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The Rending of the Veil (Matt.27:51a *par*): A Look Back and a Way Forward

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The narrative flow of Jesus' Passion account in Matthew 27, in particular, shifts abruptly at the point when Jesus 'gave up his spirit'. Up to this point, the reader has followed Jesus as he is interrogated by Pilate in Jerusalem (27:11–26), taken to the Praetorium to be beaten and mocked (27:27–31a), and led away to Golgotha for crucifixion (27:31b–44). The narrative continues by recounting the darkness (27:45), Jesus' recitation of a portion of Psalm 22 (27:46), and the responses of 'those standing there' (27:47–49). From here the narrative presents Jesus crying out in a loud voice and giving up his spirit (27:50). At this point in the text the reader is propelled from the narrative sequence and scene at Golgotha into a metanarrative (51–53) where, among other extraordinary events, the veil of the temple is torn in two. Noteworthy of the Matthean account (as well as those of Mark and Luke) is the lack of explanation for this event.² One scholar has rightly said a 'remarkable symbolism is involved, which none of the evangelists stop to explain'.³ The lack of explanation on the part of the evangelists, it seems, has contributed to the great variety of interpretations of this event offered through the history of Christendom.

Discussion of the rending of the temple veil begins with Ephraim the Syrian,⁴ whose own interpretations represent an early trend in scholarship that endures to the present day. In his *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron* (written c. 363–373), he illustrates the ambiguity of the rending of the veil commenting that the rending shows 'that [the Lord] had taken the kingdom away from (the Jews?) and had given it to others who would bear fruit'.⁵ He then provides a diverse and lengthy list of 'alternative' interpretations: including the destruction of the temple because God's Spirit had departed from it, the

¹ The author can be reached at dgurtner@yahoo.com.

² D.A. Hagner says, 'The evangelist can leave this unexplained because it was so familiar to the early church'. *Matthew 14–28* (Dallas: Word, 1995), 849. R. Brown (*The Death of the Messiah* [New York: Doubleday, 1994]) argues that neither the author nor his readers understood the symbolism.

³ Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 849.

⁴ For a survey of the earliest interpretations, cf. M. de Jonge, 'Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis', *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986), 67–79; A. Pelletier, 'La tradition synoptique du 'Voile déchiré' à la lumière des réalités archéologiques', *Recherches de science religieuse* 46 (1958), 161–66.

⁵ 41.4–6 (trans. T.C. Oden and C.A. Hall, eds; *Mark* [Ancient Christian Commentary Series: New Testament 2; London: Dearborn, 1998], ad loc. Cf. Matt. 21:43). While we appreciate pre-critical scholarship's desire to recognise a plurality of meanings to enrich interpretation, we will see below that such plurality is not necessarily warranted by the compositional whole of Matthew's Gospel.

Spirit rending the veil in mourning as the High Priest tore his robe at the wrongful accusations against Jesus, God throwing down the curtain of the temple as Judas threw down the silver he received for his betrayal, moving 'freely from one interpretation to another ... without really choosing one of them'.⁶ As we shall see, prior to Ephraim and since, scholars have been occupied with interpreting the rending of the veil, regardless of its synoptic context, by a variety of means which often, though not always, relate to which veil is in view (inner, outer, both, or neither) and what the implications of its rending were for the (Herodian) temple. This variety, surveyed below,⁷ includes arguing for a particular view based on *lexical* discussions of the use of 'veil' (*katapetasma*); the necessity of the veil being *visible* to the centurion who subsequently professes faith; an 'apologetic' interpretation which includes vindication of Jesus based on his prior predictions of the temple's destruction; Christological arguments based largely on the relationship between Christ's death and the three veil texts in Hebrews; and finally a group of *miscellaneous* interpretations, largely historical in nature, which seem to fit into none of these categories. While the survey is by no means complete, it is perhaps sufficient to illustrate both the complexity of the issues involved and the lack of substantial agreement among scholars when evaluating precisely the same evidence. Finally we will glean from the work of these scholars and propose our own method of approaching the problem.

Lexical argument

The most obvious, though least fruitful, argument upon which an interpretation is based is lexical in orientation. The text of Matthew 27:51a reads, 'and behold, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom in two'. The question is to which (if any) of the two (or more) 'veils', described first in Exodus 26:4-5, 9-10, 12, 31, 33, (to which Matthew presumably alludes), does the use of the word 'veil' (*to katapetasma*) refer? A problem is that Matthew's phrase 'veil of the temple' (*katapetasma tou naou*) occurs nowhere else in Greek literature prior to or roughly contemporaneous with the writing of the synoptics. Moreover, in the LXX there are three different curtains in the tabernacle called a *katapetasma*. Where most scholars draw attention to the ambiguity of the lexical evidence, a small handful of scholars have based a significant portion of their interpretation of the rending of the veil upon the lexical evidence of *katapetasma*.

Some scholars have looked to the LXX, where 'veil' (*katapetasma*) mostly refers to the inner veil, or to Philo (*Mos.* 2.101), who suggests the term is used for just the inner veil (though he himself uses it for others!) to insist the inner veil before the Holy of Holies is in view for the evangelists.⁸ While those who argue from a lexical standpoint are unanimously in favour of the inner veil, their subsequent interpretations are less

⁶ De Jonge, 'Matthew 27:51', 74.

⁷ For a list of the thirty-five (undocumented) interpretations counted by one scholar, cf. T.J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 140-45. For a more comprehensive account of particularly ancient Christian interpretations, see Pelletier, 'La tradition synoptique', 161-66.

⁸ W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), 562. Cf. H.L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (6 vols; München: Beck, 1922-61), 3:733.

coherent. W. Grundmann interprets the rending of the veil as among other 'cosmic-apocalyptic' events at Jesus' death, which is a reference to the 'fullness of time' in which Jesus 'opened the entrance to God'.⁹ C.F. Keil took such an argument a step further to contend the temple and the temple-cult are thus no longer necessary.¹⁰ F. Bleek concludes that the evangelists record a 'poetic exposition' with a 'symbolic meaning', namely that Jesus' death provides redemption by means of which believers enter into the Holy of Holies.¹¹

There seem to be no controls on interpretations even among those who agree on which curtain is in view, and how scholars arrive at such interpretations solely on the basis of a dubious evaluation of lexical evidence is often not clarified.¹² C.E.B. Cranfield, to name but one such scholar, is tentative in his identification of the veil because of the lexical inconclusiveness of *katapetasma* in the LXX.¹³ Even C. Schneider, in his lexical work exclusively on *katapetasma*, favours the inner veil for its 'cultic significance' rather than lexical evidence.¹⁴ Most scholars agree with Cranfield's assessment and refrain from basing an interpretation on it alone.

Visibility argument

Another way to interpret the rending of the veil is by the centurion's apparent response to it. All three synoptic references to the event (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45) place the centurion's confession, 'truly this was the son of God' (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47),¹⁵ after the rending of the veil. The veil's rending is taken as being among 'the events' (*ta gegomena*) he beheld. The (Gentile) centurion, it is argued, would only be permitted to see the *outer* veil and Josephus' description of the outer veil as being 55 cubits high (*Jewish Wars* 5.5.4 §§211–12), not only allows the centurion to see the veil from that distance but also conceals the inner veil from his view. This view, most recently defended by H.M. Jackson, who argues that the rending of the veil was probably 'public' as were other 'signs associated with Jesus' death'.¹⁶ Scholars of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have argued that if the inner veil were in

⁹ Grundmann, *Matthäus*, 562; F. Bleek, *Synoptische Erklärung der drei ersten Evangelien* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1862), 475. Our translations.

¹⁰ C.F. Keil, *Kommentar über das Evangelium des Matthäus* (Leipzig: D'Yferling und Franke, 1877), 590

¹¹ Bleek, *Synoptische Erklärung*, 476.

¹² Though see L.C. Fillion and M.A. Bayle, *Évangile selon S. Matthieu* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1878), 554.

¹³ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), 459–60. So also G.R. Driver, 'Two Problems in the New Testament', *Journal of Theological Studies* (1965), 336; J.E. Yates, *The Spirit and the Kingdom* (London: SPCK, 1963), 232; Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentary zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 1:1044.

¹⁴ C. Schneider, 'Katapetasma', *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 3:629. Similarly K.H. Maahs, 'Curtain', *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* 1:838; C.S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 686–87; Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentary zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 1:1042–46; Eta Linnemann, *Studien zur Passionsgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 159.

¹⁵ For our purposes, the differences of word order and precisely what is 'confessed' by the centurion is immaterial.

¹⁶ D.L. Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1860. Bock's conclusion, however, is cautious, and he first highlights the lexical difficulties with any decision. More specifically, W.L. Lane states, 'The rending of the veil is a public sign that the rejection of the Messiah by the leaders of the people discloses a failure in sensitivity to the divine purpose' *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 575.

view only the priests, who would be present at that hour for the evening sacrifices,¹⁷ could see it and would by no means disclose their testimony.¹⁸ Others insist that the priests who were later converted (Acts 6:7) could have made such information known;¹⁹ their sacrifices for sins are no longer necessary.²⁰

Origen proposed, among other things, 'a moral interpretation' which brings one to the 'fear of God' and 'bear witness that he who has suffered these things is the Son of God'.²¹ T.E. Schmidt suggests that the 'rending may foreshadow God's judgement on the Temple; but, at a deeper level, it signifies the departure of God's Spirit from the Jews'.²² Marshall sees the outer veil in view for Luke, while for Mark it may represent 'the new way into the presence of God opened up by Jesus'.²³

As interesting as this option is, it seems to fail to acknowledge the distinctly apocalyptic language in which the evangelist places this event. Surely Matthew, placing the rending of the veil between the death of Christ and the explicitly apocalyptic 'events' of the splitting of rocks, opening of tombs, and raising of the holy ones, intends the rending of the veil to in some way relate to this worldview within the gospel narrative. As argued, this approach makes no provision for any apocalyptic motif. Indeed, L. Sabourin rightly comments 'the *interpretation* of history lies in the centre of apocalyptic thought'.²⁴ Moreover, it is most likely that from Golgotha even the outer veil would not have been visible, as the temple was not facing either of the traditional sites.

Apologetic arguments

Scholars from the third century onwards have suggested a variety of what can broadly be called 'apologetic' interpretations of the rending of the veil, in which the line between symbol and interpretation is blurry. Taking careful notice of Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple (Matt. 23:38), some presume the rending of the veil is a symbol of temple destruction either vindicating OT prophecies²⁵ or Jesus' prediction.²⁶ Others see a combination of this vindication with judgement or retaliation on the part

- ¹⁷ M.W. Jacobus, *Notes on the Gospels, Critical and Explanatory: Matthew* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, 1862), 289–90.
- ¹⁸ So D. Brown, 'The Veil of the Temple Rent in Twain from the Top to the Bottom', *Expositor* 5th Series 2 (1895), 158–60; Keener, *Matthew*, 687; P. Gaechter, *Das Matthäus Evangelium: Ein Kommentar* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1963), 931–32; A.H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1915), 423.
- ¹⁹ H. Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Rivingstons, 1859), 1:281; A.D. Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Paternoster Row, 1909), 401–402.
- ²⁰ J.P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 33.
- ²¹ *Matthew*, 140 (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* 6:90).
- ²² T.E. Schmidt, 'The Penetration of Barriers and the Revelation of Christ in the Gospels', *Novum Testamentum* 34 (1992), 236–37.
- ²³ I.H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 874.
- ²⁴ L. Sabourin, 'Apocalyptic Traits in Matthew's Gospel', *Religious Studies Bulletin* 3 (1983), 19. Emphasis mine. G.N. Stanton comments, '[Matthew] intends to set out the story and significance of Jesus as a "foundation document" for his readers: his primary aims are Christological and catechetical' (*A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993], 2). Emphasis mine.
- ²⁵ Cyril of Alexandria, *Fragments on Acts and the Catholic Epistles* 74.760.27 (of Joel 2:31 in Acts 2:20); *Commentary on the Minor Prophets* 1.341.22 (of Joel 2:31); Eusebius, *Demonstration of the Gospel* 8.2.112.3 (Dan. 9:27); Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.42 (of Amos 8:9; Ezek. 11:22, 23; Isa. 1:8); C.G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels* (London: Macmillan, 1909), 2:744 (of

of God,²⁷ or simply pure judgement in response to the unjust execution of his Son.²⁸ Still others suggest that the rending of the veil is a sort of 'authentication'; that is, a divine 'sign' affirming that though he was crucified as a felon, God is 'speaking' through the rending of the veil to affirm that Jesus is in fact who he claimed to be, God's (divine) Son.

