

Pilgrimage, sovereignty and mutuality

Images for inter-faith dialogue

James Crampsey

IN AN IMPASSIONED REFLECTION ON THEOLOGICAL development in the wake of the dialogue with Judaism, John Pawlikowski makes a plea to the Church to ‘recapture Christianity’s original Jewish matrix’.¹ His point is that if the Church were to take *Nostra aetate*, Vatican II’s declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions, with the seriousness it deserves, it would open up not just the possibility of a genuine dialogue with people of other faiths but enrich both christology *and* ecclesiology.

In responding to the agenda raised by Pawlikowski I want to explore three themes: pilgrimage, sovereignty and mutuality. The first two are, of course, important generative images retrieved from the New Testament. They have already achieved a certain significance within the post-Vatican II Church. The third theme, however, is notably underdeveloped. But, if Pawlikowski is right about the significance for Christian identity of the Jewish–Christian dialogue, it urgently needs attention. My argument is that the mutuality learned from the dialogue between Christians and Jews is a constitutive dimension of today’s Church. As the Church engages in the various dimensions of inter-faith dialogue, it becomes more and more clear that an exclusively ecclesiocentric interpretation of scripture, which effectively obliterates the Jewish voice, becomes impossible to sustain. Mutuality, that is to say a hermeneutic which seeks a certain complementarity of interpretation, can enrich both traditions. In what follows, an interpretation of the Transfiguration will be offered as an example of how the scriptural imagery can be developed in a way which respects both traditions of faith. Finally, in response to the theme treated elsewhere in this Supplement, I shall argue that re-founding the Church is an attractive but ultimately bankrupt idea. We need instead to understand better the Church’s classic foundational text – Matthew 16.16–18. We begin, however, by retracing our steps to the image of Church envisaged by Vatican II.

Pilgrimage and pilgrim people

The Council retrieved an important image from Scripture when it described the Church as a pilgrim people.² The idea of pilgrimage as the journey through life, searching and being led by the Spirit in the company of others, captures the dynamic of individual living and collective belonging. Rooted in the language of the Letter to the Hebrews, it has the authority of the New Testament to sustain its correlation between the early Christians and our contemporary experience. But it is also true that images once retrieved then develop a life of their own. To be a pilgrim people, in the terms of the Letter to the Hebrews, is to face the fact that once-familiar sacred institutions are gone for good. There is no longer any Temple, nor any priesthood, nor any sacrifice. There is now no mediation except for the mediator himself, Jesus Christ, the one who has gone before us into the heavenly sanctuary. Thus the reception of this image generates a sense of belonging which is uncomfortable with institutions.

In other words, one of the life-giving images of Vatican II carries in its wake an anti-institutional thrust which clashes with the assertion that we belong to the institution. Here we face competing frameworks of belonging which are in creative tension. It is an interesting question whether it makes sense to talk of *organized pilgrimage* – or is this a contradiction in terms? Maybe there is a necessary dimension of chaos in any pilgrimage; remember that Joseph and Mary lost Jesus on one of their pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Pilgrimage is an intentional shaping of a crowd by the crowd itself, but the shaping is effected partly by the goal and partly by the commitment within the crowd to attain the goal.

The sovereignty of God

The pilgrim people is, therefore, a dynamic image, but it is not obvious that it is a constructive one. The key constructive image which emerged from Vatican II was that of the Kingdom. 'Kingdom values' quickly became a slogan which found explicit form in 'justice, love and peace'. Much has been written about the Kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus, and much of it is confusing and contradictory. For the purpose of this article, I want to focus on the aspect of 'democratization' which is inherent in it. But while recognizing the generative resonance of the word 'kingdom', it might be better to replace it with the word *sovereignty*.

Now the sovereignty of God becomes thoroughly enmeshed in human affairs when the Israelites ask to have a king, like the other nations. Since Israel's identity, its sense of election, is frequently

expressed in terms of *not being like the other nations*, there is a deep ambiguity in this request. According to the perspective of the deuteronomic history, this is a dangerous and flawed experiment which ends in the disaster of the exile. In the aftermath of the exile, the institution of kingship is replaced by a priestly theocracy which maintains its power even if it has to cohabit to some extent with the Hasmonean royal house in the aftermath of the Maccabean revolt.

Jesus' proclamation of the sovereignty of God has nothing to do with earthly kingship nor with priestly theocracy. Many contemporary writers on the Kingdom talk of it as having a profoundly anti-temple dimension, and as an image around which the restoration of the true Israel revolves. The sovereignty of God resides not in a dynastic king nor in a dynastic priesthood in control of the temple. Without going into all the christological discussions about the various titles which use 'Son', the 'Abba' relationship claimed by Jesus and opened up to others in the Lord's prayer is clearly a radical alternative to dynastic power plays. According to the deuteronomic history, God grants permission to Israel to have a king on condition that the king ensures that justice is done in the land for the oppressed, named emblematically as the widow, the orphan and the sojourner. Similarly, the king is responsible for monotheistic worship, and this is the apparent area of failure for all the kings of Israel except David, Josiah and Hezekiah.

