostom, for example, hardly ever mention infant recipients.

Biblical Christians should welcome this movement for change within baptismal thinking, even though it is bound to have the effect of relativising the claims of infant baptism. Such a correction was long overdue. The case for infant baptism has for centuries suffered from overkill, from exaggerated biblical deductions and maximalized historical enquiries. I never tire of citing C.F.D. Moule's oral comment on Joachim Jeremias's *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*, 'It contains at least all the evidence.'

This paper's return to our theme of covenant is also overdue. The covenant people of God is a community of faith. It is as such that the Abrahamic covenant finds its fulfilment in the new covenant of Christ, as Paul argues in Galatians 3:6–39, especially verses 7, 9, 14, 26, 29. That is why circumcision cannot serve simply as a model for Christian baptism. Second-century Christian writers saw in circumcision a mark of Jewish ethnicity. So if children belong to the new covenant people of Christians, they do not do so on special non-faith terms, of birth or nationality – and certainly not of innocence. (The late Alan Stibbs used to say that what had killed the gospel at the font was baby-worship.) There is no double-entry scheme on offer. The millennium-old experience of Christendom was recruitment largely from birth, on the basis of physical kinship.

The question, then, is whether children belong to the covenant community. To that I would answer in the affirmative, on a presumption of inclusiveness, whether or not it is thought appropriate to baptise them.²⁷ Whether by baptism, by dedication or by thanksgiving and blessing, we welcome the children of the faithful as the gift of God and we are right to treat them as new members of God's people, not as no better than little pagans or unbelievers.

This presumption of covenantal inclusiveness comports well with several features in the NT:

- i. Children are addressed in some of the epistles as though part of the community of Christians in Colossae, Ephesus and elsewhere. What assumptions does their presence imply?
- ii. The household baptisms of Acts indicate an inclusiveness extending beyond the modern nuclear family, presumably encompassing slaves also.
- iii. The descendants to whom the promise extends in Acts 2:39, 'to you and your descendants' (as in the promises to Noah, Gen. 9:9, to Abraham, Gen. 13:15, 17:7–8, Gal. 3:16, and to David, Pss 18:50, 89:34–37, 132:11–12), began life as children of their parents.

²⁷ My own position, for what it is worth, views infant baptism as an *adiaphoron*, a matter on which Christians may differ without breaking fellowship. In my judgement, it is untenable to demand infant baptism on the basis of Scripture, but at the same time its advocates have sufficient biblical arrows in their quiver not to face dogmatic rejection. Baptism itself, of course, is emphatically not an *adiaphoron*. No baptism, no Christian.

- iv. Jesus welcomed children, took them in his arms, laid his hands on their heads and blessed them. Mark twice in successive chapters has Jesus taking children in his arms, with a cuddle or a hug, I imagine (9:36-37; 10:14-16). Who were 'these little ones who believe in me, Jesus' (Mark 9:42, Matt. 18:6), whose angels in heaven, according to Matthew 18:10, always behold the face of Jesus' Father in heaven?

If this presumption of the inclusion of children within the covenant people is sound, we may make it a basis for the reconsideration of certain features of church life.

- i. The decision to allow children to join in the Lord's supper was driven, at least in the Church of Scotland, by the realisation that children, most of them baptised, were welcomed into the church at the outset but were then largely out of the church, in Sunday School or Bible Class, for years after which their full inclusion was expected but often did not happen. At least where baptism is thought appropriate to mark their inclusion, their exclusion from the other covenant ordinance is difficult to defend.
- ii. If infant baptism is practised, it should be made an important reference-point for instruction and formation. Children should grow up knowing that they belong to Christ and his church as enacted in baptism. They should be brought up believing this, and on the basis of my argument in this paper this need not be restricted to baptised infants alone.
- iii. The question arises of the inclusion of children within the normal diet of worship. This was one of the principles of the influential long ministry of the late William Still in Gilcomston South Church, Aberdeen, without for a moment involving the reduction of the level of worship to that of a children's service.
- iv. Even more controversially, and at first sight paradoxically, we should seriously consider the refocusing of energies away from special children's ministries towards adult ministries. If only in more of our churches the immense time, imagination and enterprise expended on children's ministries were paralleled in ministries to adults, especially men. Our strategy has often appeared to seek to reach parents through children, but a recent statistic revealed the huge disparity between the effect of the conversion of a child and of a mother, and even more so of a father, on other members of a family.²⁸
- v. More tentatively, I raise the question of our listening to and learning from children, of children ministering to the rest of us. The Church of Scotland has recently experimented with children's forums, and invited representatives to attend the General Assembly of 2002 and to speak.²⁹ (Annual youth assemblies send delegates to be present and participate throughout each General Assembly.) That children might be involved in decision-making may seem far-fetched, but if we listen to children at home, perhaps we should do so in church. We are increasingly accustomed to forms of feedback on adults', and teenagers', experience of the church, and it would be a short step to extend this to children.