These views are carefully summarised by Davies and Allison, who themselves argue that the veil relates to the destruction of the temple in AD 70.²⁹ In addition to Matthew 23:38, they look to Matthew 27:40 where passers-by speak of Jesus' alleged claim of destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days.³⁰ They conclude that 'it is most appropriate that, immediately after people mock Jesus for his prophecy about the temple (v. 40), his words should be vindicated'.³¹ Support is often found in Tacitus (*Histories* 5.13), who records that during the AD 70 siege of Jerusalem, 'the doors of the shrine (temple) opened and a superhuman voice cried: "The gods are departing": at the same moment a mighty stir of their going was heard'.³² Ancient Christians have associated this legend with the veil to argue that a divine being, normally an angel but also the Holy Spirit or Yahweh, abandoned its protective presence with Israel.³³ The rent veil was seen as a miraculous event of divine origin, and therefore a witness or declaration of the divinity of Christ³⁴ which is itself sufficient grounds for faith.³⁵

Ezek. 37:12); Cf. also Eusebius, *Demonstration of the Gospel* 6.18.41.3; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 13.32.19–33.1; Cyril of Alexandria, *Fragments*, 315, *On Matthew* 27:51.

²⁶ Eusebius, *Fragments* on Luke, 24.605.29; *Demonstration of the Gospel* 6.18.41.3; A. Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus: Seine Sprache, sein Ziel, seine Selbständigkeit* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1957), 783–84. Curiously, few have looked to Jesus' prediction in 24:2.

²⁷ R. Hummel, *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kirche und Judentum im Matthäusevangelium* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1966), 84–85; U. Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (trans. J.B. Robinson; Cambridge: University Press, 1995), 136; for Luke, E.E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (London: Nelson, 1966), 269, who lists the prediction of the temple destruction (Luke 21:5–38), Christ opening the way to God for all people (Luke 23:43), and the cessation of 'temple rites' as the necessary means 'for the true worship of God' all as being in view.

²⁸ Georgius Cedrenus, *Historiarum Compendium*, 1.482.19; R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 656–57; *Apostolic Constitutions* 6.5.26; Eusebius, *Demonstration of the Gospel* 8.2.116.4; *Catena on Mark*, 440.26; 441.8; Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 59.361.41; *De cruce et latrine homiliae* II, 10:15; Pseudo-Macarius, *Spiritual Homilies* 50.4.331.

²⁹ W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 3:631.

³⁰ Yet the accusations in 27:40 are explicitly said to be false. In addition, Davies and Allison suggest that the phrase 'from top to bottom into two' is more meaningful if it refers to the (taller) outer curtain (*Matthew*, 3:631). But surely Matthew is not interested in the physical difficulty, but the metaphorical significance and resulting theological implications that are indeed miraculous.

³¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:630. The texts they cite for support, however, (2:630, n. 100; Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.42; Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 88.2) say nothing about the identity of the veil but rather allude to the concept of judgement only.

³² Tacitus, *Histories* 5.13 (Loeb Classical Library).

³³ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 4.42; Hilary, *Commentary on Matthew* 33.7; *Tractate on the Psalms*, 57.10; Melito of Sardis, *The Pascha* 98. Tertullian, *Against the Jews*, 13.15; *Apostolic Constitutions*, 6.5.26; Clement of Alexandria, *Christ the Educator* 3.2; Chrysostom, *De cruce et latrine homiliae* II, 10.15; Ephraem the Syrian, *Sermon on the Passion*, 36.2 (presumably his reference to the departure of a dove is symbolic of the Holy Spirit).

³⁴ Origen, *Against Celsus*, 2.33; *Commentary on John* 19, 16; B103; Arnobius, *Against the Heathen* 53; Chrysostom, *Oratio de hypapante* 66.1; *Prayer* 64.1065.26; Athanasius, *Homily on the Passion* 28.249.18; K. Stendahl, 'Matthew', in Peake's *Commentary on the Bible* (ed.

Christological argument

By far the most common interpretation of the rending of the veil, at least since John Calvin, associates this event with the veil tradition discussed at three locations in Hebrews. Here, the believer's hope lies 'behind the veil' (6:19); in the Holy of Holies, where Christ offered himself as a sacrifice (9:3) and has opened for believers a 'new and living' way to God through the veil, which, the author says, is Christ's body (10:20). The use of these references, the only other uses in the NT of *katapetasma* save the three synoptic rending texts, is thought by some to add unwarranted and foreign interpretations to the rending of the veil in the synoptic texts.³⁶

Yet Calvin relies heavily on the Hebrews texts, noting the importance of the veil being rent, 'at the completion of the sacrifice of expiation' because it was then that Christ 'opened for us the way to the celestial Sanctuary, that we should no longer stand away in the courtyard, but freely advance into the sight of God'.³⁷ For Calvin the destruction of the Jerusalem temple was a product of its cultic ineffectiveness vis-à-vis Christ's sacrifice of himself.

Christ, blotting out the handwriting that was against us (Col. 2:14), tore away every obstacle, that we might be all one royal priesthood dependent on him as sole Mediator. The rending of the veil not only abrogated the ceremonies that flourished under the law but also opened heaven, that God might now, intimately, welcome the members of his Son to himself.³⁸

Similarly Kingsbury declares 'Jesus himself supplants the temple as the "place" where God mediates salvation to people'.³⁹ The torn veil reveals 'hidden things',

M. Black and H.H. Rowley; London: Nelson, 1962), 797; perhaps also Gregory of Nazianzus, *The Pascha*, 36.661.45; M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (trans. B.L. Woolf; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 195; R.H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 575.

³⁵ Jerome (from Aquinas, *Catena Aurea* 1.963). G. Lindeskog argues that in other references to the destruction of the temple there is no mention of a veil ('The Veil of the Temple', in *In honorem A. Fridrichsen sexagenarii* [Coniectanea neotestamentica New Testament Series 11; Lund: Gleerup, 1947], 132–37). Though the word 'veil' need not be present for the meaning to be intended, the assumption that 'rent veil = temple destruction' is speculation that to date has not been substantiated. M. de Jonge sees the rent veil as 'the counterpart of the salvation'. 'Matthew 27:51', 71.

³⁶ Brown, *Death*, 2:1098–99; Similarly S.G.F. Brandon, 'The Date of the Markan Gospel', *New Testament Studies* 7 (1961), 132; T. Zahn, 'Der zerrissene Tempelvorhang', *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* 13 (1902), 729–56; Schmidt, 'The Penetration of Barriers', 229.

³⁷ Similarly, C.S. Mann, *Mark* (Anchor Bible Commentary, New York: Doubleday, 1986), 653; P. Bonnard, *L'Évangile selon Saint Matthieu* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1963), 407; Schlatter, *Matthäus*, 783–84; Cranfield, *Mark*, 459–60; D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 355; H.B. Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: MacMillan, 1909), 365–66.

³⁸ J. Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 211.

³⁹ *Matthew as Story* (Second Edition; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 30; D.A. Carson, 'Matthew', in vol. 8 of *The Expositors Bible Commentary* (ed. F. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 580; H.L. Chronis, 'The Torn Veil: Cultus and Christology in Mark 15:37–39', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982), 111; W. Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), 221.

presumably referring to the Gentiles' (centurion's) salvation.⁴⁰ Moving freely between Hebrews and Matthew 27:51a has become a common approach, yet it presumes the inner veil of the epistle to the Hebrews is in view for the evangelist as well and makes no use of the respective synoptic contexts except for the death of Christ.

Though one need not consider the accounts in Hebrews to hold to the inner veil view, such is often the case. Bonnard emphasises the access of Gentiles to God and the abolition of the priestly regulations, while adding this as a figure for the destruction of the temple itself.⁴¹ L. Morris says the curtain 'no longer functioned to keep what lay on the other side of it a secret from those outside'.⁴² Riches insists it 'strongly suggests that the presence of God which was previously associated with the Temple has now passed to Jesus himself'.⁴³ For Hagner, 'the death of Jesus establishes the priesthood of all believers'.⁴⁴ W. Kelly sees the rending as a necessity, because 'Unrent, it had been the symbol that man could not draw near to God'.⁴⁵ T.H. Weir relates his discussion of the temple veil to women's face veils and spiritual blindness,⁴⁶ while Origen likewise refers to the removal of the 'veil' of unbelief.⁴⁷ Noteworthy of nearly all of these scholars is their lack of attention to the Matthean context, OT cultic function of the veil, or, in most cases, both. Yet scholarship's need to look to incorporate the use of the word *katapetasma* in Hebrews, since it only occurs six times in the NT, three in Hebrew and three the synoptic passion accounts, may press the Hebrews' reading into the synoptic accounts without giving precedence to its function in the narrative whole of each of the synoptic accounts.

Miscellaneous

To a final category belongs a lengthy list of various methods and still more various interpretations. Jerome,⁴⁸ in his Epistle 120.8 refers to a gospel in 'Hebrew letters' (Hebraicis litteris), from which he sees the 'lintel' (superliminare), not the veil, of the temple destroyed by an earthquake at Christ's death (cf. also Comm. Matt. 27:51; Comm. Isa. 3). T. Zahn⁴⁹ takes this to mean that the rending of the veil was a natural

⁴⁰ Origen, *Libri x in Canticum canticorum*, 2.8.25; *Commentary on Matthew 27:50–54*; *Fragments on Luke*, 151, 251; Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John* 2.143; *Commentary on Matthew 27:51*, *Fragments* 315.266–67; Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter*, 27 [15]; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 29, 'On the Son', 20; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.6; Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 61.203.44; *Exposition of the Psalms* 55.272.52; *Commentary on Hebrews*, 15.4 says veil is his body that hides the Godhead; F.J. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus: Composition and Theology in Mark 15* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), 139. M. Luther, *Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews* (Luther's Works 29; ed. J. Pelikan; St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 203, sees the rending as a sign of the end of the 'synagogue' and the appearance or revelation of the Church.

⁴¹ P. Bonnard, *L'Évangile selon Saint Matthieu* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1963), 407.

⁴² L. Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 724.

⁴³ J. Riches, *Matthew* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997), 98.

⁴⁴ Hagner, *Matthew* 14–28, 848–49.

⁴⁵ W. Kelly, *Lectures on the Gospel of Matthew* (London: G. Morrish, 1868), 398.

⁴⁶ T.H. Weir, 'Veil', in *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (ed. J. Hastings; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1917), 2:790–91.

⁴⁷ *Commentary on Matthew 27:50–54*; *Fragments on Luke*, 151, 251.

⁴⁸ For a more complete discussion of Jerome's evidence, cf. Brown, *Death*, 2:1116–17; M. de Jonge, 'Matthew 27:51', 72–73.

