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## SETTING THE SCENE

## 1 The context for the present study

The issue of Jesus' faith, as opposed to faith in or directed towards him, is not a new one. It has been raised previously by theologians and biblical exegetes alike, but seemingly the matter has never been conclusively resolved one way or the other. From one perspective, we have Thomas Aquinas' celebrated refutation of faith as an attribute of the human condition assumed by the Son of God. Having presented a case for Christ's faith, which cites Romans 1.17 and Hebrews 12.2 in support, he then demonstrates its untenability:

The field of faith is divine reality that is hidden from sight. This we maintained in the *Secunda Pars*. Now, a virtue, like any other habit, takes its character from its field of action. Hence, where divine reality is not hidden from sight there is no point in faith. But from the moment of conception Christ had the full vision of the very being of God, as we will hold later on. Therefore he could not have had faith.

Hence: (i) The reason faith ranks higher than the moral virtues is that it deals with more important affairs than they do. Yet it handles these affairs with certain limitations. Now Christ suffered no such limitations. And so, even though he did have moral virtues he could not have had faith. For the moral virtues do not carry the kind of limitation faith does in dealing with their own particular material. (ii) The moral value of faith comes from accepting, out of obedience to God, things which are not clearly seen. Thus, St Paul speaks of *the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations*. But Christ practised the ultimate obedience to God, as is written, *He became obedient*

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*unto death.* So, he taught no moral values which he himself had not already achieved in a higher way.<sup>1</sup>

We may note here how theological considerations prove determinative as Aquinas assumes that the nature of the incarnate Son's relationship with God excludes the possibility of his demonstrating faith, regardless of scriptural precedent.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to this, however, emphasis upon Christ's identification with humanity has led to the opposite conclusion. Maurice Wiles expresses it thus:

But the vision to which Jesus gives rise is not only a vision of God. If Jesus is the 'image of God', that implies not only that to see him is to see the Father, but also that to see him is to see man as he is intended to be in the design of God's creation . . . So in reading the story of Jesus not merely as a historian but with the concern of faith, I am seeking to see in it a way of faith for myself as a believer too.<sup>3</sup>

In this case, focus upon the nature of the relationship between Jesus and others permits, if not requires, the former to be seen as one who shares faith. Further, the perspective of a common humanity, articulated this time in terms of an existential correspondence between the experience of Jesus and that of others, has also yielded fruit in the domain of biblical exegesis, both in terms of specific texts which speak of Jesus' faith<sup>4</sup> and of broader conceptions of Jesus' relationship to God as expressed in the Gospels.<sup>5</sup> But here again there have been problems and not only in terms of interpretation of key references, but also at the level of presupposition. In this latter respect, Rudolf Bultmann criticises Gerhard Ebeling for using the bridge of faith, linking believers with Jesus, to speak in a historicising manner of the latter's personal disposition:

<sup>1</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 3a.7.3.

<sup>2</sup> 'In the first case, that of Aquinas, it is probably not so much the neat either-or distinction between faith and vision (read: faith and revelation) that finds an echo in so many minds, not so much this as the more general unreflecting conviction that belief in the divinity of Jesus rules out all possibility of envisaging a personal faith of Jesus himself.' (Mackey, 'Historical Jesus', 162–3)

<sup>3</sup> Wiles, *Faith*, 61–2; also Baillie, *Faith*, 231–63; Cook, 'Call', 679–700; Ebeling, *Nature*, 44–57; Gogarten, *Christ*, 38–4, 235–53; Mackey, *Jesus*, 159–71.

<sup>4</sup> The seminal work here is still Gerhard Ebeling's article, 'Jesus and Faith', in *Word*, 201–46; also Mackey, 'Historical Jesus', 155–74, and Thüsing, 'New Testament', 143–59.

<sup>5</sup> Especially, Sobrino, *Christology*, 79–145; also Cairns, *Faith*, esp. 218–23; E. Fuchs, *Studies*, 48–64; Schoonenberg, *Christ*, 146–52; cf. Braun, 'Meaning', 89–127.