²⁸ According to research in America, if a child is the first person to become a Christian, there is a 3.5% probability that the rest of the family will follow; if the mother is the first, 17%; if the father, 93%. Reported in *Evangelicals Now* 18:5 (May 2003), 28. It must be said that 3.5% is not negligible.

²⁹ *Reports to the General Assembly 2003* (see n. 3 above), 29/4-5.

Concluding Reflections

The wide-ranging exercise which this article has attempted can be viewed in part as a process of disentanglement from aspects of the complex legacy of the Reformation which has reached us, again in part, as Christendom, entailing a heavy element of continuity from the pre-Reformation western church. Within this context, infant baptism has been a mixed blessing. It has unambiguously marked children as heirs of the promises of the covenant, but often with major disagreement among us on when they enter into their inheritance. In fact, very many of the infant-baptised, probably a good majority, never enter into that inheritance, if we judge by standard criteria. If we believe that baptism is a dominical ordinance, to whomsoever it is given, hard questions about tolerable levels of ineffectiveness seem inescapable.

What is proposed here concentrates on a less specific inclusiveness focussed on children growing up within the heart of our churches, or within the fold of the covenant community, if that language is preferable, as 'little ones who believe in Jesus', mini-believers or believers-in-the-making. The boundaries of such inclusiveness will almost by definition be open, porous, permeable. Whether all will be members of the church, of the covenant people, need not be pressed.

In many churches the concept of membership has been becoming more problematic. We are undoubtedly moving into an era that is characterised by looser patterns of belonging, before and after believing, and children are surely very much to the point. This may prove bothersome to some evangelicals. We tend to be precisionists, to want to have things tied down and buttoned up, insistent on people conforming, meeting conditions. Calvin got a bloody nose when he attempted in his first years in Geneva to get all the citizens individually to state where they stood on the Reformation. This issue is not irrelevant to the question of the presence of children at the supper. If you bring the Sunday School in as a group, what about any unbaptised children among them?

If we balk at the possibility of unbaptised children at the communion table – as I do – let us be sure that we know why we do. Attitudes towards the sacrament of the supper in some quarters still reek of the hypersacralism of the late medieval church. There is surely gross incongruity between the scrupulous care with which we fence the table and the freedom with which we dispense the other sacrament instituted by Christ, on the grounds, for example, that it presents an evangelistic opportunity. Yet in the Scottish tradition it is communion, not baptism, that has been known as a converting ordinance. Discrepant views of the two sacraments of the gospel continue to distort pastoral policy.

The vision granted to the prophet Zechariah of the Jerusalem to which the Lord has returned to dwell in, the Jerusalem now called the faithful city, the holy mountain, includes the following picture.

Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there (Zech. 8:4–5).

Is this a sight of the new heavenly Jerusalem to come? Do the streets of our city of God on its earthly pilgrimage ring with the playing of boys and girls? The presence of children may demand of us less of a prim-and-proper solicitude lest they disturb the peace of our Sunday morning expositions.

The Blurring of Time Distinctions in Roman Catholicism¹

Leonardo De Chirico

Leonardo has recently completed his PhD on *Evangelical Theological Perspectives on Post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism* at King's College, London. He is a lecturer at IFED (Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e Documentazione, Padova, Italy) and editor of the theological journal *Studi di teologia*. He is also pastor of an Evangelical Church in Ferrara.

A consideration of the question of time offers a useful perspective from which to view the contours of the Christian faith. In a recent book, John Stott put forward the idea that the message of the gospel can be summed up adequately by two biblical adverbs which are linked to time: *hapax* (once and for all) and *mallon* (for evermore).² It is around these two adverbs that both the uniqueness and definitive character of the incarnation is asserted and the dynamic, progressive nature of the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit articulated. The two adverbs refer to two aspects of the work of the trinitarian God in the world, the one circumscribed by time and definitive in regards to the completion of the work of salvation, the other proceeding through time and developing the outworking of that salvation in history. The gospel is a message that is based on what God has done, *hapax*, and on what he is doing, *mallon*; it refers to unique facts and also to on-going developments. On the one hand, there is a series of finished events and, on the other, a continuing process which flows on through time.

To consider the essence of the Christian faith from this adverbial point of view is without doubt an approach that is biblically viable and helpful. It recognises that the work of God, both *hapax* and *mallon*, has significant temporal meaning in the history of salvation. Both of these elements can be seen in the divine plan, and as long as their boundaries are maintained, any unjustifiable blurring is avoided.

If we borrow from the language of the Chalcedonian definition regarding the two natures in the one person of Jesus Christ, we can say that the *hapax* and the *mallon* of the gospel must not be confused, but considered as unchangeable, indivisible and inseparable. Their co-existence in the divine plan does not diminish their differences; they need to be both affirmed and safeguarded. The demarcation which differentiates *hapax* from *mallon* may be subtle but it must be maintained in order to avoid any

¹ I wish to thank Huw and Alexandra Anderson as well as Paul Finch for their kind help in preparing this paper for publication.