⁴⁹ Zahn, 'Der zerrissene Tempelvorhang', 729–56; cf. also P. Fiebig, 'Der zerrissene Tempelvorhang', *Neue sächlich Kirchenblatt* 40 (1933), 227–36.

result of the breaking of the lintels to which it was attached.⁵⁰ Mostly early Christians have argued that the rending of the veil is an act of mourning, as was the rending of garments was in various biblical texts.⁵¹ Among modern scholars this view is most clearly developed by D. Daube,⁵² for whom, 'the action of Elisha on Elijah's ascension' (2 Kgs 2:12) is a 'prototype' for the veil event, which was a sign of lament for the death of Jesus.⁵³ M'Neile poetically summarises this view: 'The very temple rent its veil in mourning, as the earth had clothed itself in darkness'.⁵⁴ Among the most creative, as well as ancient, interpretations of the rending of the veil is one which highlights the close proximity of veil to the statement of Mark 15:37: 'with a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last' (cf. Matt. 27:50). From this Evans argues that Jesus' loud shout on the cross was the agent of the rending. Moreover, drawing largely from Lives of the Prophets 12.11–12 and Testament of Levi 10.3, he concludes that the symbolism is one primarily of vindication of Jesus' prediction for the destruction of the temple (Mark 13:2) and the judgement of Jesus' 'priestly judges' (Mark 14:62).⁵⁵ Rather than Christ's breath, G.R. Driver insists that violent winds, common in Palestine, tore the veil.⁵⁶ S. Motyer, looking at Mark's narrative structure, sees an 'inclusio' with the rending of the veil in 15:38 and the rending of the heavens in 1:9–11. Therefore for him the rending of the veil is 'a Markan Pentecost, a proleptic bestowal of the Spirit analogous to the proleptic destruction of the temple'.⁵⁷

In an imaginative interpretation of the rending of the veil in Luke, D. Sylva highlights the close proximity of Jesus' death at the 'ninth hour', the Jewish time of prayer.⁵⁸ He concludes that:

Jesus' commitment of his spirit is an address to the God revealed to him by the tearing of the temple curtain, as Stephen's commitment of his spirit is an address to the Lord revealed by the opening of the heavens.⁵⁹

- ⁵⁰ He dismisses the accounts in Hebrews as pure dogmatisations of the more likely historical accounts of Jerome, the Talmud, and Josephus, citing the closeness in dating between the gospel record and that of Josephus. Zahn, 'Der zerrissene Tempelvorhang', 730. Cf. E. Nestle, 'Matthew 27:51 und Parallelen', *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 3 (1902), 167–69.
- ⁵¹ *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* 1.41.3; Origen, *Fragments on Luke*, 250; *Fragments on Matthew*, 560; Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 26:39 51.32.40.
- ⁵² D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1956), 23–24.
- ⁵³ Daube, *New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 23–24. Cf. also *Clementine Recognitions*, 1:41; M'Neile, *Matthew*, 423.
- ⁵⁴ M'Neile, *Matthew*, 423.
- ⁵⁵ C.A. Evans, *Mark 8:27 – 16:20* (Word Biblical Commentary 34b; Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 509–10. So also *Catena on Matthew*, 237.30–31; *Catena on Mark*, 440.26; 441.1; *Catena on Acts*, 36.4; Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 88.2. Others suggest what was breathed out and subsequently rent the veil was the Holy Spirit, departing in judgement. Cf. Jackson, 'The Death of Jesus in Mark', 27. This 'punitive' use of his breath, France regards as 'bizarre' (*Mark*, 657).
- ⁵⁶ G.R. Driver, 'Two Problems in the New Testament', *Journal of Theological Studies* 16 (1965), 337. His reason: 'No one, certainly no educated man, can have supposed such a portent possible'.
- ⁵⁷ S. Motyer, 'The Rending of the Veil: A Markan Pentecost?' *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987), 155. Similarly, D. Ulansey, 'The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark's Cosmic Inclusio', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991), 124.
- ⁵⁸ D. Sylva, 'The Temple Curtain and Jesus' Death in the Gospel of Luke', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986), 241.
- ⁵⁹ Sylva, 'The Temple Curtain', 245. For an excellent critique of this view, which has found no support prior to 1986 and very little since, cf. J.B. Green, 'The Death of Jesus and the Rending

From a Markan perspective, S.G.F. Brandon has put forth an interesting proposal for gentile reading of the event. He looks to the historical record of the 'Flavian triumph' when, according to Josephus (*Jewish Wars* 6.5.3 §§288–309; cf. Tacitus, *Histories* 5.13), the ornate veil was part of the loot pillaged from Jerusalem and taken to the imperial palace in Rome.⁶⁰ Suggesting the Romans would have flaunted their spoils, he concludes the tradition of the rending of the veil was likely conflated and appropriated to Jesus' death to respond to the Jewish notion of its acceptance by God as symbolised by his presence in the temple.⁶¹

Among the most promising studies from a methodological standpoint is proposed by J.B. Green, particularly in a Luke-Acts context. The differing order of the account by Luke coupled with the largely positive view of the Temple itself in Luke-Acts leads Green to argue that the rending of the veil symbolises 'the obliteration of the barriers between those peoples previously divided by status and ethnicity'.⁶² The attractiveness of this view is that Green has very carefully drawn a distinctively Lukan picture of the temple as a key hermeneutical element, a method which will similarly be proposed for Matthew.⁶³

A Way Forward?

Here it is appropriate to examine the single work published to date, apart from commentaries and monographs on other topics, that purports to speak solely of the rending of the veil in *Matthew*.⁶⁴ In his 1986 article M. de Jonge suggests that many approaches to date used to interpret the account are unsatisfactory, criticising modern approaches for insufficient methodological considerations:

[I]t is very unlikely that 'the' meaning of Matthew 27:51a will ever be established beyond doubt. Perhaps, however, the scrutiny of the early Christian material will induce modern exegetes to review their own interpretations critically and to present them with utmost modesty. Many of them are not all that new, and all of them are tenuous.⁶⁵

of the Temple Veil: A Window into Luke's Understanding of Jesus and the Temple', *Society for Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 30 (1991), 550. For a sympathetic voice, cf. J. Nolland, *Luke* (Word Biblical Commentary 35c; Dallas: Word, 1993), 3:1157, though he argues more cautiously and more emphatically of the apocalyptic nature of the event.

⁶⁰ S.G.F. Brandon, 'The Date of the Markan Gospel', *New Testament Studies* 7 (1961), 132.

⁶¹ This view is not without its serious difficulties and assumptions. For a helpful, though brief, critique cf. Yates, *Spirit and the Kingdom*, 232–37.

⁶² Green, 'Death of Jesus', 543. Similar conclusions are reached by Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew 27:51*; P. Benoit, *The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (trans. B. Weatherhead; New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), 201–202; D. Marguerat, *Le Jugement des l'Évangile de Matthieu* (Genève: Editions Labor et Fides, 1981), 376; similarly 167; R. Walker, *Die Heilsgeschichte im ersten Evangelium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 73.

⁶³ While this is critical, it fails to give credence to a number of vital factors, not least of which is Luke's view of Christ's death, for it is in the context of the death of Christ that Luke places this event. Surely the subject of the crucifixion narrative is the death of Christ rather than the temple.

⁶⁴ Though compare with the piece in Italian by D. Andreoli: 'Il velo squarciato nel Vangelo di Matteo,' *Biblical Studies on the Web* 1 (1998), 20–42.

⁶⁵ De Jonge, 'Matthew 27:51', 79. Unfortunately, he offers none of his own and particularly fails to address the specifically Matthean context of the event.

Particularly in light of the complexity of the issues surveyed above, a great deal of respect must be afforded to de Jonge's caution. However, it seems the methods outlined above can be instructive for pushing a new way forward which assimilates the methodological approaches to the subject of three key scholars: Eta Linnemann, J.B. Green, and J.E. Yates.

The veil, a most Jewish symbol, is often interpreted from Mark's (Gentile?) gospel rather than Matthew's which R.T. France calls 'at the same time the most Jewish and the most anti-Jewish of the gospels'.⁶⁶ Consideration of the 'Jewish' origin of the veil is then perhaps both the most essential and overlooked element to interpreting the veil, particularly in Matthew. H. Alford's statement: 'A right and deep view of the OT symbolism is required to furnish the key to it',⁶⁷ has been largely overlooked. In 1970, Eta Linnemann articulated what is curiously perhaps the most unusual methodological statement on interpreting the rending of the veil when she simply suggested that one must examine the function of the curtain in order to understand what its rending meant for its original audience.⁶⁸ Though her work gives only brief attention to the function of the veil in the OT and none to its role in the Matthean Passion Narrative, her comment is an important place to begin. For whatever else may be said of the event, synoptics scholars are largely agreed that the rending of the veil expresses the cessation of its function. The function of the veil, then, as articulated in the OT and Second Temple texts, is an essential element to be factored into any interpretation of its rending in the synoptic passion accounts.⁶⁹

This is an important place to begin, for if we can presume, with most scholars, that the rending of the veil depicts the cessation of its function, and we look to the OT to discern its function, it will prove decisive in determining which veil is in view and provide some indication as to the significance of its rending. Indeed, though, as we have seen, Matthew's *katapetasma* can refer to any of *three* curtains in the tabernacle/temple structures of the OT, only that which refers to the *inner veil* before the Holy of Holies is designated any explicit function. Surely, as is commonly presumed, its function includes keeping people out of the Holy of Holies. Yet it also served to 'separate' the holy from the unholy, and possibly reminded the priest presenting the sin offering (Lev. 4:6, 17) that his sacrifice was incomplete and pointed to its completion on the Day of Atonement. By virtue of the cherubim woven into the inner veil, it could serve to 'guard' the Holy of Holies from sinful people entering in, just as the cherubim were stationed at the edge of the Garden of Eden to keep fallen humanity from entering the pristine garden. Indeed, Second Temple Jewish texts liken the garden as the 'Holy of Holies' (cf. *Jubilees* 8.19). The rending of the veil could depict the cessation of these functions: no longer are people prohibited from the presence of God,⁷⁰ no longer is there 'separation' of the holy from the unholy, no longer is atonement impeded, and no longer are there cherubim blocking the Garden of Eden (a noted soteriological expression, cf. Testament Levi 18.11).⁷¹ Indeed, for one to share such communion with God as possibly depicted

⁶⁶ R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1989), 19.

⁶⁷ H. Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Rivingstons, 1859), 1:281.

⁶⁸ Linnemann, *Studien*, 160. Our emphasis.

⁶⁹ Cf. D.M. Gurtner, 'Functionality, Identity, and Interpretation: The Tearing of the Temple Curtain (Matt. 27:51 par) in Light of Pentateuchal Tabernacle Texts', (under review).

⁷⁰ Rather than the explicit depiction in Hebrews of the believer entering into God's presence, Matthew could be particularly alluding to his incarnational Christology ('God with us').

⁷¹ These functions and the implications of their cessation are explored in some detail in Gurtner, 'Functionality, Identity, and Interpretation: The Tearing of the Temple Curtain (Matt. 27:51 par) in Light of Pentateuchal Tabernacle Texts'.

by these images, Matthew surely presumes atonement to have occurred and inextricably links it with the death of Christ (Matt. 27:51).

