

Joshua and the Pilgrim People of God in the New Testament

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It is possible, as I know from recent experience, to spend three years studying theology in a secular university, and even with a majority of that time devoted to the New Testament barely touch on anything that might credibly be called 'New Testament Theology'. The texts of the New Testament are studied in considerable detail, with careful attention paid to the theological positions of each individual writer—or at least, for the most part, of Mark, John and Paul—but with no attempt to create a synthesis, to trace theological themes that link disparate books, or to allow a reading that goes beyond narrow exegesis to inform the exercise of speculative systematic theology. There are honourable exceptions to this general trend: Gerd Theissen's *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion* attempts something in the way of a synthesis, but explicitly goes beyond the texts of the New Testament in a way that makes his programme more a historical study of early Christian theology than New Testament theology properly speaking. Arguably one has to look back to the likes of Barth and Bultmann for authentic New Testament theology, theology based on the scriptural texts themselves rather than on a historical reconstruction of the theological milieu that produced them, and addressing modern theological concerns.

This article proposes one route towards developing this sort of theology, beginning with the significance of Jesus's name. Though the Holy Name was once an important Catholic devotion, it receives little attention today, either spiritual or scholarly: yet when properly explored through readings of, in particular, the Letter to the Hebrews and Matthew's Gospel, the fact that Jesus's name is identical to that of Joshua (in Greek *Iesous*, in Hebrew *Yeshua*) proves to be far from trivial, opening the way to a theologically powerful and spiritually refreshing approach to Christology and ecclesiology.

The word *Iesous* appears 975 times in the New Testament. Alongside the 971 references to Jesus of Nazareth, we find one each to Jesus Justus, the companion of Saint Paul, and to Jesus son of Eliezer, one of Christ's ancestors according to Luke; only two are to Joshua the son of Nun, who led the people of Israel into the promised land. This may seem a somewhat

narrow basis on which to build a theological edifice, especially as one of these two, Acts 7.45, I shall henceforth disregard. The other, Hebrews 4.8, is an often-overlooked mention of Joshua occurring within a passage largely disregarded in modern commentaries, and indeed in a New Testament book that receives considerably less scholarly attention, especially in the English language, than other texts of comparable size. Nonetheless the reference is striking precisely on account of its rarity, and surely raises the question whether the coincidence of names, which strikes the reader of the Greek texts so dramatically when first encountered, ought to strike the New Testament theologian similarly. Moreover, though in the Gospels *Iesous* refers almost exclusively to Jesus Christ, and never to Joshua, the structure of Matthew's Gospel suggests strongly that the word bears powerful connotations of the other *Iesous*, Joshua son of Nun. This is because, contrary to the common view that Matthew has a pentateuchal structure, it has in fact a hexateuchal structure, with the passion and resurrection of Christ deliberately set in parallel to the sixth book of the Old Testament, the Book of Joshua: in his death and resurrection, Christ leads his people into the real promised land, not through the waters of the Jordan but through the waters of death, not into Canaan but into the Kingdom of Heaven; 'Joshua' of Nazareth, the Son of God, is the definitive successor of Moses, completing the task foreshadowed by Moses' earlier successor, the son of Nun.

The suggestion that Matthew has a hexateuchal structure was proposed forty-eight years ago by Austin Farrer in his groundbreaking article *On Dispensing with Q*. As the title of the article indicates, his suggestion about the structure of Matthew is placed at the service of an argument regarding the literary relationships of the synoptic gospels. As a part of this argument his suggestion is neither necessary nor even helpful, for he goes on to argue rather less convincingly that *Luke's* Gospel shows an awareness and a conscious development of this hexateuchal structure. Yet regarding Matthew Farrer's suggestion is both convincing and highly stimulating, and it is unfortunate, though highly indicative of the state of New Testament studies, that the most theologically stimulating part of this article is almost invariably overlooked in favour of yet more stale and uninteresting discussion of the so-called synoptic problem.

Farrer points out that, while it is true that five great blocks of teaching can be discerned in Matthew, each immediately followed by a phrase along the lines of 'And when Jesus finished these sayings' (5.1-7.27; 10.5-42; 13.3-52; 18; 23-25), these blocks do not have a thematic one-to-one match with the five books of the Torah. This is broadly accepted by scholars, who either abandon the notion of a pentateuchal structure entirely, or argue that the lack of a one-to-one match is unimportant, and that the existence of the

five blocks is sufficient to establish the pentateuchal structure. However, replacing the five-fold with the six-fold structure does allow a clear one-to-one match, while reflecting the fact that the five books of the Torah contain both teaching (law) and narrative, just as the Gospel does. The Gospel begins with *Biblos geneleos Jesou Christou*, literally 'Book of Genesis of Jesus Christ', and it is surely this, and not the first block of teaching (the Sermon on the Mount) that parallels the first book of the Pentateuch, the Book of Genesis. Matthew quite deliberately uses the word *geneleos* in order to echo the Greek name of the first book of the Old Testament, and for Matthew these Greek names seem to be of vital importance, as in fact a great deal of exegesis of the Old Testament by Jewish writers of the first century focused on the Greek names of the books.