² John Stott, *Evangelical Truth. A Personal Plea for Unity* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999).

distortion of the fundamental structure of the Christian faith. If the two are confused, problems arise. If uniqueness is attributed to that which is progressive or, alternatively, if what is definitive becomes by nature continuous, this brings about a distortion in the constitution of the faith which alters its fundamental characteristics. Just as Chalcedon recognised the basic parameters for Christology, the important distinction between *hapax* and *mallon* with regard to the gospel reflects the contours of the Christian faith that are indicated by the Word of God. In both cases even a minimal violation would become devastating, producing effects of enormous consequence.

Since it provides such a clear insight to the different aspects of gospel truth, reference to *hapax* and *mallon* also provides a model by which to evaluate the degree to which Christian confessions adhere to the biblical message. In a particular way it provides a helpful interpretative perspective from which to examine Roman Catholicism's understanding of how God works within time in the world.³ The way in which Catholicism perceives time, the sense of definitiveness as well as that of a progression, is a pointer to its basic theological framework. The argument which will be suggested here, in an introductory way, is that Roman Catholicism operated a crucial breach of the boundary between *hapax* and *mallon* in its understanding of the Church as a prolongation of the incarnation. This breach subsequently caused a series of further incursions, above all in the doctrines of the Eucharist and revelation.

The prolongation of time with respect to the incarnation

One of the defining aspects of the Roman Catholic Church is its self-understanding that reveals a great deal about the nature of Roman Catholicism.

Throughout the twentieth century there have been many images of the Church which have held a prominent position in Roman Catholic thinking. One only has to think of the insistence on the 'mystical body' found in the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* of Pius XII (1943) or the vigorous restatement of the conception of the Church as a 'sacrament of salvation' from Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium* 1), with their emphases that are still widely promoted. Even if the highlighting of certain interpretations can be attributed to changes in cultural factors and ecclesiastical dynamics, there exists, however, an underlying element of ecclesiological self-definition which these different emphases presuppose and reinforce. Although variations, they are simply modifications within a single wider picture whose perimeters are determined by the central hardcore. In fact, Roman Catholic ecclesiology rests on the idea of the continuation of the incarnation of the Son of God in his mystical body, that is, the Church. In Adam Möhler's classic definition:

The visible Church ... is the Son of God himself, everlastingly manifesting himself among men in a human form, perpetually renovated, and eternally young – the permanent incarnation of the same.⁴

³ For a recent proposal for an evangelical theological analysis of Roman Catholicism, cf. the document issued by Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e Documentazione (Padova, Italy) and endorsed by the Italian Evangelical Alliance, 'An Evangelical Approach Towards Understanding Roman Catholicism', *Evangelicals Now* (Dec. 2000), 12–13.

⁴ Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism or Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences Between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by their Symbolic Writings* (London: Gibbings & Co. 1906), 259.

This 'incarnational' understanding of the Church, rooted in the Counter-Reformation tradition and renewed in recent authoritative teaching⁵ and theological reflection,⁶ is the key to understanding the basic framework of Roman Catholic ecclesiology. Recent developments (e.g. the insistence of the Church as a sacrament or as communion) have further enlarged its scope without changing its premise based on the idea of the Church as the prolongation of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

The incarnation is the period of the Son which goes from his virginal conception to his ascension into heaven, and includes the teaching, miracles, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just as the conception marks the beginning, the ascension delineates the conclusion of the incarnation within the scheme of salvation. If this were not convincing enough, the fact that Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father is the supreme culmination of his earthly mission. It marks the beginning of the intercession of the Son and anticipates the submission of the whole world to him.⁷ The incarnation of Christ is a *hapax* in the work of God which is so uniquely related to the person and mission of the Son that it does not require any supplement or continuation, integration or representation.

In Roman Catholic thought, however, while the virgin birth is rightly considered to be the beginning of the incarnation (even though the perpetual virginity of Mary is also a doctrine which enters into conflict with the same principle that breaks the *hapax* of the Christ event) the ascension does not represent a definitive end of Christ's work in salvation which confirms its uniqueness and completeness. It is considered as part of a process which, although changing the mode of Christ's presence (from a physical to a mystical presence), carries out the continuation of his incarnation in the nature and mission of the Church. In other words, the uniqueness of the incarnation, while being mainly understood as centred in Jesus Christ, also has an ecclesiological appendix that ensures its continuity throughout history. It is obvious that Roman Catholicism maintains a series of distinctions between Christ and the church that prevent an indiscriminate and wooden identification. Nevertheless, despite all the subtle distinctions that are introduced, a substantial continuity remains between the incarnation of the Son and the work of the Church and that has serious consequences.

The act of having destroyed the unique and definitive nature of the incarnation with its glorious conclusion at the ascension implies the transferral of the mission of the Son from Christ to the Church. By overthrowing the *hapax* of the incarnation in favour of its continuation through the Church, Christ's prerogatives are aligned with those of the Church.⁸ The unique mediation of Christ yields to the mediation of the Church. The regal authority of Christ is absorbed into the jurisdictional power of the Church. The final revelation of Christ is subsequently administered by the magisterial office of the Church and, given that it also embraces oral tradition, this could result in the emergence of other truths that are not attested in biblical revelation. The choice of the apostles by Christ, instead of being a once and for all event, evolves into the succession of bishops

⁵ E.g. *Lumen Gentium* 8; 10–12; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 737; 766; 787–88; 795.