In addition, whether in Matthew or Mark, most scholars rightly see the rending of the temple veil as some sort of comment on the death of Christ. With an argument exclusively based on the Marcan context, J.E. Yates provides an innovative approach to the relationship of the death of Christ and the rending of the veil. He recognises the centrality of Christ's death to the pericope and then traces Mark's portrayal of Jesus' death throughout the gospel to highlight the 'positive significance of the death of Jesus'.⁷² Similarly, an interpretation of the rending of the veil in *Matthew* must explore that evangelist's theology of the death of Christ as a hermeneutical key to interpreting the veil. The atoning theme would be even more pronounced in Matthew, who clearly portrays Jesus' death as rescuing people from sin from the start (Matt. 1:21) and in other key places in his narrative (Matt. 20:28; 26:28).

Similarly, in a method not unlike that of J.B. Green, discussed above, one must account for Matthew's attitude toward the Jerusalem temple in general and its relationship to Christ in particular to try to define, as much as possible, the relationship between Christ and the temple and explore possible implications for the relationship between the death of Christ and the rending of its veil. It seems that Matthew's choice of language for the temple both expresses his authority vis-à-vis that of the religious leaders (*hieron*) as well as judgement to be carried out in the destruction of the temple because of the mismanagement of the temple (*naos*).⁷³ The latter term is used with respect to the veil of the temple (*naos*) and therefore Matthew's consistent thematic use of that term should be used to inform an interpretation of the tearing of the veil.

Finally, a 'way forward' in solving the riddle of this text must include a more careful use of Second Temple and Rabbinic Jewish sources. As was noted earlier, scholars are quick to look to Philo and Josephus for help identifying the veil, but are just as quick to leave these sources and overlook others. As early as Josephus (*Jewish Wars* 5.5.4 §211), Jewish authors have made a connection between the veil of the temple and the heavenly firmaments (Gen. 1:6; cf. *Targum of Job* 26.9; 3 *Enoch* 22B.6; b. *Yoma* 77a).⁷⁴ Just as the veil conceals God's abode in heaven, so the veil conceals his heavenly abode in the Holy of Holies. The rending of the veil, then, could depict the rending of the heavens or at least relate to the opening of heavenly doors, etc. (cf. Rev. 3:7-8; 4:1; 11:19; 15:5; 19:11), which clearly locate the synoptic rending texts in an apocalyptic milieu.

Perhaps we have raised more questions here than we have answered. Yet, while the methods proposed here may not provide a singular or even decisive interpretation of Matthew's account, they may serve to prompt scholars to rearrange the pieces of this puzzle in a different yet coherent manner. Incorporating elements of the cessation of the veil's function, the evangelists' portrayal of the death of Christ and the Jerusalem temple, and a careful use of Jewish sources could combine to be a way forward for understanding this historically enigmatic passage in its particular Matthean context.⁷⁵

Dedicated to Dr J. Bibza, with gratitude.

⁷² Yates, *Spirit and the Kingdom*, 232.

⁷³ For a more careful analysis of this point, cf. Gurtner, 'Judgement and Authority: A Compositional Reading of Matthew's Temple', (under review).

⁷⁴ Cf. Pelletier, 'La tradition synoptique', 174-75

⁷⁵ Comprehensive treatment of the issues raised is being addressed by the author in his PhD thesis currently being written at the University of St Andrews, Scotland.

Johannine Jesus, The Supreme Example of Leadership: An inquiry into John 13:1–20

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The world is looking for leaders who would be creative and who would set themselves as models for others to follow. Normally, the world thinks of a leader as an important figure who efficiently asserts his/her authority to subdue others. John's Gospel, which was written at a time when there were competing claims for religious leadership, challenges such worldly understanding of leadership and portrays Jesus as a unique and exemplary leader, who, by an act of foot-washing, demonstrated that the true leadership authority lies in enduring love for others, in humility and service. By offering himself to die on the cross for human salvation, Jesus has become the source of life and the cleansing agent for those who yield themselves to him so that they might be aptly equipped to fulfil their mission in the world productively and with servant attitude. Since he has set himself as an example of love, humility, simplicity and service, and enables his followers to reflect these leadership qualities in the world, Jesus, whom John portrays, is the distinct example of leadership for us today.

Introduction

An important issue faced in our world today at the socio-political and ecclesiastical level is what is commonly said, 'lack of proper leadership'. Those who hold leadership are often accused either of misusing their power or of being unable to exercise their power. Traditionally, leadership has been viewed in terms of exercising authority and power over individuals so that they might be fearful and be submissive. This traditional way of exercising leadership has caused the people under authority to be restrained from functioning creatively and constructively. It also runs into the danger of encroaching upon human freedom and choice and thereby of violating human rights. Some, therefore, suggest that we need to develop a new kind of leadership that will facilitate the process by which people can be freed from the constraining forces of authority and can express their own creativity.¹ However, a leader does possess authority which cannot be compromised with human freedom. But the moot question is: with what attitude and for what purpose is the leader exercising that leadership authority?

The leadership crisis in many parts of the world is not directly related to the authority that our leaders hold, but to the attitude with which and purpose for which they exercise their authority. In the time of Jesus too there was a leadership crisis. Those who

¹ See, for example, T. Gordon, *Group-Centered Leadership: A Way of Releasing the Creative Power of Groups* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1955), 5–8.

ruled over the Gentiles were 'lording it over them', i.e., they were exercising authority in such a way that the citizens' freedom and creativity were subdued (Mark 10:42). In other words, the rulers had a wrong approach and attitude in their dealings with the people. There has been a false understanding that leadership is an opportunity to enjoy power and subdue people. With this understanding, many have become ambitious to take up leadership positions. Such selfish ambition has always led into contention, conflicts, in-fights, insecurity and, in brief, to a deep leadership crisis.

At the time when John's Gospel was written (i.e., after 70AD) the Johannine community was facing, among other issues, the issue of leadership both within the community and in the Jewish nation. The various groups of Judaism were competing with each other to assume a leadership role in their attempt to rebuild and restore the temple to its former glory and to revive the religious life of the Jews.² The death of the 'Beloved Disciple' and other eye-witnesses posed in the community not only the problem of the Parousia,³ but also, in all probability, that of leadership. The description of 'the Jews' in John as 'thieves and robbers' (John 10:8) and the reference to the 'hireling' who, unlike the shepherd, flees away from the sheep when danger comes (John 10:12) expose the worthlessness of the then leadership of Judaism (cf. Ezek. 34 which provides a formidable background to John 10). In contrast, Jesus is presented as the unique shepherd-leader who offers abundant life to all those who believe in him (10:9-10).⁴ In other words, John projects Jesus as the good and model leader at a time when there were conflicting claims for leadership. The portrayal of Jesus as king throughout his Gospel and Jesus' reference to 'my servants' (*hupiretai*) associated with his kingship prove John's purpose to show Jesus as the leader, though not in the worldly sense of the term (John 18:36; cf. 12:26 which describes Jesus' servants as those who should follow him). The fact that Jesus is the teacher who is worthy to be followed is evident even in the early stage of his ministry (John 1:37, 38, 40, 43). Jesus, as the leader, had prophetic authority with which he cleansed the temple (John 2:13-17) and in recognition of this leadership authority the crowd acclaimed, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world' (John 6:14-15 where Jesus is referred to as the prophet-king). The very purpose of John is to prove that Jesus is the Christ, (i.e., 'God's anointed') who will lead victoriously those who believe in him unto eternal life (20:31). The then prevalent idea of Christ as the political leader who will bring deliverance to Israel by war confirms that in John's presentation of Jesus as the Christ the mode and manner of leadership is in focus.

Johannine Jesus is delineated as the leader in terms of shepherd, king, prophet, teacher, and, above all, of the Messiah whose attitude and approach are different from those of the messianic king, as expected by the people, and from those of the shepherds and teachers of that day. The leadership authority of Jesus, as John shows, consists in his humility, obedience to the Father's will, suffering and supremely in his death on the cross. Even his cleansing of the temple by force is symbolic of his death, the true sacrifice offered on the cross.⁵ Jesus' leadership quality is nowhere described with greater clarity than it is in Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet (John 13:1-20), which is the subject of our study. Since a good leader sets himself/herself always as a model for others to

² See M. Asiedu-Peprah, *Johannine Sabbath Conflicts as Juridical Controversy* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 217, 225.

³ See C.K. Barrett, 'The Place of Eschatology in the Fourth Gospel', *Expository Times* 59 (1947-48), 304.

⁴ Asiedu-Peprah, *Johannine Sabbath Conflicts*, 225.

follow,⁶ the interpretation of foot-washing as an 'example' (*hypodeigma*) for his disciples to imitate (John 13:14–15) calls for a closer study of the passage not only for understanding the what and how of Jesus' leadership, but also for addressing the leadership issues involved in Christian mission today.

The exemplary significance of Jesus' leadership (13:1–20)⁷

While Jesus was about to depart from the world to go to the Father by way of crucifixion, he gave to 'his own' his final words that began with the symbolic act of foot-washing (13:1, 3). In chapters 13–17 John records what Jesus does and says privately with his disciples and it is probable that he is engaged in a training session with the twelve whom he will leave behind in the world (17:11, 15, 18). The fact that Jesus' foot-washing is linked with his death indicates the immense importance of the act,⁸ for in the Mediterranean culture the final works and words of a dying person are to be keenly observed and obeyed.⁹

Jesus, the leader, recognises the value of each human

The statement that Jesus, who had been loving his followers in the world, loved them to the end (cf. the twice repeated verb *agapân* in 1b put in participle and indicative mood) shows that the foot-washing was an act of Jesus' love. The love commandment of Jesus given precisely in this context (13:34–35) confirms this all the more. The expression of Jesus' *agapê*-love by means of a foot-washing indicates how he recognised human values inherent within the disciples and how he made them realise their worth in life. His love is dramatically expressed by seven related acts: Jesus rises from the meal, lays aside his garments, takes a towel (reference to this act is missing in the RSV, NRSV, NIV, etc., but not in the NEB), girds himself with it, pours water into a basin, washes the feet of his disciples and wipes them with the towel with which he had been girded (13:4).¹⁰ Both washing and wiping share a common verb, 'began', which shows that washing and wiping are the two sides of the same act. The act of girding himself with a towel reflects the posture of a household servant in India, who appears

⁵ It is true that Jesus exercised violence while cleansing the temple. However, it was not a symbolic act that was given by Jesus for others to imitate. This is symbolic of the replacement of the old system of temple sacrifice with the sacrifice of his own body offered once for all on the cross (2:19–21). Thus even Jesus' authority to act violently flows from his humility and obedience to Father's will to die on the cross.

⁶ That the Christian leader is a model whom others could follow is clear from Paul's injunction to Timothy to set himself as an example to the believers (1 Tim. 4:12, though the Greek word used is *typos* [type] and not *hypodeigma* as John has). Ajith Fernando comments that it is by an exemplary life that a leader could command respect even from critics – see A. Fernando, *Leadership Lifestyle: A Study of 1 Timothy* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1985), 94–97.

⁷ I take liberty not to mention henceforth 'John' whenever references are made to John's Gospel.

⁸ Note that the foot-washing takes place at the feast of the Passover when Jesus knew that 'his hour' had come to depart from this world to go to the Father. The event also marks 'the end' of his life on earth and is linked with Judas's betrayal (13:2, 11, 18, 21) which inaugurates the process of Jesus' deliverance to death; see also below.

⁹ As observed by B.J. Malina and R.L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 221.