The first block of teaching in chapters five to seven can then be allowed to match up quite naturally with the Book of Exodus. Matthew's Exodus though, does not begin here but, like the Book of Exodus, with narrative: Jesus is in Egypt, in danger of death due to the wrath of a jealous king. His return from Egypt is followed immediately by his baptism; like the crossing of the Red Sea this is an apocalyptic event that precedes a period in the wilderness—forty days for Christ paralleling the forty years the people of Israel spent being tempted in the wilderness, though unlike them Jesus does not succumb. Only then does Christ's teaching on the Mount occur, foreshadowed by but clearly surpassing the teaching given to (not by) Moses on Mount Sinai. It is already clear that Jesus is intended to be more than another Moses, that he surpasses Moses as Joshua surpassed him; but Christ's surpassing of Moses, unlike that of the first Joshua, is definitive.

When we move on to Leviticus we must recall that Matthew is sensitive to the Greek names of the books of the Torah. Leviticus was understood to be a book about Levites, that is, about the servants of the Torah and the tabernacle, and this is the function performed in Matthew by the 'Mission Discourse' in chapter ten, in which the Apostles are given a mission in regard to the New Covenant equivalent to that of the Levites in the Old. In the same way, Numbers was read, by Philo for example, as a book about the mustering of the host of the people, the gathering of the tribes of Israel into one holy nation; this is quite different from the way in which it is read by scholars today, if they read it at all. Chapter thirteen of Matthew similarly deals with the gathering of the numerous host of the people of the Kingdom of God, and with the criteria by which some are members of the People of God, promised admission to the promised land, while others are excluded.

According to the usual reckoning of the blocks of teaching, this leaves chapter eighteen to be our Deuteronomy. In fact, just as Matthew's Exodus begins before the block of teaching, so his Deuteronomy starts a little

earlier, with an apocalyptic event that forms a diptych with Jesus's baptism, the Transfiguration. Moses promised a successor at the end of Deuteronomy, and at the Transfiguration he appears again, to bear witness to the identity of that successor; but it is God's voice that identifies the new Joshua as his own Son. Moving forward to chapter eighteen of Matthew, one can trace themes strongly similar to those in Deuteronomy, first with parallels to Deut. 17's teaching on the proper behaviour of princes, then on grievances against one's neighbours. Matthew 19 considers questions of divorce and children, paralleling Deut. 24.1-4, and Jesus's answer to the rich man later in that chapter reads like a summary of the book of Deuteronomy as a whole.

At last, then, we come to the last book of Matthew's hexateuch, his portrayal of the fulfilment of Joshua—both the book and the person—as Jesus passes through Jericho, scene of Joshua's great victory, and enters Jerusalem in triumph. First, though, we need to understand exactly what the figure of Joshua represents, and this is no simple task, for there are several strands of Joshua tradition within the Old Testament. In the Book of Exodus he is principally an attendant of sorts to Moses, and one among several leaders of the people in battle. In Numbers, where he starts out with the name Hoshea, he is just one of a number of spies. Joshua only really comes into his own in Deuteronomy, in which he is made the successor of Moses, the one who is to achieve what Moses set out to do, namely to bring an end to the wilderness wanderings and lead the people by conquest into the promised land. In the Book of Joshua, he fulfils this role, becoming not only a new Moses but the one who completes the work of Moses; he is also portrayed as the precursor of the Davidic kingship. The biblical estimate of Joshua's significance continued to develop through the post-exilic period: in later writings such as 2 Esdras, Sirach and 1 Maccabees he is seen as pre-eminent judge and prophet. Sirach writes, 'Joshua the son of Nun was mighty in war, and was the successor of Moses in prophesying. He became, in accordance with his name, a great *saviour* of God's elect, to take vengeance on the enemies that rose against them, *so that he might give Israel its inheritance*' (Sir. 46.1, my emphasis).