⁶ E.g. Romano Guardini, Henri De Lubac, Yves Congar, Karl Rahner.

⁷ For a brief presentation of these aspects of the Incarnation, cf. Gerald Bray, *Steps of Understanding. Key Events in Jesus' Life* (Fearn: Christian Focus 1998).

⁸ On the transposition of the threefold office of Christ (king, prophet and priest) to the Roman Church, cf. the always stimulating critique by Vittorio Subilia, *The Problem of Catholicism* (London: SCM, 1964). On the same subject, cf. also Mark Saucy, 'Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox Together: Is the Church the Extension of the Incarnation?', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43/2 (2000), 193–212.

which is established by the ecclesiastical institution. The prerogatives of salvation that belong solely to Christ are indirectly, but nevertheless really, attributed to Mary, who shares with the Son an assumption into heaven. The worship that is attributed exclusively to God is also deflected to other figures, even if this is only in the form of veneration. In short, the *hapax* of the time of Christ continues in the *mallon* of the time of the Church. Once the concept of the unique time of the incarnation is broken, the idea of the prolonged time period of the Church, in which the incarnation of the Son of God continues, and establishes itself. The time period of Christ becomes identified with, and actualised in, the time of the Church, just as the time of the Church is always thought of as a direct continuation of the time of Christ.

Nobody can deny the organic relationship between Christ and the church which is presented in the fascinating Pauline metaphor of the body (e.g. 1 Cor. 12:12–27). Such a metaphor like this, however, does not warrant the undue expansion of the time of the incarnation which breaks its *hapax* nature and creates considerable space for the church to operate as an 'alter Christus' (another Christ). Within the one body, the head is head and the members are members, without confusion or exchange of prerogatives. The Roman Catholic self-understanding of the church in terms of the prolongation of the incarnation allows the invasion of the church in a christological area which is invariably *hapax*, exclusive, closed. In this sense, the Protestant 'solus Christus' (Christ alone) is really the vindication of the integrity of the *hapax* of the incarnation against any attempt to infringe on its time delimitation and to extend his unique nature and mission to another agent. The incarnation of the Son of God is christologically *hapax*, not ecclesologically *mallon* as Roman Catholicism argues.

The re-presentation of time in the Eucharist

One of the inevitable results of the Roman Catholic understanding of the church as a continuation of the incarnation is the expansion of the categories through which Roman Catholicism understands the work of redemption, in particular the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Both the theme of the *ephapax* in the letter to the Hebrews (7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10) and the work of the Son of God in its accomplishment are read in the light of the hermeneutic of the 'church time' which breaks into that of Christ. Since the church is involved in the time of the incarnation of the Son, she is also active in his redemption which is accomplished on the cross. Both the incarnation and redemption are seen in the light of *mallon*, instead of *hapax*. This transition is most clearly seen in the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist, another Gordian knot in the theological exploration of Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Eucharist is based on a twofold, co-existing assumption: on the one hand, the acceptance of the unique, historical event of the cross and, on the other, the necessity of the re-presentation of the same sacrifice by the church. The dynamic that operates between uniqueness and re-presentation opens the field to another typically dialectic move: there is both the recognition of the exclusive role of Christ in his sacrifice and the simultaneous insistence on the role of the church in the act of re-presenting that same sacrifice.⁹

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, time and again, uses the *ephapax* language of the letter to the Hebrews, to refer to the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary and, compared

⁹ I have further explored the issue in 'The Cross and the Eucharist: the Doctrine of the Atonement according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church', *European Journal of Theology* 8:1 (1999), 49–59.

to every other sacrifice, to underline its uniqueness (614, 618) and its perfection (529). The uniqueness of salvation-history intersects, however, with the eucharistic developments in such a way that what is affirmed about the sacrifice of Christ becomes integrated with the language of re-presentation (1366), perpetuation (611, 1323) and making present (1362). The Eucharist is the sacrifice of Christ re-enacted, perpetuated and made present. Among other things, this means that as the cross is a sacrifice, so too the Eucharist is a sacrifice (1330, 1365) – to the point that together they are 'one single sacrifice' (1367). The uniqueness of the cross is thought out in loose terms in order to include the Eucharist so that the *hapax* of Calvary is dissolved in the *mallon* of the Mass. The event of the cross of Jesus Christ is extended, becoming part of the event of the Eucharist of the Church. In this respect, the *tetelestai* language of John 19:30 assumes open borders in the sense that the work of the cross is considered definitive but not final and, above all, is unable to actualise its own efficacy without the active participation of the church in making it present. Given that the enactment of the Eucharist is a supplement necessary to make the cross effective, it is in the Mass that the real work of redemption is carried out (1364).