In this way, Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom, God's sovereignty, is profounding anti-institutional. The worship of God and the concern for the oppressed is democratized and becomes the responsibility of the people. Through the people, the proper sovereignty of God will be both honoured and made concrete. The generative vitality of this image in the contemporary Church thus raises difficulties for the institutional Church. This is an image with an immediacy of connection to the historical Jesus, but which also carries with it a constructive programme of action which is challenging, life-giving and seems to meet the needs of the world which we inhabit. We are often told that there is no democracy in the Church, but to the extent that the message of the Kingdom remains an important element in the life of the people of God, attention needs to be given to the dimension of democratization inherent in it.

It is interesting that both these images – pilgrimage and sovereignty – have something of a utopian character. There is no place, no goal for the pilgrimage, other than heaven. Likewise the Kingdom does not belong in any place. There is only the dynamic of the pilgrim journeying and gaining glimpses of the Kingdom which function like

signposts, perhaps oases on the journey. There is a sound instinct here which is abandoned only at great cost.

Mutuality – from ecclesiology to christology

Implicit in these brief remarks is the theme which so much exercises Pawlikowski – how the Church is to live out of its ‘Jewish roots’. In my language he is complaining about the lack of mutuality, that the post-conciliar understanding of Judaism has barely impinged on the Church’s understanding of itself or its Lord. Now Vatican II was, of course, preoccupied with the question of ecclesiology. But what difference does the *living* world of the Jews make to the Church’s self-understanding? In the two constitutions on the Church a theology of the Church as existing in necessary relationship with the world was proposed and a pastoral praxis suggested. The Church could learn from the world and the world from the Church. This theme of mutuality was exemplified most obviously in the Decree on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis humanae*) and, through the opening to other religious faiths, in *Nostra aetate*. Both have clearly had an important impact on the question of evangelization. But they also demand a real mutuality: the respect that the Church expects for itself in matters of religion has equally to be conferred on the religion of others. And, although it may sound odd, I would also want to argue that the document on Revelation (*Dei verbum*) proposes a similar opening and a similar mutuality – this time to the Scriptures, the dangerous preserve of the Reformed Churches. Anyone who doubts this should read the account of the conciliar debate on ‘tradition’ which now seems to be on another planet.

Against such a background, in which scriptural imagery is to be interpreted not independent of but in relationship with Judaism, we are called to move towards an understanding of ourselves as Church and then to try to formulate who Christ is. There are some indications that such a programme is part of the experience of the early Christians reflected in the New Testament. In the Fourth Gospel, there is a definite correlation between the self-understanding of the community and their expressed understanding of Jesus. In a famous article, Wayne Meeks characterized this relationship as one of harmonic reinforcement.³ In a nutshell, the community feels itself as outsiders, rejected by their own Jewish matrix, and proposes its understanding of Jesus in analogous terms. He is ‘not of the world’, he is ‘from above’, ‘he came to his own and his own received him not.’ Just as the community feels not at home in the world, so Jesus is not at home because he is from another world.

This is the most extreme example of this correlation, but it certainly needs to be understood since John is the most clearly anti-Jewish of the Gospels.

An easy inference to draw from this would be that a high christology must be abandoned since it is vitiated by a flawed self-understanding of the community. Easy and wrong. Recalling Pawlikowski's plea, the task for the Christian theologian is not to abstract from the Jewish matrix but precisely to explore the Jewishness of Jesus as a correlative which can enrich traditional christology. It is probably worth observing here that the articulation of the high christology of the Fourth Gospel receives its generative power from a Jewish mystical tradition. But, since the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels is often thought to be more accessible than the majestic other-worldly figure of the Fourth Gospel, I would like to explore those writings briefly for indications of what I shall call for convenience 'Jesus the Mystic'.

That old sceptic Rudolf Bultmann had little sympathy for the Synoptic Gospels which he regarded as 'an unnecessary excrescence on the *kerygma*'. However, even he, in his own minimalist findings on the historical Jesus, characterized some of the sayings of Jesus as being uttered 'from the exaltation of an eschatological mood'.⁴ In this regard the incident which can perhaps best be explored in terms of mysticism is the Transfiguration. This account of an experience of Jesus appears in the three Synoptic Gospels and there is a summary account of it in the Second Letter of Peter.