¹⁰ The Gospel of the Hebrews adds one more act, narrating that Jesus kissed the disciples' feet after wiping them – see B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 45.

before his master by girding a towel around his waist as the mark of his humility, loyalty and submission to the master. In the Jewish society, washing of the feet of exceptional persons was the duty of a slave, particularly that of a Gentile slave.¹¹ Thus Jesus takes up the position of a servant/slave. By washing and wiping the feet of his associates, he treats them as guests of honour and affirms their value in his company. He also communicates the message that human value is to be identified and exerted only by serving one another. That is why Jesus describes his act as an example and calls them to wash one another's feet (13:14-15). The Johannine Jesus thus gives his followers the awareness that true greatness lies not in exercising lordship over others, but in serving others with a humble attitude (cf. Mark 10:42-45). That is, true leadership consists in lowliness, humility and service motivated by agapè-love. If Thomas Gordon's thesis that society is looking for a kind of leadership that puts human values first¹² is true, then John 13 shows that Jesus is the one who exhibited such quality of leadership. Jesus is, then, the significant model of leadership, for by humbling himself, he sought to bring the best from each of his team members.

Jesus, the leader, seeks to establish a viable relationship in his school

The Johannine Jesus is not only dealing with human values, but also with human relations. While referring to the new leadership patterns in educational institutions, Gordon mentions that the teacher, as a group leader, needs to make an influence upon the 'learning behaviour of the students'.¹³ By stating that leaders must be skilled in dealing with human relations and must facilitate a change in people rather than in the curriculum,¹⁴ he suggests that the adult educators should try methods which involve the learner in self-motivated activity.¹⁵ In the exemplary act of foot-washing, which is accompanied by an emphatic command to wash one another's feet, one can see Jesus fulfilling the role of an ideal leader or educator. For by this act Jesus motivates and trains his pupils to relate with one another in an attitude of love, humility, and servanthood. The long 'farewell discourse' begins not with Jesus' spoken words, but with his act that directly deals with the attitude of his followers with which they should relate with one another. In the leadership model of Jesus, deeds precede words!

Jesus chose the twelve disciples. In John, we do not have the reference that Jesus chose them to be with him and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons, as we have it in Matthew and Mark (Mark 3:14-15; Matt. 10:1). But definitely the idea is present. Throughout his ministry Jesus spent time with the twelve, rebuked them, corrected them, instructed them, prayed for them, and washed their feet in order to motivate them to be servant-leaders in the world. We have seen that by foot-washing, Jesus put human values first and sought to bring the best out of his learners. He also dealt with their attitude and inter-personal relationship with one another by the same act of love and humility. In this sense, the Johannine Jesus is portrayed as a group-centred leader, the one who showed a genuine interest in the development of the group and in the achievement of its goal (see also opposite).

¹¹ It was not only the duty of a slave, but was also one of the duties that a wife should perform for her husband, and sons and daughters for their father - see R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John 3* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 399 n. 41.

¹² Gordon, *Group-Centered Leadership*, 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

Jesus, the Lord and Teacher, influences his team by demonstrating servanthood

The mysterious relationship between servanthood and leadership is also brought out by the Johannine Jesus by linking with his act of foot-washing the two prestigious titles, the Lord and the Teacher (13:13–14). Jesus rendered this humble service as an eminent leader in Jewish society, as his followers themselves acknowledged. The title 'the Lord' shows Jesus as a leader who holds unique authority over their lives, because he is worthy of all honour and worship due to God alone (5:23; 12:20–26). John portrays Jesus as the Lord in the sense that he is the revelation of the Lord God, the object of human worship and faith and the one who has overcome 'the prince of this world' (12:31–32; 20:28).¹⁶ The title 'the Teacher' is derived from the Hebrew 'rabbi' which was used in Jewish society for the teachers of the law who educated and trained their pupils. During the Passover meal here Jesus, the Rabbi (1:38; 20:16), is engaged in a training session with his pupils. He teaches them the ideals of servant-leadership by demonstrating it first and then by directing them to follow his example. Learning in Judaism demanded the learner to sit at the feet of his rabbi (Acts 22:3) and on occasions to wash the rabbi's feet as well as to tie or untie his sandals (Matt. 3:11 par.). The teachers had the right to receive such services from their students. Jesus, however, did not use any of his rights (cf. 1 Cor. 9:3–12), but voluntarily took up the place and work of a slave (Phil. 2:7). He did not use his authority to subdue his team members, but taught them the virtue of humility and service.

The two titles, 'the Lord' and 'the Teacher', bring out, on the one hand, the greatest degree of Jesus' love for and claim over his disciples and his generosity to humble himself as a servant, on the other. Both his status and service make Jesus a leader who seeks to influence the lives of his associates by way of service done to them and thus he proves to be a servant-leader. Jesus' enactment of servant-leadership puts an obligation on those who received his service of love and humility to express the same love, simplicity, and service to the world (13:14–15). The conditional clause, 'if I have washed your feet', introduces the conclusion derived from Jesus' demonstration and the command, 'you also ought to wash one another's feet' (*opheilete ... niptein*) lays the moral obligation on the trainees to love and serve. Although the Greek word *hypodeigma*, used in verse 15 for 'example', means a 'model' or 'image' or 'copy' of the true and original things, implicitly the things in heaven, here in John, it implies more than an example. As H. Schlier puts it, 'It is a definite prototype. In a typical act they (i.e., the disciples) experience the love of Jesus and are to cause others to have the same experience.'¹⁷ Thus, the word 'example' is used in an active sense, referring to an act that was done to motivate the learners for mutual service.

Jesus' demand to imitate him is reiterated by the proverbial saying, 'A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent is greater than he who sent him', (v. 16) as well as by the beatitude, 'Blessed are you if you do them' (v. 17), and is confirmed by the revelatory formula 'truly, truly I say to you'. Any master or teacher is greater in status and function than his disciples. Naturally, the students follow the teacher and if the teacher exemplifies and expresses his leadership in humble attitude as a servant, then his followers ought to do the same. The followers of Jesus are sent into the world as

¹⁶ The first-century Christians ascribed the Name 'the Lord', which is the Name of Yahweh, the God of Israel, to the risen Jesus whom they found worthy to receive worship and praise due to God alone.

¹⁷ See H. Schlier, '*hypodeigma*', *TDNT* II, 32–33. See also below n. 22.

servants just as the Father sent Jesus into the world (20:21). Both in status (as servants) and function (as the sent ones) they are not greater than their Lord and Teacher. Their greatness lies precisely in serving one another in obedience to the Master's command and drawing their life from him (12:26). Both servants and sent agents are expected to fulfil not their own will, but the will of their masters under whose authority they function. So also, Jesus' followers have no other task except to carry out their Master's command: serve one another with love (Gal. 5:13).

The Johannine Jesus sets his foot-washing as an 'example' (*hypodeigma*) for his disciples to relate with each other as members of his community. That is, his exemplary act is the ethical norm, 'the ground on which this discipleship rests and the source from which it gains strength' (cf. the statement, 'that you also should do as I have done to you', in v. 15).¹⁸ Jesus is seeking to make an impact on the lives of his followers by exhibiting his love expressed in humble service. Leadership has been defined as 'a process of influence',¹⁹ and the foot-washing is an effective step taken by Jesus to influence his followers by revealing his divine nature inherent in his humanity (cf. 'that you may believe that I am he [*egō eimi*]' in v. 19). However, the process of influence is not complete until Jesus will sacrifice his life as on the cross to which the foot-washing points.

Jesus, the Servant-Leader, sets the goal and objective for his team

In the narrative of foot-washing, John describes how Jesus foresaw the betrayal by one of his own disciples that will lead to his death. The statement, 'I tell you this now, before it takes place' (13:19a) may refer to the betrayal by Judas (13:21, 25-26). However, the following reference to the resultant faith of the disciples that Jesus is the 'I AM' (13:19b) points forward to a still greater event, the lifting up of Jesus on the cross (cf. 8:28). For, after all, the betrayal initiates the process of Jesus' trial and death. Thus, the Johannine Jesus brings the foot-washing into a climactic point of saying that his death will eventually reveal that Jesus is the 'I AM', i.e., he is the revelation of one God, the God of Israel. In the over-all mission of Jesus, the foot-washing, which symbolises his death, reveals in a smaller scale the glory of God in Jesus.

Whereas the ultimate purpose of Jesus is to enable his team to see God's love and power in him, the group's objective that will lead to fulfil that goal is spelt out by him in verse 20 in terms of the disciples' mission to the world. Here Jesus declares the relevance of Christian faith, mentioned in verse 19, to the life and mission of the Church. That is, those who believe that Jesus is the revelation of God's name 'I AM' have a mission to do in the world. Their mission is nothing but the continuity of Jesus' mission. Since Jesus' mission itself proceeds from the Father (17:18; 20:21), he says, 'He who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me' (cf. similar mission statement in Matt. 10:40). Both Jesus' mission and the Church's mission flow from God and hence they constitute God's mission. It is impossible, therefore, for the world to receive one and reject the other. Those who receive anyone who is anointed and sent by Jesus receive Jesus and those who receive him receive the Father who anointed and sent him. This tripartite relationship will lead the world to see God in Jesus through the community he formed. Those who see Jesus

¹⁸ H. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, ET 1997), 463.

¹⁹ See D.W. Bennett, *Leadership Images from the New Testament* (OM Publishing, 1998), 1.

see God (1:18; 12:45; 14:9) and those who believe in Jesus, in fact, believe in God (12:44). John expresses in verse 20 the oneness that exists between Jesus and God who sent him in functional terms, while in verse 19 the same oneness is expressed in revelatory terms. In other words, the team's goal, set by the Servant-Leader by means of foot-washing, is to manifest God in Jesus and this goal could only be reached by means of its 'mission to the world', that is, by loving and serving the humankind as Jesus loved and served. The foot-washing is not only the symbolic of Jesus' redemptive death on the cross (see further below), but also the symbolic of the Church's mission to the world. Obviously, it is a teaching method adopted by Jesus so that the disciples might learn this goal and fulfil it with love and humility. By perceiving in advance what will happen in future and by setting on that basis the team's goal and objectives, the Johannine Jesus demonstrates himself as the supreme example of leadership.²⁰

The Servant-Leader makes Servant-Leaders

Jesus' foot-washing inaugurates the process of his suffering and death. Scholars, in general, agree that the foot-washing is a symbolic act that points to the death of Jesus, which is the point of his glorification.²¹ R.A. Culpepper, for example, argues that the foot-washing is a proleptic and metaphorical interpretation of Jesus' death, for his death on the cross, his instruction that the disciples wash one another's feet, the love command, the betrayal by Judas, and Peter's denials cannot be understood in isolation from one another.²² We will also see below that the cleansing effect of foot-washing is the sign of the cleansing effect of Jesus' blood shed on the cross (13:7, 8, 10). It was in his suffering and death that Jesus revealed his utmost humility and simplicity. Pilate's words with which he introduced Jesus, 'Behold the man!' (19:5) and 'Behold your King!' (19:14; cf. 19:19-22) picture Jesus as the messianic King who revealed the glory of his leadership in humility, suffering and death. John portrays Jesus as the King/Leader in lowliness and humility also in his account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on an ass (12:13-15), an event that can be understood rightly only in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection (12:16).

Similarly, the paradoxical combination of leadership and lowliness is envisaged in the foot-washing of Jesus, which points forward to his shameful death on the cross. What does this imply? This means that the self-sacrifice of Jesus is the source of life for any human who believes in him and the driving force to love and serve one another in the community. For the blood of Jesus cleanses and equips his followers to be servant-leaders. According to John, the only example that Jesus leaves with his followers is his act of self-giving love, humility, simplicity, and servanthood. It is imperative for a leader to set an example to these virtues (1 Tim. 4:12) and only then can they could command others to imitate them (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 4:9; cf. Rom. 15:7; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 12:2-3; 1 Pet. 2:18-25). However, this does not mean that anyone could imitate Jesus in his death

²⁰ While referring to planning as the first and most important function of leadership, Hrangkhuma observes that a leader should be able to foresee what the future is going to be like, to establish goals or targets, and to do programming by setting up short-term objectives - F. Hrangkhuma, *Effective Christian Leadership* (Bombay: GLS, 1981), 18-20.