It must also be noted that the fluid nature of the time periods of redemption also has repercussions for the doctrine of justification. In fact Roman Catholicism sees it as a gradual and progressive process through which the righteousness of Christ is increasingly infused into man and not as a declarative act of God through which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the sinner. As far as justification is concerned, in Roman Catholicism the category of *mallon* has displaced that of *hapax* and ecumenical engagement on this issue needs to be aware of it.¹⁰

Inseparably connected to these crucial elements of the doctrine of the Eucharist is the centrality and agency of the church. If the Eucharist is the re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ, the subject (the church) which offers it assumes a decisive role in the workings of the sacrifice: it not only receives its benefits, it actualises it and carries out its memorial. In the Eucharist the sacrifice that is re-presented is also the sacrifice of the church (1368) which also includes the offering of the church itself (1330). What is vitally important here is being aware of the theological framework which is at the basis of it. In this case, once again, the Roman Catholic eucharistic theology can be traced back to the subversion of time periods, from the *hapax* of the cross of Christ to the *mallon* of the Mass of the church via the understanding of the church as the prolongation of the incarnation. The theology of re-presentation can be explained in terms of violation of the uniqueness of the soteriological completeness of the sacrifice of Christ by an enlarged view of the sacrifice which includes both the unique event of the cross and the on-going events of the Mass. The Roman Catholic theology of the Eucharist, 'the fount and apex of the whole Christian life' (*Lumen Gentium* 11), is a consequence of a prior intrusion of 'church time' into the time of Christ which establishes a continuity between

¹⁰ A standard treatment of the controversy over justification is R.C. Sproul, *By Faith Alone. The Doctrine that Divides* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995). The 1999 Joint Declaration between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation does not change the fundamental issues at stake. For introductory comments by Evangelicals, cf. Albert Greiner, *Fac-Réflexion* No. 51–52 (2000/2–3), 4–21; W. Robert Godfrey, *Banner of Truth* 436 (2000), 17–20; José Moreno Berroch, *Nueva Reforma* 50 (2000), 4–9; Gerald Bray – Paul Gardner, *Churchman* 115 (2001/2), 110–27; David Estrada, *Christianity and Society* (2001), 12–17; Ted M. Dorman, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44/3 (2001), 421–34; David Vaughn, *Revue Réformée* 216 (2002/1), 43–64.

them in terms of the prolongation of the incarnation of the Son within the mission of the church.

The dynamic time of revelation

A third area of vital theological importance in which it is possible to clearly discern the Roman Catholic understanding of *hapax* and *mallon* is that of revelation. While the doctrinal subject changes, the generating mechanism of violating time periods is the same in that it is indelibly rooted in the Roman Catholic system. Here, the yardstick of biblical data sees the faith as being given to the saints once for all time (Jude 3). The divine revelation has been made known in Christ *hapax* in the sense of its completeness (Heb. 1:1–2). It has certainly undergone an historical progression in the unfolding of salvation history, but in the fullness of time has reached its final apex in the mission of the Son of God (Gal. 4:4). After Christ, the culmination of revelation, no further revelation must be expected until his return. As definitive revelation, the canonical Scriptures are the divinely inspired testimony by which, through the Holy Spirit, the mission of the church is made possible together with the transmission of the gospel from generation to generation (2 Tim. 3:16). If Jesus Christ is the definitive divine revelation, then the canonical, inspired Scriptures are the complete revelation of the Son in the books of the Bible. The closure of the canon is the attestation that the revelation of Jesus Christ is complete until he comes. Both events, the revelation of the Son of God and the final acceptance of the canonical Scriptures, are organically linked and are deeply permeated with a sense of *hapax*: revelation is complete and definitive. After the revelation of the Christ of the Bible, there can no longer be revelations but only interpretations of the already given revelation. The work of interpretation of the revelation is a *mallon*-type of divine intervention. It is the Holy Spirit who continually guides into all truth (John 16:13). While revelation belongs to *hapax* time, the hermeneutic of revelation belongs to the *mallon* time. From the evangelical perspective, the Bible is the canonical authority revealing the *hapax* event of Christ and it needs to be known *mallon* through the Spirit.

The Roman Catholic perspective, however, while attributing a conclusive character to the revelation of Christ and to the Bible, has a wider understanding of the Word of God than simply the canonical Scriptures. Revelation is one 'divine wellspring' (*Dei Verbum* 9) from which the Bible and tradition flow. The two means of transmission refer to the unique revelation that is interpreted authentically and authoritatively by the Magisterium.¹¹ What needs to be stressed here is that the stream of revelation by tradition is neither independent nor necessarily anti-biblical, but it can certainly be extra-biblical in the sense that it is now given the status of a fully legitimate stream of revelation in itself. In the words of the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (1998), the Scriptures are not 'the only point of reference of truth' for the Roman Catholic Church. Scripture and tradition together bring revelation. The *hapax* sense of biblical revelation is opened up to being integrated with tradition that is mediated by the Magisterium, thus creating a dialectic between the Biblical message and the process of tradition. On the contrary, the Protestant 'Sola Scriptura' based on the *hapax* of the revelation of Christ in the Bible, questions the idea of tradition as either a parallel or an intersecting channel of

¹¹ Cf. *Dei Verbum* 7–10; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 50–141.

revelation.¹² Without doubt the way the Roman Catholic doctrine of revelation is conceived demands that revelation is open since tradition is still an active stream of revelation even if it is subject to numerous restrictions and precautionary measures. The example of the promulgation of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary (1950), explicitly lacking any biblical warrant but well attested in tradition, indicates that such an idea is not just hypothetical. For Roman Catholicism, revelation can be seen as a *mallon* action of God that is administered by the church.