I suggest that this understanding of the figure of Joshua was taken up and further developed by the first Christians as part of their reflection on the significance of Christ, which must surely have included reflection on the meaning of his name. So it is that Matthew has quite naturally chosen to have his Gospel climax with a parallel to the Book of Joshua, extending once more well beyond the fifth 'block of teaching', to cap his reprise of the Torah. The new, the real, Joshua is portrayed in his victory over the enemies of God's people, thus giving Israel its inheritance. For Jesus, though, the site of the real victory is not Jericho but Jerusalem: it is the

walls of Jerusalem and her temple that must fall as the pre-condition and sign of the entry of the people of God into the true promised land under the leadership of the true Joshua (cf. Matt. 24 especially verse 2). This victory is enacted by Jesus at his crucifixion, outside the city walls. As the curtain, the inner wall, as it were, of the temple is rent asunder, the centurion cries out that this was truly the Son of God. This transforms our diptych of apocalyptic moments into a triptych, as it echoes the language and imagery of the Baptism and the Transfiguration: the curtain, for example, is literally 'opened from above to below', a paradigmatically apocalyptic expression.

The reader may be asking by now what is meant by 'apocalyptic'. It is at present a buzz-word in New Testament scholarship, but its importance was first brought to prominence by Albert Schweitzer as early as 1906 in his *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (English Translation 1910), still arguably the single most important contribution to the study of the historical Jesus. Jesus lived in a religious world dominated by the language and imagery we associate with the Book of Revelation, the latter part of Daniel, the beginning of the Book of Ezekiel and even the call of Isaiah. This was so not merely on account of some theological/literary fashion, but because apocalyptic literature reflected and nourished the religious world-view of many Jews at the time: heaven was a reality, a plane of existence, as it were, not figurative or less real but more real than this earthly realm. Angels standing before the throne of God, demons and dragons ravaging the world were not mere literary representations but higher realities visible to those granted a glimpse of the way the world looks from a divine perspective. It is true that much of the most strongly apocalyptic literature that survives from roughly the period of Jesus's earthly ministry is seemingly sectarian in tone, and looks towards some kind of future consummation of the present age, but neither sectarianism nor strong future eschatology are of the essence of apocalypticism. Rather, it is a world-view, even a spirituality, an understanding of the shape of the cosmos that issues not only in obviously apocalyptic texts such as 4 Ezra or the Book of Revelation, but also in passages like 2 Corinthians 12.2-4 or Acts 7.55f., as well as the passages from Matthew I have mentioned.

Another book of the New Testament shot through with apocalypticism is the Letter to the Hebrews. Of uncertain date, it is a document that bears distinctive witness to a Christianity at once very Jewish and very Greek, written as it is in the best Greek of the New Testament, and yet dependent upon a familiarity with the apocalyptic world-view of first-century Palestinian Judaism and with the cult of the Jerusalem temple. It reminds us that Palestinian Judaism and Hellenism were far from being two opposite ends of the spectrum by the time of Christ. Though the Letter is difficult to read (even in translation!) the overall message of Hebrews is

quite straightforward: it teaches the absolute pre-eminence of Jesus Christ as the mediator between God and humanity, the pioneer of our salvation. It relies throughout on the language of the Jewish temple cult, for the vocabulary is that of priesthood and sacrifice, altar and sanctuary, blood and purification; but underpinning all of this is the understanding that the cult itself is representative of something more profound, being one might say the projection into this mundane world, the making present, of an eternal and celestial reality.

This is why Hebrews speaks of the tabernacle rather than the temple; this fact is often unhelpfully invoked in attempts to date the Letter, with some scholars arguing that it proves that Hebrews was written after the temple was destroyed in AD70, others that, since the destruction of the temple is not mentioned, it must have been written beforehand. Needless to say, both trains of reasoning cannot be correct, but in fact neither is terribly insightful: the writer speaks of the tabernacle carried by the people of God in the wilderness because, for him, that is the nearest thing on earth to the heavenly sanctuary; the temple of Solomon was a mere shadow of this tabernacle, itself only a pointer towards the heavenly reality, and the temple of Herod a very faint shadow, we may suppose, of Solomon's. 'For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf (Hebrews 9.23f). The whole point of Hebrews is that, given what has been achieved by Christ, God's people no longer have need of any earthly representation of the heavenly sanctuary, not the original tabernacle of Moses and still less the present (or recently past) temple cult. We may well speculate that this theology had its roots in Jesus's own self-understanding, seeing himself replacing the temple as the locus of God's presence to his people. The writer of Hebrews argues that Jesus, being a priest 'after the order of Melchizedek' as prophesied by Ps 109(110), is possessed of a priesthood entirely superior to that of the priests of the old covenant; they must offer their sacrifices every day, whereas Christ has made his once-for-all sacrifice in his own blood and taken his seat at the right hand of God.

