

One is a little weary of much contemporary reference in the media to the alleged unlovely, arid, anaesthetic heritage of Calvinism or Scottish Presbyterianism, usually from people who have never read a word of Calvin or been near a Presbyterian church. Many of the extracts here give the lie to such judgments and invite a more informed view.

A similar point is made in an excellent Introduction by Cheyne's friend and successor, Professor Stewart J. Brown, reflecting on Cheyne's (not wholly uncritical) valuing of the Calvinist tradition, and including a short appreciative biography.

An older generation found great inspiration from John Baillie's *Diary of Readings*. It would not be surprising if a new generation, interested in what made Scotland what it is today, found a parallel inspiration here.

D. W. D. Shaw,
St Andrews



Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration, Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI); translated from the German by Adrian J. Walker, London: Bloomsbury, 2007, pp. xxiv, 374, ISBN 9780747592785. £14.99

When I told my wife that I was reading a book on Jesus by the Pope, she asked mischievously if it had the "imprimatur". Of course it has no such thing. How could the leader of the world-wide Roman Catholic Church require a certificate to reassure the faithful that his book contains no heresy? However, right at the beginning Benedict makes it plain that this is no *ex cathedra* statement but an expression of his personal search 'for the face of the Lord'. He is also content for this to be his contribution to the continuing debate about Jesus. He states plainly: 'Everyone is free to contradict me.'

This book is by no means a quest for the historical Jesus. Such a quest is alien to the Pope who sees the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith as one and the same. This is rather a book of biblical theology based on the gospel story of Jesus from the time of his baptism by John up to the Transfiguration. (A second volume will deal with the Nativity, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.)

What a rich tapestry of scriptural insights is displayed by the Pope for our theological edification! The reader cannot help but be impressed by the dazzling comprehensiveness of Benedict's scripture knowledge and sheer love of the Word of God. Explaining a saying of Jesus, Benedict frequently selects the Old Testament passage which throws most light on it and then may generate even more light by reaching into the epistles to show how St. Paul treats the same theme. For example we are shown how the topsy-turvy world of the Beatitudes, which celebrates God's underdogs who are meek, merciful, poor, etc, is reflected in Paul's paradoxical discipleship: 'We are treated as imposters and yet are true ... as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ...'. Jesus' denunciation of the rich, the smug, etc (Luke 6), is shown to echo the strident preaching of Jeremiah in such passages as: 'Cursed be the man who trusteth in man ... and whose heart departeth from the Lord.'

Again when expounding 'Hallowed be thy name', Benedict takes us to the burning bush where Moses is told the puzzling name of God and then to John's gospel (17:6) where Jesus as the new Moses claims, 'I have manifested thy name to men'. Similarly Benedict's meditation on 'Give us this day our daily bread' is a rich treasure chest of theological and biblical insights in which we discover in the bread of Matthew 6 the promise of the future kingdom, a reminder of the church's eucharist and of Christ himself, the Bread of Life.

The Fourth Gospel is undoubtedly Benedict's favourite and he shows great joy in exploring its riches. He writes lyrically of the four great images of John, i.e. water, vine/wine, bread and the shepherd. We

cannot help sharing his enthusiasm as he contemplates the miracle of water turned into wine at Cana in Galilee:

The sign of God is overflowing generosity. We see it in the multiplication of the loaves; we see it again and again – most of all, though, at the centre of salvation history, in the fact that he lavishly spends himself for the lowly creature, man. This abundant giving is his “glory”. The superabundance of Cana is therefore a sign that God’s feast with humanity, his self-giving for men, has begun. (p.252)

Nevertheless, despite being deeply moved by the power of Benedict the biblical theologian, one must confess doubts about the competence of Benedict the historian. In the introduction he reaffirms the position of the Roman Catholic Church towards the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, namely that it is ‘an indispensable tool’. However he then continues:

I have tried to go beyond merely historical-critical exegesis so as to apply new methodological insights that allow us to offer a properly theological interpretation of the Bible. To be sure, this requires faith, but the aim unequivocally is not, nor should be, to give up serious engagement with history. (p.xxiii)

Despite this assurance, it soon becomes clear to the reader that ‘serious engagement with history’ has been given up for the sake of a ‘properly theological interpretation’. Benedict’s concept of ‘going beyond’ the historical-critical method means in effect ignoring it altogether. To describe the historical-critical method as indispensable and then to pay it scant attention is a blatant exercise of the papal privilege of having one’s cake and eating it.