To this should be added the observation that the violation of the time periods of revelation also gives enormous scope for the exercise of normative authority by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Given that both the interpretation of Scripture and the discernment of tradition are the roles of the Magisterium, it finds itself invested with enormous powers. The inevitable result is that if the *hapax* of revelation is broken, the role of the church mushrooms out of all proportion since the church administers the *mallon* of revelation.

Roman Catholicism is not intentionally driven by the desire to confuse the time periods of God. It would be uncharitable and prejudiced to think so. All the same, the unfolding of its powerful dialectical capacities which introduce subtle distinctions leading to the amplification of the synthesis ('both-and' instead of the Reformation 'sola', 'solus') brings about a substantial rearrangement of the time periods. Here is the Roman Catholic genius of 'complexio oppositorum' (convergence of opposites), an epistemological art which is at the same time both fascinating and disconcerting. The removing of boundaries between *hapax* and *mallon* means the removal of demarcation lines between event and process, between definitive and progressive aspects of Divine action, between Christ and the church. To undermine the configuration of time is a dangerous game. A *hapax* that is violated gives rise to disruptive rifts in the very fabric of the Christian faith. An extended *mallon* produces 'add-ons' that are Scripturally unsustainable in the economy of faith.

The Protestant Reformation identified the core of the problem with Roman Catholicism in its mingling of what needs to be distinct. 'Solus Christus' and 'sola Scriptura' are none other than an urgent call to rigorously respect the *hapax* of the gospel in order to benefit from it more and more. In fact, enjoying the *mallon* of the gospel is possible only after respecting its *hapax*. Looking at Roman Catholicism today, it is hard to believe that that call has been superseded.

¹² A brilliant treatment of the significance of 'Sola Scriptura' against the background of the controversy with Roman Catholicism is Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow: Canon Press 2001).

How shall we sing the Psalms? – A Review Article

Jamie Grant

Highland Theological College, Dingwall

Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction

C. Hassell Bullock

Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001, 266 pp., hb., £19.99

Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations, FOTL XV

Erhard G. Gerstenberger

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001, 543 pp., £32.95

Praying the Psalms: A Commentary

Stanley L. Jaki

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001, 239 pp., £11.99

The Book of Psalms has been the object of great delight and fascination for believers of every generation. This delight and fascination continues in contemporary Christianity and Judaism and is reflected in the number of books that are published on the Psalms each year. This review will consider three recent – and very different – contributions to the secondary literature on the Psalter. Each of these works takes a different approach to the study of the psalms, but perhaps this is to be expected when one considers the backgrounds of the authors: Hassell Bullock is Professor of Biblical Studies at Wheaton College, Erhard Gerstenberger is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Literature at Marburg University, and Stanley Jaki is distinguished Professor at Seton Hall University, a Roman Catholic university in New Jersey.

The approaches to the study of the Psalter found in these three books vary, not only because of the backgrounds and presuppositions of the respective authors, but also because of the aims of each book in question. Baker Books' *Encountering* series may well be known to readers of *Themelios* – it is a series of publications aimed at the undergraduate student of theology. There are two strands of *Encountering* publications: the more general and entry-level overview books aimed at new students of theology (e.g. *Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey*) and the more detailed and advanced publications on specific books of the Bible. Bullock's volume is one of the latter and, for all its accessibility (illustrations, call-outs with quotes, study questions, glossaries and summaries throughout), this is ultimately a scholarly and quite detailed work on the Book of Psalms. Gerstenberger's long-awaited addition to the *Forms of Old*

Testament Literature series is (typically of this series) a very careful, well-researched and scholarly publication that deals with everything from textual criticism of the various psalms to questions of structure or genre or life setting. Consideration of each psalm also includes a comprehensive bibliography of works which discuss that poem's significance. Jaki's work is a single, one-off publication based upon his devotional use of the psalms over the last sixty years. It does not pay detailed attention to questions of exegesis or genre or setting, but rather is designed to encourage the adoption and use of the psalms as prayers.

Perhaps the best way to give the reader a taster of each of these books, is to select a test case and show how each of the authors deals with the content of a specific psalm. The somewhat controversial (from the perspective of disagreement within the secondary literature) Psalm 110 seems to offer good insight into the workings of each of these books. I shall deal with Gerstenberger and Jaki first, for reasons that will become clear.