²¹ See the list of scholars in J.C. Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, reprint., 1993), 14 n.1; 16 n. 2.

²² R.A. Culpepper, 'The Johannine *Hypodeigma*: A Reading of John 13', *Semeia* 53 (1991), 133-52. Culpepper holds that because the term *hypodeigma* in v. 15 elevates a virtuous and noteworthy death, the interpretation in vv. 12-17 is closely related to vv. 6-11.

on the cross, which has redemptive significance and which is the only means to wash away human sins. The disciples are only called to draw their strength from Jesus' life-imparting death and make it the basis for their daily relationship with one another. Thus, the leadership qualities found in Jesus – his love, expressed in self-sacrifice, simplicity, humility and service, and spiritual authority – are inseparably bound up with the cross. No one will be able to exhibit these qualities unless they accept Jesus' death as imparting salvation and allow his blood to do their inner cleansing. The leaders' job will become incomplete, if they do not equip others to become leaders. Here the servant-leaders, besides setting themselves as models to emulate, themselves becomes the life-imparting sources to make servant-leaders. This leads us to study the so-called 'first interpretation of the foot-washing' (13:6–11) that unveils the pre-requisites to become a servant-leader.

The pre-requisites for servant-leadership

The foot-washing in John projects Jesus as the unique example of leadership. He is the Teacher and Lord who trains his own to develop a humble and serving attitude and to motivate them to relate with one another with love. We should note that this training session does not take place in an artificial situation such as a classroom lecture or public gathering, but that it takes place in a real life situation when Jesus had the Passover meal exclusively with his disciples. Jesus is the leader par excellence because he himself provides the ground and basis to function as servant-leaders. That is, his foot-washing has the cleansing power from which the true authority of a leader flows. It is impossible, then, to understand the significance of Jesus' foot-washing without 13:6–11 where he explains the cleansing effect of his act. Bultmann argues that 13:12–20, which interprets the foot-washing as an exemplary act, and 13:6–11, which interprets it as a symbolic act, run contrary to each other.²³ However, he fails to notice the unifying theme that those who come into communion with Jesus by the cleansing power of his blood should emulate his love, humility, and his ministry of foot-washing. This leads us to examine some of the pre-requisites for servant-leadership.

To acknowledge the cross of Jesus

It is a social custom in India for the people of inferior status to fall at the feet of any dignitaries: worshippers at the feet of deities, children at the feet of their parents or elders, learners at the feet of their *gurus*, and followers at the feet of their leaders. It is an embarrassment to anyone who sees the superiors falling at the feet of their juniors. It was this embarrassment which led Peter to prevent Jesus from washing his feet by saying, 'Lord, do you wash my feet?' (13:6).²⁴ Peter represents here those who have the worldly view of leadership according to which a leader is not supposed to do any menial job. The world perceives the leaders not as servants, but as those who are in higher places to make people submissive by authoritarianism. It was to pull the attention of his

²³ R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, ET 1971), 461–62. The statement that the disciple will comprehend the significance of the foot-washing only at a later stage (v. 7) is not indifferent from vv. 12–20, for the disciples will understand the cleansing power of the foot-washing only later in the light of the cleansing power of Jesus' blood to be shed on the cross, whereas vv. 12–20 speak of the act of foot-washing in general (see also n. 22).

disciples to the true significance of leadership implied in his act of foot-washing that Jesus said to Peter, 'What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand' (13:7). In the light of Jesus' consciousness of his suffering and death during his meal with his disciples, we need to understand his response in verse 7 as a veiled reference to his death and resurrection. Those who have the worldly understanding of leadership will not be able to understand the concept of servant-leadership that is displayed in such a humble act as foot-washing until they come to the cross of Jesus where his love, forgiveness, and servanthood were supremely displayed. It is the cross of Christ and the subsequent bestowal of the Holy Spirit that are going to reveal to the disciples the secret of servant-leadership (cf. 2:22; 12:16). The pre-requisite for understanding and practising servant-leadership is the acknowledgement of Jesus' death and resurrection. One should acknowledge humbly God's way of salvation and cleansing that was made through the cross of Christ.

To draw life from Jesus by letting him serve

It was imperative for Peter to yield himself fully to his master and allow him first to serve him. To prevent Jesus from washing his feet means that the learner denies the master's love, forgiveness, and cleansing. It also amounts to non-submission and non-availability to fulfil the master's mission of serving the needy. Before we serve others, it is important for us to allow Jesus first to serve us so that we might experience his love, forgiveness, and total cleansing. In other words, Jesus' followers need to let him deal with them completely so that they might be better equipped to serve the world. It is the servant attitude, demonstrated by Jesus, that makes the intimate fellowship with Jesus possible for his followers. Participation in Jesus' life is possible by yielding oneself to serve the people in communion with him. It is in this sense that Jesus said to Peter, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part in me' (13:8). For to have a part with someone means 'to have a share with, to be a partner with someone'. Thus, the Johannine Jesus means that only those who are washed by him are able to be united with him. In other words, we are made servant-leaders when we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross (1 John 1:7) and thereby we share in the life of Jesus in union with him. The necessity to absorb the life of Jesus in communion with him is sufficiently emphasised in John (6:56; 14:19; 15:4-10) and the reference to 'having a part with' him also conveys the same idea. Unless Jesus cleanses those who come to him, they can hardly enjoy communion with him and in him with God (15:2-3). If anything, it is the servant attitude that will unite with Jesus those who are cleansed by him. If 'to have a part with Jesus' implies a participation in the life of Jesus, then it includes also the disciples' share in the mission and destiny of their master in this world. It means to be sent into the world as Jesus himself was sent (4:31-38; 20:21-23) and to die for his cause (12:24-26; 13:36; 21:18-19). If Jesus came to the world to serve and to give his life for its salvation, then those who acknowledge him as Lord and Teacher are also kept in the world as servants who would renounce themselves for the salvation of humankind. Thus, by washing the feet, the Johannine Jesus prepares his associates to face persecution, or even martyrdom, in their pursuit to accomplish the group's goal of manifesting God by reaching out the world with the gospel of love and service.

²⁴ The pronoun 'you' appears in an emphatic position, implying, 'Is it you, the Lord and Teacher, who wash my feet? No, I will never allow this happen' (cf. Matt. 3:13-15).

To have prior cleaning and continuous cleansing

Washing of the feet presumes prior cleaning by a 'bath'. Peter realised that if fellowship with Jesus, the servant-leader, is denied to those who are not washed by him, then he should be thoroughly washed, notwithstanding his hands and head (v. 9). He thus appealed for a complete bath. Peter's unreserved yielding denotes his complete openness for Jesus to deal with him. Though Peter exhibited such a zeal for his master, still it seems to be at the human level (cf. 13:37). With a partial understanding of Jesus' words, Peter thought that if foot-washing is going to keep him in association with Jesus, then it would be better to have a washing of his entire body rather than settling for a little. He gave himself up fully to Jesus expecting from him not just a washing of his feet but a complete bath, if that would enable him to maintain fellowship with his *guru*. However, Jesus refused to wash Peter's hands and head, by saying that those who are already clean by a bath need no washing of the whole body except for the feet (v. 10).²⁵ This means that the one who has bathed has no need to wash the hands and head as Peter is suggesting, but only the part, in this case the feet, that has become dirty.

Some scholars interpret verse 10 that those who have already received the benefit of Jesus' death are entirely clean without any need for further washing.²⁶ They treat the verbs 'to bathe' (*louein*) and 'to wash' (*niptein*) as having identical meaning, symbolising the event of the cross with a secondary reference to baptism either as a sacrament or as the interpretation of the sacrament implying, 'the one who has been baptised into his death'.²⁷ As Jesus' foot-washing constantly points to the cross, it is probable that the idea of participation in the life of Jesus by the cleansing effect of his blood is present in verses 8 and 10.

It is possible that the phrase, 'He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet', is a proverbial saying, denoting a common truth explained in verse 10b.²⁸ The guests at the meal are not expected to take a complete bath, because they are already clean. All they need is a slave who, on their arrival, will wash their feet to remove the dust that was collected on the way.²⁹ Similarly, the disciples are already 'his own' possessions (10:3-4, 14; 13:1) and are clean by the word of salvation spoken to them (15:1). Therefore they need not wash their whole body now. In spiritual terms, the Johannine Jesus says that his disciples are already united with him by his life-giving

²⁵ The first part of v. 10 has more than five different readings in the Greek manuscripts. The main issue is whether the phrase 'except for his feet' is the original part of the reading or something that was added later. It is more probable that the phrase 'except for his feet' might have been added later lest Jesus' foot-washing is discredited - see Schnackenburg, *St John 3*, p. 20.

²⁶ See C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 2 edn, 1978), 442; Schnackenburg, *St John 3*, p. 21; R.E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 566.

²⁷ Some scholars believe that the verb 'to be bathed' refers to baptism and the washing of the feet refers to the eucharist or even to penance (see Schnackenburg, *St John 3*, p. 401 n. 57; for a reference to baptism see R.H. Lightfoot, *St John's Gospel: A Commentary* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956], 262; Brown, *John XIII-XXI*, 566-67). However, sacramental interpretation reflects only the attempt to read into the text to support the Church's ritual practices. If the eucharist was in John's mind, why is there no reference to the Words of Institution as well as to bread and wine together? If 'washing' denotes baptism, then it implies that one cannot have intimacy with Jesus unless one undergoes the ritual of baptism (13:8) and that baptism makes the recipients completely clean (13:10). Sacramental interest does not seem to be the concern of the passage.

word. We can also say that even today Jesus' followers remain cleansed by the words of Jesus proclaimed in the Church's proclamation and by his blood poured out on the cross. However, they need continuous cleansing by Jesus' word (17:17) and Spirit (7:38-39) so that they might remain united in his love.³⁰ Thus, the 'first interpretation' of Jesus' foot-washing makes it clear that no one can exercise servanthood without becoming clean first by Jesus' words and redemptive work, and allowing him to continue his work of inner cleansing. In other words, those who have experienced the salvation found in Jesus and allow him to deal with them continuously can, by nature, exhibit the quality of servant-leadership. For, as Ridderbos comments, by his symbolic act of foot-washing, Jesus presents himself to his disciples for all time as the one who came as a servant and thus foot-washing represents Jesus' servanthood.³¹

Nevertheless, not all who came into contact with Jesus became eventually clean. For example, Judas Iscariot could not become fully clean, although he was one of 'his own' (13:10b, 11). Instead of yielding himself to Jesus for cleansing, he gave himself up to fulfil the plan of the devil to betray his teacher (v. 2, 11). Therefore the foot-washing and Judas's close association with Jesus became ineffective to train him to live in the world as a leader – a servant-leader. At the end, he was led into darkness by being separated from the company of Jesus forever (13:30). So also, all those who have experienced the salvation of Jesus are not eventually equipped to become servant-leaders in the world unless they yield themselves without reservation to live in fellowship with the master by acknowledging his love and service every day. Those who do not reflect Jesus' attitude of love, humility, and service finally join hands, consciously or unconsciously, with the enemies of Christ, pushing themselves to lead a life of worthlessness and destruction. On the other hand, we can cite at least two women in John, who loved Jesus and rendered service to him when Jesus was at the threshold of his death and who later became the leaders of two different house churches in Asia Minor. They are Martha who 'was serving' (12:2) and Mary who anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hair (12:3; 11:2).³² It is Jesus' cleansing power that makes his 'beloved' the servant-leaders!