Again and again Benedict feels free to side-step the literary and historical problems that are present on every page of the gospels in order to persist with his presuppositions about the unity of the Bible

and the historical basis of the church's theology. For example, we are told that the Sermon on the Mount is the new Torah. But we are not told how much such an interpretation depends on Matthew's theological agenda.

Benedict is quite content to present us with a harmonization of the four gospels in order to reveal to us the face of Jesus. But the historical-critical method resists all attempts at harmonisation, discovering four different faces of Jesus in the gospels. Indeed there is ample evidence to suggest that Matthew and Luke wrote their gospels in order to replace that of Mark entirely. Moreover it is highly likely that John's radically different Jesus was regarded by his congregation as the final word on the Word, replacing the synoptic writers.

The nature of the relationship between the four evangelists is deliberately ignored in Benedict's amalgamation of their witness. He seems reluctant to admit that Mark was used as a source by Matthew and Luke. There is only one reference to the priority of Mark and that does not appear until page 325. Moreover, the sayings source "Q" is never mentioned, surely a serious omission. After two hundred years of the historical-critical method such a cavalier approach to gospel interpretation simply will not do. Does Benedict not know that when a harmonisation of the four gospels was produced by Tatian in the mid-second century, it was rejected by the church in favour of the four separate witnesses?

It would seem that Benedict cannot cope with the possibility of the voices of the New Testament being in any kind of conflict with one another. We are told that the reaffirmation of the Jewish law in Matthew 5:17-18 only *appears* to contradict Paul's conviction that righteousness is revealed apart from the Jewish law. Nor does Benedict appreciate how each evangelist had a concern to shape the Jesus story in order to deal with problems encountered in his own congregation. The way in which Matthew and Luke make creative use of Mark, feeling free to alter his message in order to address the needs of their communities, is never recognised. The insights of Roman Catholic scholar Raymond Brown into the way the Gospel of John functioned

as a handbook for John's church are never contemplated. Needless to say, the attempts of the Jesus Seminar to assess the likely historicity of various sayings of our Lord are totally ignored. Benedict even rebukes the New Testament scholar Martin Hengel for offering 'an astonishingly negative, or (to put it more gently) extremely cautious, judgement of the historical character of the text' (p.228). But can a historian be blamed for drawing the conclusions that he believes are indicated by the evidence?

Of course the historical-critical method has its limits. It cannot give birth to living faith. But at its best it enables the faithful reader to discover how the books of the Bible enjoy a unity-in-diversity that resists all attempts at neat and tidy harmonisation. Even papal attempts to fuse the four gospels are bound to founder on the rocks that are the many witnesses of the New Testament. Indeed to be a non-fundamentalist Christian in the twenty-first century requires one to cope with the tension of having several conflicting New Testament voices bearing witness to the Saviour. By giving us such a collection of books for our spiritual enlightenment the Eternal One seems to be encouraging us to live with this tension. However this is one divine voice which Benedict XVI is unwilling to hear.

Denis Campbell,
St. Andrew's Church,
Blackrock,
County Dublin



The Witness of the Student Christian Movement: 'Church Ahead of the Church', Robin Boyd, London: SPCK, 2007, pp. xii, 212, ISBN 9780281058778. £14.99

Many surely remember or have heard about the "swinging sixties". Most people have strong opinions about these years: some romanticise the society that existed before the sixties and some want the radical spirit of the sixties to return. Most people surely agree that these years radically transformed the United Kingdom by bringing issues of social