Under the title of 'Divine Proclamation; Messianic Promise', Gerstenberger begins his analysis by laying out the structure of the psalm (two stanzas based on the oracles found in verses 1 and 4 and their succeeding interpretations). He then moves on to analyse the text of Psalm 110, which he describes as 'particularly obscure ... because of textual corruptions and ... unintelligible allusions to mythical, ritual and theological details' (264). Gerstenberger considers the 'lord' to whom Yahweh speaks to be 'an Israelite royal figure ... offered the highest possible dynastic honour: to sit next to God on the divine throne as divine regent or vice-deity' (264).

After drawing out some of the implications of this first oracle, he points out the priestly nature of the second oracle found in verse 4 and discusses the incongruities of this association of king and priest within the overall theology of the OT. The challenges presented by Psalm 110 in conflating the figures of king and priest lead Gerstenberger into consideration of possible historical settings for this psalm. He deduces that initial indications found in the psalm indicate a background found in the Judean monarchy with the oracles mediated by a 'court prophet or mantic priest'. He decides, however, that this is the reworking of old oracles because such ideas as 'universal outlook, world government from Zion [and] final battle against nations' are 'features incompatible with pre-exilic Judean theology' which 'forbids [the] dating [of] our psalm in monarchic times. Rather, it should be localised in the exilic/postexilic messianic expectation' (266). Gerstenberger continues with a brief discussion of genre and further comment on setting, before concluding with a paragraph on the intention of this psalm ('to kindle hope for betterment and the strength to fight for it,' 267) and a lengthy bibliography of scholarly works dealing with Psalm 110.

Jaki's approach is very different and makes no pretence at offering a comprehensive discussion and exegesis of this text. His opening gambit with regard to Psalm 110 gives an accurate insight into the tone of the book as a whole:

If thirty years count for one generation, then sixty some generations of Christians have already prayed this psalm as a praise to Jesus, the Messiah, the eternally begotten Son of God. Whether all the words they prayed were clear to them all the time is doubtful. Even more doubtful is that they could readily follow the train of thought of a psalm that is more mysterious than all other psalms. But pray they did, praise they did, and had their soul filled with the sense of certainty and peace (192).

Jaki – a Hungarian born, Roman Catholic scholar whose distinguished work has mostly come in the field of science and religion – is not concerned with questions of text or genre or exegesis, but with the issue of how the adoption of a psalm from an NT perspective shapes the prayers of the Christian. He does not ask or seek to answer the difficult hermeneutical questions of the relationship between the testaments or how the Christian should read the psalms 'christologically'. (There is some discussion of this issue in the introduction, pages 26ff., but this is far removed from a detailed consideration of method). Jaki's approach is much more 'subjective' than that found in Gerstenberger's careful analysis. The problem with analyses of this type is that the prayers which one Christian draws from and bases upon a psalm may be very different from the same prayers drawn from the same psalm by another believer.

Assessing Bullock's consideration of Psalm 110 is slightly more complicated as his book takes a thematic approach to the study of the psalms rather than a canonical analysis psalm-by-psalm. Therefore the 'Scripture Index' is of paramount importance if one is dipping into this work in order to access information about specific psalms. There are several references to Psalm 110 throughout the volume, but the bulk of them are to be found in the section dealing with 'The Psalms of the Earthly King' (177ff.). In this section Bullock introduces the reader to the genre and function of royal psalms by way of discussion of the characteristics of such psalms. Psalm 110 features in this discussion because royal psalms were defined by the form-critical school via their explicit reference either to 'the king' or to 'David' or to 'the anointed one' within the content of the psalm (as opposed to Davidic reference in the superscription) – Psalm 110 is one psalm which is classed as 'royal' despite the fact that it contains explicit reference to none of these features. Bullock goes on to explain that some psalms are termed 'royal' because they:

clearly describe the power, paraphernalia, and activities of the king, even though they do not mention his name ... Psalm 110 uses language that obviously refers to the king, speaking of him as 'my lord', (1) and referring to his 'sceptre' (v. 2, pp. 178–79).

Further discussion of this psalm is found in the section dealing with 'The Royal Psalms and the Messiah' (182ff.), where Bullock discusses the historical and eschatological levels at which the royal psalms are interpreted. These psalms he describes as rooted in history ('the ground level of hermeneutics'), yet having strong eschatological overtones ('the royal psalms readily lend themselves to the NT messianic view') and he discusses the process by which the gospel writers reinterpreted these psalms in the light of the person and the work of Christ.

Each of these books, needless to say, has its own strengths and weaknesses. Gerstenberger's analysis is careful and well-argued and provides an ideal starting-point for more detailed research into any of the psalms that fall within the remit of 'Part 2' (i.e. from Psalm 61 onwards). The quality of Gerstenberger's scholarship is beyond question and the analysis of each psalm is very thorough. Readers of *Themelios* will not always agree with the theological conclusions which Gerstenberger derives from the analysis of the text (e.g. his assumption that the royal psalms find their original historical root, not in the Judean monarchy, but in the eschatological expectation of the Second Temple period), but this book is an excellent starting-point for any detailed work in the Book of Psalms.