Conclusions

At a time when there was leadership crisis both in Jewish and Christian circles in the late first century AD John presents Jesus not merely as the Christ, King, Shepherd, Lord, and Teacher, but more as an exemplary leader who expressed his leadership qualities by love, humility, simplicity, and sacrificial service. Jesus sought to train, motivate, and influence those who were committed to him to become leaders with servant attitude. As their Lord and Teacher, he loved 'his own' *till the end* and expressed his love by doing a slave's work of washing their feet. This shows that he put human values first and led them to

²⁸ Cf. Schnackenburg, *St John 3*, p. 22, who regards v. 10a as a little parable, followed by an application to the disciples.

²⁹ See Ridderbos, *John*, 460.

³⁰ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 465, holds that 13:10 speaks of continuous washing, the progressive Christian experience effected by the cross of Christ.

³¹ Ridderbos, *John*, 460-62.

³² See on this J.J. Kanagaraj, 'The Profiles of Women in John: House-Bound or Christ-Bound?', *Bangalore Theological Forum* 33 (2, 2001), 60-79, esp. 72-74.

realise their worth in life. The Jesus of John's Gospel is the leader *par excellence* whose authority flowed from his humility and who firmly charged that his servant attitude needs to be emulated by all men and women who belong to him. In other words, by displaying servanthood before his pupils, Jesus sought to build up right attitude and inter-personal relationship in his school. John projects Jesus as a group-centred leader, who worked out the group's goal as to exhibit God who was revealed in Christ and its objective as to involve in Christian mission to reach out the world with the gospel of love and service.

The foot-washing symbolically points to Jesus' death on the cross and the cleansing effect of his blood by means of which one can be united with him. Jesus' humble act, then, was not merely an example for his adherents to follow, but also an effective means of communicating the truth that the one who laid down his life himself becomes the life-giving and enabling source for them to accomplish their mission in the world as servant-leaders. By being a model as well as the enabler, the servant-leader proves himself as the supreme leader who is capable of making others the servant-leaders. In this sense, Jesus, portrayed in John, is a unique figure whose leadership quality surpasses that of the earthly leaders.

It is imperative for human beings to become clean by Jesus' words and Spirit and allow him to cleanse them continuously by his blood shed on the cross. Only by yielding oneself fully to the dealings of Jesus can one be united with him in love and fellowship. If anything, it is the servant attitude which is the common bond and the unifying factor between Jesus and his followers. By narrating the story of foot-washing, John calls the people of his time to believe in a suffering messiah whose death and resurrection provide the ground and source for effective leadership. Any leadership that is not rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus will lead to self-glory, insecurity, and authoritarianism. Without union with the servant-leader, Christians today can hardly prove themselves to be typical leaders.

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The God of Promise: Christian Scripture as Covenantal Revelation

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Avery Dulles outlines five different models of the doctrine of revelation in theological thought: Revelation as Doctrine, as History, as Inner Experience, as Dialectical Presence and as Inner Awareness.¹ Some theologians refuse to see these as exclusive alternatives and seek mediating positions. Others insist on the necessity for one model to stand alone. What is agreed, however, is that these models of revelation clearly compete with each other at certain key tension points and the matter is further complicated when the question of the Bible and its relationship to revelation is introduced. Is it necessary to offer a 'model for Scripture' separate from any of those offered by Dulles for revelation, or should Scripture take its place in one, some, or all of the models? Is the Bible itself revelation? What might it mean to formulate a doctrine of Scripture alongside a doctrine of revelation? Kevin Vanhoozer states the critical theological question: 'A doctrine of Scripture tries to give account of the relation of the words to the Word and of how this relation may legitimately be said to be "of God."²

The aim in this article is to attempt an account of this relation and, in so doing, to suggest some avenues that could be explored fruitfully and further developed in a contemporary doctrine of Scripture. We shall seek to bring an exegetical understanding of what Scripture actually *is* to some of the more pressing contemporary questions about revelation and its relationship to the Bible. For the exegetical approach to Scripture we will not simply be interested in the minutiae of defining 'inspiration', but rather will seek to provide a broader perspective: we shall suggest that Scripture presents itself to us as a covenant document and that this is the overall framework within which both exegetical and theological claims should be heard. As a way of engaging with current issues we will bring this covenantal model into dialogue with Karl Barth's doctrine of Scripture, as it can be argued that Barth offers one of the more profound attempts to expose the relationship between revelation and the Bible. Our argument will suggest that viewing Scripture as the documentary mode of God's

¹ Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983).

² Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 127.

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).

Simon Gathercole meets Henri Blocher Atlanta, November 2003

Simon Gathercole is a Lecturer in New Testament at the University of Aberdeen. He is author of *Where is Boasting?* (Eerdmans).

SG: *Henri, can you tell us about what you're currently doing?*

HB: I've been appointed as a Professor at Wheaton College Graduate School, mainly in the doctoral programme, but the arrangement is that I will not give up (at least for the time being) my ministry as a Professor in France. I will continue to live in France, and teach in our Faculté Libre de Théologie Evangélique in Vaux-sur-Seine in Paris. I will, therefore, just come on campus in Wheaton three times each year, for one month at a time, although the load of PhD students probably will get heavier – since the programme is just starting, there are very few at this moment. I suppose the number of students who will be my responsibility as a mentor will progressively grow. Otherwise, I hope I will have more time to write. I have fewer courses in our faculty in Paris because my successor is already being introduced to the work. Overall then I hope to have more time to write, as I have writing projects which have been awaiting completion for months and years!

SG: *So what are your current writing projects?*

HB: The main one which has been suffering for quite a time is a text-book on 'church and sacraments'. I have still one chapter to write. The rest is practically completed.

SG: *I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about how you came to be a professional theologian?*

HB: I was born in a Christian family, in a family of pastors and professors. On one side, my grandfather was a Professor of Reformed Dogmatics at the University of Leiden. My father taught theology at a Bible Institute in Paris. So I had some models in my own family, but at first I did not think this was the Lord's plan for me: I was preparing to be a missionary, and it was after I had completed the normal course of studies that it was clear from the health of my wife that we couldn't go overseas. I was asked at that time to start teaching part-time while going on with my doctoral studies. So that is the way it started.

SG: So when did you first decide to study theology?

HB: The call to ministry I received quite early, when I was quite young, so it was clear in my mind that I would have to study theology. When I got my 'Baccalaureat', as we call it in France, I was very young, so I didn't start theology immediately, although I took New Testament Greek. I had two years at the Sorbonne (first mathematics, then general literature), but it was with the idea that I would study theology next.

SG: I wonder if you could tell us what the experience is of being a Christian in France?

HB: I think we have to distinguish between being a Christian in France; being a Protestant among French Christians; and being an Evangelical among Protestant Christians in France. These are three qualifications to represent different situations. First, I think as a Christian in France, I have had no impression of being persecuted, but definitely as being different. I don't think there was any hostility when I was young and as a student. And I did not at any time have training in a Christian college, but only in state secular schools, with this special understanding of what is called *laïcité*: the strict separation of religious studies from every other kind of training and education. There was practically no mention of the Bible. History was done with minimal reference to the role of the church and the Reformers – yes, very little. Calvin was mentioned as an important writer, who was one of the fathers of modern French, but little beyond that. So that could be mentioned as far as being a Christian in France is concerned, as France has for about two centuries probably been the most secular (by deliberate intention, officially) of all western states.

Then being a Protestant among Catholics has meant having a memory – a memory of persecution; having a memory, and at the same time a kind of pride in being descendants of those witnesses who were able to withstand such pressure. I have ancestors from the Cèvennes who really set a magnificent example, who, for example, were sent to the galleys. So being a Protestant means having that heritage, and claiming a French Protestant origin, fighting the image that is quite often in the minds of French people that Protestantism is a foreign thing. So this is at least one element. On the other hand, for some non-Christians, Protestants – sometimes for reasons we cannot be pleased with – have a good image in France, and have had for many decades. To some non-Christians, Protestants are secular-minded, set free from the Catholics: they are those Christians who are open, who are not fettered by dogmatic prejudice; who have freedom, and are not bound to the authority of a pope. That pleases the general public.

Being an Evangelical for a long period in my own experience has meant being part of a despised minority which was not considered at all. We were insignificant for quite a time, although a change occurred in the mid-1970s. I was, I think, very near to the place where the change occurred. There was a general assembly of Protestantism in the mid-1970s, where I was invited to prepare with others a special commission. This assembly was the first time Evangelicals were recognised (at least to some degree). In fact, there was a kind of paradoxical alliance with some left-wing Protestants, who felt similarly that under the name of pluralism, the establishment was controlling everything and silencing all those with different opinions. Following that, we have been given a hearing and of course the evangelical wing, although still very small, has been growing, whereas the rest of Christendom has been declining in numbers and influence. I think the evangelical wing has grown about 300 percent since the 1950s. It has weaknesses,

and the rate of growth is slower now than it used to be: the late 1960s, '70s, and early '80s were years of rapid growth. It is still growing, but much more slowly, and of course there are tensions (with the greater numbers) over policies – over which strategies are to be chosen, and in some cases also over which beliefs are to be maintained – divisions between the 'left' wing and 'right' wing. I have done my utmost to avoid a division among evangelical ranks, but it is a danger.

SG: So how do you think your experience of living and working in France has affected the way you have done your theology?

HB: I have tried to be as relevant as possible to the French situation. So I think it has meant, for me, more dialogue with Catholic theologians than I would otherwise have tried to achieve. In my personal case, I have invested much in the study and understanding of the theology and philosophy of Paul Ricoeur. I followed one of his courses for a year, when I was very young in my doctoral programme, and I decided then that he would be the one great contemporary thinker I would try to know – not exhaustively, but more than the others. I therefore tried to read most of his writing and have had several occasions of being with him, and there is some personal relationship with him. This special relationship to Ricoeur I probably would not have had if I had not been a Frenchman.

SG: Why Paul Ricoeur?

HB: I think that in terms of gifts and power, he is probably the number one Protestant thinker among the French since Calvin. When I started to study him in 1961, he was not well-known internationally – apart from in French Protestantism. So I think that my view at that time was fully confirmed by what came afterwards. I discovered in him the one liberal – because he is a liberal Protestant – who realised the force of evangelical objections. Someone who dealt with them at least with a fair degree of seriousness and didn't brush off these objections, as so many do, as if they didn't exist. No, he is very careful to examine those objections. So I'm not convinced by the way he deals with them, but I'm impressed with his lucid understanding of the facts in most cases at least.

He stressed what to me is a very important element: the contrast between a metaphysical understanding of sin, of human alienation, and the Christian understanding which is historical, not metaphysical. A metaphysical interpretation of human evil considers that it is part of the very constitution of the human being, the human 'essence', that which defines what being human means (from creation if one believes in creation); a historical interpretation considers it was introduced at some point by the use, abuse, or misuse of freedom, so that the difference of before and after is relevant. So I was pleased to reflect on this contrast – that was one of my motivations in following his course. He is the man, especially in his earlier writing on the symbolism of evil, who has perfectly understood that this is the original feature of the biblical account of evil, and that it is entirely bound to moral monotheism and the prophetic call to repentance – that these three are bound together. Although he has realised all this and said it so well, still he does not maintain the historicity himself. So he is a liberal! He doesn't accept it! But he has seen the meaning of it, the presence of it in Scripture. This is probably the main reason I have invested in the study of Ricoeur more than of others.