This is an event which, frankly, baffles exegetes. Is it an anticipation of a resurrection appearance or an anticipation of the Parousia, the second coming? In many ways, it is more of a problem to investigate the pre-history of the story. Assuming that Mark is the first Gospel, the story appears to have had a very complex tradition history. From Peter's suggestion about building the tents or booths for Moses, Elijah and Jesus, one can make a case for there being a connection with the Feast of Tabernacles. As it is recounted in the three Gospels, the main point of the story is the declaration that Jesus is the Son of God. The second level of importance is the evangelists' perception of the relationship of Jesus to Moses and Elijah. In Mark, Jesus' appearance with Moses and Elijah shows that Jesus is neither a revived Moses nor Elijah. The Elijah connection, which has already come up in response to the question, 'Who do people say that I am?' (Mark 8.27), is further discounted on the descent from the Transfiguration. In Mark, there is an implicit identification of John the Baptist with the Elijah who is to return (Mark 9-11-13), which Matthew makes explicit (Matt 17.13). In Matthew

scholars suggest that we are to understand Moses and Elijah as representing the Law and the Prophets of which Jesus is the fulfilment and perhaps the new beginning. 'For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come' (11.13). Luke's treatment is again different, though this time it is made explicit in the Transfiguration scene. In Luke 9.31 it is reported that Moses and Elijah spoke of his departure (*exodos*) which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. In my view, this is played out in the Lukan accounts of the Ascension at the end of the Gospel and at the beginning of Acts. The narrative in the Gospel reflects features of a particular extra-biblical tradition about the departure of Moses while the narrative at the beginning of Acts reflects elements of the departure of Elijah to heaven at the beginning of the second book of Kings. Again, if we are to take Pawlikowski's demands seriously, we have to find a christological interpretation which is not dependent on a supersessionist theology but respects the intrinsically Jewish context.

The fourfold dialogue

These few remarks set the scene for an application of the interpretative principle of mutuality. My point here is that, in the light of the teaching of *Nostra aetate* and its further elaborations of the Jewish-Christian relationship, it is incumbent on Christians to rediscover their Jewish origins and feel at home with Jews. How can we formulate an adequate way of expressing our belonging together? I want to put these thoughts into a framework which I hope is not a straitjacket or a Procrustean bed. If we are to reinvigorate our ecclesiology and christology from the starting-point of *Nostra aetate* and the retrieval of the Jewish matrix, then we should take seriously the model of the fourfold dialogue which has emerged from inter-faith discussions and has been adopted in the Church's official documents.⁵

The fourfold dialogue consists in the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of religious experience and the dialogue of theological exchange. As a practice of faith, each is motivated by the generative images discussed above.

Dialogue of life

Pilgrimage is a powerfully enabling metaphor for the experience of sharing common space and common experiences of life. Understood as a shared life experience with fluid boundaries, pilgrimage allows for the telling of faith stories, faith stories from all traditions. The shared act of telling is an opening up to a shared interpretation of experience. And

the telling of stories is very much part of the Jewish and Christian traditions and one significant aspect of Jesus' ministry.

Dialogue of action

The Kingdom understood as the sovereignty of God played out in the lives of human beings struggling for a just world is common to the lives of committed Jews and Christians. The record of Christian witness during the *Shoah* leaves much to be desired, but there were Christians who stood up to be counted – Dietrich Bonhoeffer would be an outstanding example, but he was not alone. In an analogous way, there are many Jews in contemporary Israel committed to justice for Palestinian Arabs, both Muslim and Christian. Our media rarely give them a voice.

Thy Kingdom come is a prayer common to both the prayer Jesus taught to his disciples and the *Kaddish* prayer from the Eighteen Benedictions. As a prayer it acknowledges the sovereignty of God – only God can bring the Kingdom – but the people of God are obliged to point to it with their lives. In these prayers both Jews and Christians commit themselves to an engagement in God's future for us. And again it is a journey, a pilgrimage which is the enfolding metaphor of this shared vision.

Dialogue of religious experience

My own working definition of prayer is 'any moment when our desire for God meets God's desire for us'. Both Jews and Christians have a desire for God and are convinced that the God we both believe in has a desire for us. As we all know, human desire is variable; as we all believe, God's desire is constant and faithful. There is much common ground here for a shared conversation. It is probably worth returning to the experience of the shapers of the Jewish and Christian traditions. The Jewish tradition is shaped by the results of Moses' encounter with God on Sinai during the people of Israel's pilgrimage to the promised land. Moses, who spoke to God face to face, comes down from the mountain with shining face carrying the *mitzvoth*, the words, the ten commandments for *the shaping of humanity*. Jesus, the Torah-observant Jew who speaks face to face with God, is transfigured and comes down the mountain to be handed over to reveal to us *our capacity for inhumanity*. Moses as a messenger of God reveals that which will keep us human. Jesus as a messenger of God reveals how far we are from making that humanity a lived reality.⁶

Peter was right! What Moses and Jesus share is the experience of speaking with God face to face, and the desert tabernacle, the tent of meeting not the Temple, is that place. Contemporary Jews and

Christians have to find on our shared pilgrimage a ‘tent of meeting’ where we can speak to God together as a way of reinforcing the values of the Kingdom which build humanity in harmony with God’s sovereignty.