The very subjectivity of Jaki's book means that it inevitably appeals to some and not to others. He moves freely between the OT, NT, Roman Catholic doctrine (elements of

which an evangelical audience will certainly disagree) and scientific observation without any explicit consideration of the method at work in these transitions. Some of Jaki's comments are indeed helpful in understanding the spirituality lying within the psalms, but many are so far removed from an exegetical reading of the psalm that they seem to hide the meaning rather than to bring enlightenment. For example, the reading of Psalm 96 – a great 'missionary' psalm which celebrates Yahweh's universal dominion over all the earth – focuses only upon the initial command of the psalm to sing a new song and discussion centres upon ideas of novelty and liturgy, which are, at best, peripheral to the composition and, at worst, irrelevant.

Bullock's *Encountering the Psalms* is very much an introduction. However, as introductions go, it is a helpful, comprehensive, well-written and well-presented introduction to the Book of Psalms. Anyone beginning serious study of the psalms will find Bullock's work to be an excellent starting point, with helpful discussion of most of the major debates within the secondary literature and a very useful bibliography which is divided into subject sections should the reader wish to research a particular topic more thoroughly.

The Last Word

The Self-Emptying Life

Robbie Castleman

National Director for RTSF/USA and Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies and Theology at John Brown University

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself.

Paul's words of admonition to the church in Philippi (Phil. 2:5-7a, NRSV) might have been easy to sing or recite as part of an early hymn or creed in the first century church, but Euodia and Syntyche might have found them hard to swallow. In the Epistle's fourth chapter, Paul asks these women to 'be of the same mind in the Lord' over some grievance between them that was not doctrinally significant, but was proving disruptive and distracting to the community of faith (Phil. 4:2-3).

Every time I teach Philippians, I wonder what the disagreement was about. (It probably had to do with what kind of music was best for the hymn!) Whatever it was, it was a dispute that did not concern the truth of the gospel as Paul never hesitated to deal with those sorts of disputes in the particular. No, this dispute was waged over preference or taste, something that smacked of pride and lent itself to power. Euodia (smells good!) and Syntyche (looks great!) were in some sort of power struggle over an issue that boiled down to influence, a preferred comfort zone or a preference for how something should be done. Even though Paul did not treat this as false doctrine or false teaching, neither did the Apostle ignore this fracture within the fellowship. Paul wanted these two women who had struggled with Paul in the work of the gospel to empty themselves for the sake of the other.

I often think that when the letter was first read, Euodia and Syntyche sat there across the room from each other and thought, 'I hope *she's* listening!' And then suddenly they each heard their own name and realised the need for the self-emptying life wasn't just for 'the other person'. Each of us has to hear our name in Paul's admonition. We might 'look great' and even 'smell good', but if we are not self-emptying servants, we can disrupt our communities of faith and impede our witness to the gospel. In Philippians 2:3, Paul, in fact, contrasts 'conceit' or 'vain glory' (lit. *kenodoxia* – *empty glory*) with the glory of Christ that is self-emptied in the incarnation. Every time we think a sermon is for someone else, it means we're full of ourselves. We are not emptied. We are not humble. We do not have the mind of Christ.

Self-emptying is incredibly challenging for those who consider themselves somehow endowed with a superiority compared to others, but it's even difficult for those who consider themselves as equals. From the Jerusalem Council in Acts after the Gentile Pentecost to the Judaisers of Galatia, from the Philippian church of Euodia and Syntyche to Philemon's treatment of Onesimus, from Mary's discipleship at the feet of Jesus to Phoebe's ministry in the early church, issues of self-emptying swirl around what it means that 'there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28). As the spiritual offspring of Abraham, all of us are to 'have the same mind ... that was in Christ Jesus'. We are to empty ourselves, 'looking not to our own interests, but to the interests of others' (Phil. 2:4). This costly discipleship should transform our homes, energise our mission, celebrate our gifts and inform our hermeneutical practice as well. When a person is marginalised in serving the church on the basis of gender and not the gifts given by grace, or when Scripture translation becomes an exercise of power over pronouns it smacks of *kenodoxia*, not the kenotic theology of the incarnation and the cross.

When my son was asked during pre-marital counselling to describe the foundational principle for relating to his wife, he began by relating the truths of Philippians chapter two. 'If Karen and I are equals in Christ, equals in personhood, equals in value, then our equality is not something to be grasped or exploited or turned to our own benefit. The only thing I can do is empty myself for her – give my self away for her, no matter the cost. To love her as Christ loves the Church'. And she for him.

If we won't even sacrifice our taste in worship music, our preferences in pronouns in Bible translation, or how Powerpoint should or should not be used in sanctuaries, how will we ever see the church unfettered from its empty glory to give itself away for the world God loves? Euodia and Syntyche regretfully merited a rebuke in Scripture because they were in a power struggle over a gospel non-essential. If Scripture were written today, would we read our names in a similar rebuke? If 'Euodia' were to truly bear the aroma of Christ (2 Cor. 2:15) in the world and if 'Syntyche' were to be an 'ornament' for the gospel (Titus 2:10), the self-emptying life is the only way to the glory that matters.