SG: *What are some of the major theological battles you have tried to fight in your career?*

HB: Well, apart from Ricoeur's influence, I must say that I fought with Barth's theology as a young man. I felt I had to, and it was rewarding. Of course this is also related to the French situation, because the Reformed segment of French Protestantism was heavily dominated by Barth – more so than in other countries, and for a longer period. Until the early 1960s at least, the Reformed church was basically Barthian, and the man with whom I started my doctoral studies in the Faculté of Paris, Jean Bosc, was a faithful Barthian. I therefore had to work with, and in some measure against Barth, as well, so that was a theological battle, I would say. There, the key question of worldview appeared to me to be entirely basic: the creation-fall-redemption scheme, rather than the Barthian christocentric concentration. For Karl Barth, it is the very principle of his method to draw everything from the one Christ-event (reconciliation). For him, therefore, the true theological order, despite the superficial aspect of the sequence (which he sometimes follows), is first reconciliation (incarnation, cross, resurrection) and then, logically second, creation and sin. I had to decide basically between Barth's choice on this, and what I found more biblical – the classical Reformed interpretation. That, therefore, was one basic fight.

Then the question of hermeneutics was an important topic for me. I did more work on that topic than in other areas. Some of my longest and most technical articles were on this – I should say, on the older form of the hermeneutical debates; I have not kept abreast of the more deconstructionist forms. So that was another fight.

Then there was the area in which I first worked with my doctoral thesis and now hope to write a book. That is in the area of the sacraments. My effort has been to shape an understanding of sacramental function that is different from both the Catholic and the Reformed one. Although I think I can agree formally with practically all of Calvin's propositions, still I think that as an account of sacramental function, the Reformed doctrine is not satisfactory, and that there is (more implicitly than explicitly) in the Baptist tradition, which is mine, a third view which is more satisfactory. However, I don't agree at all with those Baptists who have tried to remedy the weaknesses of the explicit Baptist account by going back to the Catholic heritage for a dose of sacramentalism! I have, therefore tried to bring about an original interpretation which is not in formal disagreement with the Reformed one, but with the emphasis elsewhere. That is an area in which I initially didn't publish much, but I have now written a few articles in French, and am publishing the text-book next year. But later I hope to write a more academic book on sacramental function.

SG: *Who have been the most influential theologians in your life, both in personal contact, the people who have been your mentors, but also among dead theologians you have read?!*

HB: I have already mentioned two names – great thinkers with whom I have had to fight, whose influence I have had to resist. Yet at the same time I was shaped by that very effort. Because I studied them without being convinced, I was probably influenced in unconscious ways.

But on the other side, Calvin is really such a pleasure just to read and discover that he has seen all the problems, and the facets of the problems, already. So Calvin is a great influence. Also, Roger Nicole was my Professor of Systematic Theology, and between his

family and mine there has been a long friendship. It was because he taught in the college that I went to it, and he was an influence on me at that time. I didn't discuss as much with him as with others. There was a NT Professor with whom I had hours of discussion, but I couldn't say that that was such an influence at the same time, at least I don't think so.

SG: *You've been involved in discussion between Evangelical theologians and Catholic theologians in France. I wonder if you could explain to us what has taken place, and how you have enjoyed the experience?!*

HB: I have enjoyed it! I have been involved in two different dialogues, and the comparison between the two is also an interesting feature. I have been involved in the WEF or the WEA (World Evangelical Fellowship, then Alliance) dialogue with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. There I met several theologians, including Cardinal Avery Dulles. The funny thing is that at times Dulles and myself would agree, as two dogmaticians, against some of our colleagues on both sides! I have also been involved in dialogue between Catholics and Baptists in France, and there my main partner with whom I have also worked and conversed in other settings has been Bernard Sesbouë, the Jesuit theologian.

I have noticed here some interesting differences. In particular, in the conversations with theologians appointed by the Pontifical Council, we were confronted with a much more traditional Catholic position than that which we encountered in France – this was quite plain. In both of these dialogues, our emphasis has been that we first had to know each other and understand our feelings. We shouldn't prematurely seek agreement, so we have not made any significant step in the way of agreement; we have stated our common emphasis on the trinity, on the incarnation, and also on Scripture. In some respects at least, especially with such a man as Cardinal Dulles, there is an emphasis on Scripture as the Word of God, as inspired unreservedly, which is also good Catholic dogma. There is of course the problem of interpretation to be raised; and there is the problem of the Apocrypha, but on the nature of biblical inspiration, with the traditional Catholic position there is agreement.

But we have also brought to light the basic differences and oppositions between our positions, and the question of the sacraments has again been central. In almost every round of discussion – or at least very often – we go back to the role of baptism and the eucharist. And with no possible agreement, although such a man as Bernard Sesbouë does make considerable modifications to what is usually considered to be the Catholic understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper. He definitely has an understanding of transubstantiation that I would consider not so far from things we could accept, and for instance he would be ready to say, with quotations from Thomas Aquinas on his side, that believer's baptism should be considered as the norm. Although he would defend infant baptism, he would agree that the basic model from the NT would be believers' baptism. He would then find reason also to legitimise infant baptism. So I think it's quite interesting to hear such things.

SG: *What do you think will be the most important issues in the near future, in the next generation?*

HB: Oh, I am not a prophet – at least in the predictive sense! I think we are quite often surprised with what happens. As the new thing, the new fad, I'm not sure that the so-

called postmodernist, deconstructionist type of thinking has such a future. I think it is a fad. It lacks a serious basis. I grow more and more impatient, I confess, with the very word 'postmodern': as a tag, it is so convenient, it boosts your ego, and is favourable to book-selling to have 'postmodern' in the title! Actually it is late modernism. I think all the serious writers are not using the language of 'postmodern' – the vast majority of them, at least. There was a special consultation at the Sorbonne of about twenty of the world's leading intellectuals in the year 2000 (George Steiner, for instance, was among them) on 'The Future of Christianity'. The participants gave their interpretation of our cultural situation, and in the book which came out of that consultation, none of them uses the word 'postmodern'! Not one of them! I think that's significant. I know this is a negative answer to your question.

On the other hand, I think the syncretistic pressure is very, very strong and maintaining a pure Reformation understanding of the gospel will be under great pressure. It already has an air of 'bad manners' to insist strictly on sola Scriptura, on a clear doctrine of justification by faith alone, and so on. So I think it will be a test of our faithfulness to the gospel to maintain them in ways which are not just frozen conservatism.

SG: *Many of the readers of Themelios are of course theological students who are at the beginning of their theological study. How would you advise a theological student to maintain both studying the Bible academically and also reading the Bible devotionally? Do you have any advice from your own experience?*

HB: Well, I think I would say three things. The first is that we should be convinced deeply, and with strong resolution, not to let the devotional relationship to the Bible wither away. It's very important to maintain this relationship to the text as God's Word, which God continues to use to shape my own life.

Second, this should not be done with a kind of wall of separation between the academic work and the devotional use, otherwise I think it is inevitable that a crisis will occur for the young student in theology. He or she has to find new ways of integrating what is learned from and about the Bible in classes with the personal reading of Scripture. It should not be just a childish reading of Scripture for the heart on one side, and then the academic exercises on the other side, with little communication between the two. There must be an integration. It is difficult in many respects, but I think it is critical that we do – and I think it can be successful when studying in an evangelical environment. The difficulty is ten times greater when young students are studying in a non-evangelical environment, so my advice would be to start to study theology in an evangelical environment. That would be the second point.

The third point is that I think one way of integrating is to use the Bible in the original languages for personal devotional reading. This, at least to me, has been extremely helpful, and one of the greatest joys and rewards of theological study has been the discovery of all the allusions to OT passages in the NT, especially in the gospels. The richness of just following the indications in the Nestlé-Aland Greek New Testament – these references to OT passages in the margin! It has to be done in Greek in order to get the reminiscences in wording, from the Septuagint especially. So this, I think, is a very important tool for better integration.

SG: *Henri, merci beaucoup!*

The Last Word

My Father and Common Grace

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My father died in mid-spring this year after a long illness and a slow deterioration of his once robust and handsome body. A friend once told me, 'I'd rather die by the yard than by the inch'. My dear father died inch by inch, becoming less and less able to be who he had been. And he had been so much to so many. My dad became a follower of Jesus as an adult. In fact, my father told his pastor that I led him to Christ. But, I often start my own testimony with this sentence, 'I was not raised by parents who were Christians, but I was raised in a home where Christ was present'. My parents loved their daughters with an extravagance of both affection and discipline that modelled for my sister and me the gift of grace and the tellers of truth we have become for our own children.

I have thought more poignantly about God as Father since my dad's death. I have realised with gratitude the truth I shared at my father's funeral. I said at that time, 'My dad did not make it difficult to believe that God the Father is good'. For so many people, the idea of God as 'Father' is an obstacle for faith or understanding that must be overcome, but not for me. And I am profoundly grateful for that. My father was delightful. It was my dad who created games the whole neighbourhood could play. It was my dad who carried me off to bed at night as a 'helicopter' or a 'blind horse' – and it took a long, long time to get there. It was my dad who taught me to read and love books. It was my dad who taught me to drive a 'stick-shift', control a spin on an icy road and notice every other driver on the road. It was my dad who took an interest in my life as an adult and still knew how never to be my peer. My father bid me welcome, but never was I encouraged to presume on his audience, or take his attention for granted. My father let us know that he was to be respected. I was to knock before entering. I was to say, 'Pardon me' before interrupting. I was to factor in his authority as much as I was to relax in his affection.

Is it any wonder, with such a father, that I have come to love God as the one who invites me to 'come boldly to the throne of grace to find mercy and help in time of need'? Yes, I come boldly, but I know I come to a throne, not an easy chair. I am part of our Father's family, but never is this relationship familiar, casual or presumed upon. My Father loves me and I need to be awestruck by that reality. God is my Father, but never my peer.

It strikes me that even Jesus understood that as the only Son of the Father. Jesus addressed God as Father carefully – 'holy' (John 17:12) and 'righteous' (John 17:25) were adjectives that balanced the possessives of 'my' and 'our' that indicated Jesus'

relationship with God as Father as well as our own. The one time the NT records the Aramaic Abba, it emerges in Jesus' prayer language (Mark 14:36) as an intimate cry of distress, not an irreverent address of presumption. Jeremias' early work on emphasising Abba as a term of endearment has led to some ill-grounded pretension as well as exaggerated hermeneutical implications of who God is as Father. The triune God is not to be trifled with!

Jesus, as the incarnation of God the Son, gives us a hint of how careful we have to be in understanding our relationship with God in the family of faith. Jesus the Son is never our peer either! He calls the disciples his 'friends' (John 15:15) in order that they might know and do the will of his Father. But, it is interesting to note that never does Jesus reciprocate this designation. Jesus does not invite the disciples to call him 'friend', but says, 'You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am' (John 13:13). This demarcation of respect isn't intended to create an alienating distance or coldness in the relationship of the disciples to Jesus. It is intended to define our place and His preeminence in all things.

It is also worth noting, that only by the third person of the Trinity are we able to call God Abba! 'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God ... when we cry Abba Father! it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God' (Rom. 8:14–16). It is through the Son that we know God as Father in the present reality of the Spirit. The mystery of God as Trinity demands careful approach, careful address to the intimate love and glory of his very self.

This intimate and loving reverence was a gift of grace in my childhood home before any of us knew Jesus the Son, understood God as Father or were indwelt by God's Spirit. God was at work in our lives before we could identify his presence or know his name. God's goodness was hinted at in the kindness and affection of my dad. God's glory was thinly veiled in the respect my dad expected. And these marks of my dad's life have helped me know God for who he is. Was not this 'common grace' prompted by unknown 'special grace'?

I am grateful to legally bear the diminutive 'Robbie' as my given name. My father's name was Robert Joseph Fox and it is an inexpressible joy to know that I introduced my dad to our Father and, together in the Spirit, we cry, Abba!