Dialogue of theological exchange

If this article has any value it is because it represents this dimension of the inter-faith engagement – called forth by the need to reflect on a Christian identity practised not apart from but in mutual relationship with other pilgrims. The marks of the Church are well expressed in the tradition as *One, Holy, Catholic* and *Apostolic*. Would the categories I have discussed earlier offer a helpful depth of field to the traditional expression of the marks? Does it not make sense in the contest of inter-faith relations to see the theme of *pilgrimage* as a perspective on *Apostolic*, *sovereignty* as a perspective on *Holy*, and *mutuality* as a perspective on both *One* and *Catholic*?

Refounding the Church?

Let me take this final reflection a little further and connect it with the theme of this Supplement. The Church is characterized not by abstract principles but by a life lived from the constant renewal of its own generative images. In this sense I really wonder whether the idea of re-founding the Church is at all cogent. It is a constant and attractive temptation that needs to be avoided. If that canny observer Albert Schweitzer were invited to bring his *Quest for the historical Jesus* up to date, he would be interested to see that the situating of Jesus in the Judaism(s) of his time is central to modern research. While approving of this, he would be horrified to see the continuous recourse to what he called the ‘Galilean Springtime’, that idyllic time of innocence before Paul got his hands on the *kerygma*. Albert Nolan’s *Jesus before Christianity*, in many ways a fine book, would be one of many recent books which share something of this agenda.

This re-appearance of the nineteenth-century Liberal Protestant agenda, while more sophisticated, functions in the same way. It is an attempt to criticize *what happened after* by a return to the beginning. Despite all our desires, we cannot go back to the beginning even if we knew what the beginning was. It may be worth observing that *the beginning* in the New Testament is often polemical (Matt 19.8; John 1.1; 1 John 1.1; 2.7; 2.24; 3.1). Mutuality requires an abandonment of polemics. If Catholic Christianity has a privileged insight, it has to do with incarnation, the body: this cannot be unmade, only transfigured.

Perhaps one way of talking about this is in terms of 'being at home in one's body'. If one is at home in one's body, then mutuality is not a longing for affirmation from the mirror that is the world, but an offering of hospitality to the world, the making accessible of a sacred space.

Let me finish with a comment on the Church's classic foundational text, Matthew 16.16–18. Just as the Jewishness of Jesus has to be integrated into a high christology, so does something analogous have to happen in ecclesiology.

For some time now I have been intrigued by Mark's introduction to the call of the twelve.

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to cast out demons. (Mark 3.13–14)

Gallons of ink, exegetically and spiritually, have been poured out on the words 'to be with him'. The last part 'to cast out demons' has been woefully neglected. My suggestion is that, since modernity is rather squeamish about 'demons', we should translate the term dynamically as 'what is not human'. In other words, the commission given to the disciples is to bind the inhuman and to loose the human. As this part of the disciples' ministry is taken up into the foundation text of the Church, we should not lose sight of this dimension. 'Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed also in heaven' (Mt 16.19). This binding of inhumanity is a constitutive part of the Church's mission and one that Christians can share with our Jewish co-pilgrims as a sign of God's sovereignty continuing to break in.

James Crampsey SJ has lectured in Biblical Studies at Heythrop College, University of London. He was also the Provincial Superior of the Society of Jesus in Britain. He is currently parish priest of St Anselm's, Southall in West London.

NOTES

1 John Pawlikowski, 'Vatican II on the Jews: a dramatic example of theological development'; paper presented to the Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, June 12th, 1999.

2 In this article I am trying to avoid what I call *colonizing* language, that is, terms which are properly Jewish should not be hijacked by Christian discourse. We should, therefore, speak of 'pilgrim people' rather than 'people of God'.

3 Wayne T. Meeks, 'The man from heaven in Johannine sectarianism', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972), pp 44-72.

4 Rudolf Bultmann, *The history of the synoptic tradition*, ET by John Marsh (Harpers: New York, 1963), p 105.

5 See 'Dialogue and proclamation: reflections and orientations on interreligious dialogue and the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ', published by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (Rome, 1991), para 42.

6 This structural mutuality may be a way forward in dealing with the vexed question of typology. Typology is a colonizing hermeneutic which treats Judaism as only a shadow of the true reality. Mutuality tries to respect the tradition of the other for its own sake.

7 There is a lapidary phrase of Albert Loisy: Jesus preached the Kingdom and the Church came. This is often cited as a lament by Loisy. In fact, he is arguing against Adolf von Harnack *for* the continuity between Kingdom and Church. If anyone had reason to be anti-Church, it was Loisy, a victim of the Modernist crisis.