Mention of the tabernacle rather than the temple should also point us to the period of the wilderness wanderings of the people of Israel as the principal focus of the Letter's incipient ecclesiology. Scholarly consideration of Hebrews has tended to focus on the aspect of temple and priesthood, more obviously to the fore in the text, and less on that of Joshua and the wilderness wanderings; yet the two are intimately linked, both by the tabernacle motif and also by the notion of sabbath rest: when Joshua is mentioned at 4.8, the writer is arguing that, since Ps 95 speaks of a sabbath rest still not entered into by the people of Israel, and since the psalm was written (by King David) after Israel had entered Canaan across

the Jordan under Joshua's leadership, therefore this entry cannot be the final sabbath rest promised to God's people. By implication, therefore, the land of Canaan is not the ultimate promised land and Joshua is not the ultimate successor of Moses. This interpretation of the word 'rest' (in the Greek *katapausis*) is in tune with that of Jewish exegesis of the same period, which understood Ps 95 to refer simultaneously to entry into the promised land of heaven and to the temple as the place *par excellence* of sabbath rest. Other Jewish writings used *katapausis* in the same way: 4 Ezra 8.52, for example, reads 'for you a paradise is opened ... a city is built, a rest is furnished'; the Testament of Daniel (5.12) tells us that 'the Saints shall rest in Eden, the righteous shall rest in the New Jerusalem'. Similarly, Philo and the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* associate 'rest' principally with the spiritual or heavenly realm.

It is, then, not only the Book of Revelation that sees the city of Jerusalem as a type of heaven, pointing both upwards to the present celestial reality and forwards to the breaking-in of that reality into human history at the consummation of the age. The author of Revelation and the writer of Hebrews alike, though utterly different in linguistic style and very distinct in theological approach, understand the Christian hope to be based upon access to the heavenly plane of existence, of which Jerusalem and her temple are the projection into the present earthly reality. However, whereas Revelation speaks of heaven descending to earth, in Hebrews the picture we are presented with is that of Christ ascending into the heavenly sanctuary, taking with him his own blood as expiation for the sins of the people. Thus the day of his crucifixion becomes the final and definitive Day of Atonement, the day on which the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of the sacrificial offering on the inside of the curtain: 'When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus assuring an eternal redemption' (Hebrews 9.11f).

However, Christ is more even than the High Priest who is able to offer the perfect and final sacrifice to save us from our sins. He is also the *pioneer* of our salvation (Hebrews 12.2), just as Joshua was the leader of a great multitude across the Jordan and into the promised land. The writer of Hebrews addresses to his audience a 'word of exhortation' (13.22)—in Greek a *logos parakleseos*, an intriguing echo of Johannine vocabulary—to encourage them to stand firm in their faith as did their forefathers who were the pilgrim people of God. 'These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth

... They desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one' (11.13,16). Jesus, we might say, has not only *shown* them the way to salvation but *cleared* the way, because the Christians' entry into the sabbath rest is both parallel to that of Christ into the heavenly sanctuary and made possible by it. 'Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in the full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water' (10.19-22).

We note here that the writer links Christ's flesh with the curtain, or veil, of the temple, just as Matthew (following Mark) has Christ's death coincide with the rending of the same curtain. The death of Christ in the flesh becomes an apocalyptic event in a new sense, for now it is possible, through that death, not only to *see* beyond the veil but to *pass* beyond it. To do so, however, we too must pass through Christ's death, 'our bodies washed with pure water'; this is surely a reference to baptism, one that is very like Saint Paul's understanding of baptism as the beginning of the Christian's participation in Christ (see Romans 6.1-11). It is clear that this notion of participation, though principally associated with Paul, is in fact a part of the Church's inheritance of Jewish apocalypticism, an inheritance received alike by Paul and by the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews. It is worth noting that Saint Paul does not restrict this notion of participation to being 'in Christ': regarding the crossing of the Red Sea, he writes, 'I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea' (1 Cor. 10.1). John's Gospel, too, has its concept of participation: the 'farewell discourse' (chapters 14-16) is full of participationist language and is thoroughly apocalyptic.

Thus we are not obliged to take the view that the theological similarities between Hebrews and the Pauline letters imply any dependence in one direction or the other: both are dependent on the very Jewish (that is, very Hellenistic and very Palestinian) understanding that what is achieved by one may be appropriated by others in and through the 'pioneer'. The Christian becomes a member of the pilgrim people of God when, through baptism, he follows Christ through the waters of the Jordan and into the promised land of sabbath rest. Theological themes that cut across diverse New Testament texts, read in the proper historical context of first century Jewish apocalypticism, point the way to a 'Joshua' Christology and ecclesiology and may, with sensitive exploration, issue in a new and intelligent spirituality of the Holy Name of Jesus.