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The Gospels do not speak of Jesus' own faith, nor does the kerygma make reference to it. To be sure, Ebeling most appropriately describes the structure of faith as an existential stance. When he says, however, that 'it would be impossible to exempt Jesus himself from an act of faith in view of the way in which he speaks of it,' then like Fuchs he deduces the personal attitude of the historical Jesus from an understanding of existence present in his activity and becoming audible in his words. He thus confuses the existential encounter with an objectifying view. When he states that 'a structural uniqueness of faith' lies in the fact 'that the origin of faith is directed to an encounter with the witnesses of faith,' then by 'witnesses of faith' he evidently means believers who witness to their faith, whereas the kerygma does not permit any inquiry into the personal faith of the preacher.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst much of the discussion about Jesus' faith has focussed upon the significance of his life and ministry for understanding the nature and content of human response to God and, as such, has tended to revolve around references gleaned from the Synoptic Gospels and the Epistle to the Hebrews,<sup>7</sup> the issue has also come to expression within more overtly theological contexts. In this respect, recent years have witnessed a renewed interest<sup>8</sup> in the question of whether the apostle Paul draws attention to the faith of Christ either as the basis for Christ's obedience – and, indeed, all human response – to God or as a channel for God's faithfulness in Christ to all people.<sup>9</sup> But once again differences in exegesis and, indeed, presupposition have prevented a consensus being reached.

<sup>6</sup> Bultmann, 'Primitive', 34. That Bultmann's stance here is not informed by critical exegesis is evident from a footnote accompanying this quotation: 'In Heb. 12.2, Jesus is described as the "pioneer and perfecter of our faith". But this is not a description of Jesus as a believer, as Ebeling would suppose, for he does not appear in the "cloud of witnesses" in Heb. 11.'

<sup>7</sup> Key passages include: Matt. 17.14–20/Mark 9.14–29; Matt. 21.18–22/Mark 11.12–14, 20–25; Heb. 3.1–6; 12.1–2; also Rev. 1.5; 2.13; 3.14; 14.12; 19.11.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted, however, that the question of whether the πίστις Χριστοῦ constructions in Paul (e.g. Rom. 3.22, 26; Gal. 2.16, 20; 3.22; Phil. 3.9; cf. Gal. 3:26 [346]; Eph. 3:12) refer to Christ's personal faith was raised by German-speaking scholars at the turn of the century: Haussleiter, 'Glaube', 109–45, and 205–30; Kittel, 'Πίστις', 419–36; cf. Schläger, 'Bemerkungen', 356–8.

<sup>9</sup> As we shall see in chapter 3, the contemporary debate is considerably more nuanced than these two alternatives suggest, although most if not all positions can be accommodated within the proposed anthropological–theological polarity.

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One drawback with most discussions of Jesus' faith to date is that they fail to give adequate consideration to the extent of the early church's interest in this theme or to assess its significance in relation to other christological development. On the one hand, theological studies cite scriptural precedent to support rather than provide the point of departure for consideration of Jesus' faith; on the other hand, biblical exegesis identifies reference to Jesus' faith in certain passages, whilst the broader theological implications remain largely unexplored. As a result, the basis for interpreting Jesus as one who demonstrated faith remains both incoherent and inconclusive.<sup>10</sup> It is in response to this unsatisfactory situation that the present study is offered.

## 2 The scope of the present study

The purpose of this investigation is to assess whether early Christian traditions bear witness to interest in the faith of Jesus Christ and, if they do, to ask why.<sup>11</sup> Our approach is primarily exegetical with emphasis upon the theological issues raised by the texts considered. The larger part of the study is devoted to the New Testament, but relevant antecedent material together with extra-canonical sources suggestive of our theme will also be discussed. We aim, therefore, to trace the early church's concern with Jesus' faith from inception to conclusion or decline and, as part of this exercise, we shall attempt

<sup>10</sup> For example, J. D. G. Dunn, commenting on whether Mark 11.23 speaks of Jesus' faith, claims that, as the more primitive versions of Matt. 17.20 and Luke 17.6 do not permit this interpretation, this possibility is certainly not original and at best originates in Markan redaction. He then concludes that, as there are no other substantial data in the Synoptic Gospels suggestive of Jesus' faith, 'Jesus is the witness of grace not the witness of faith.' (*Jesus*, 75) It seems strange, firstly, that there is no mention of Mark 9.23 in this context, to say nothing of the relevant texts in Paul, Hebrews and Revelation mentioned earlier, and, secondly, that the origins of Mark's interest in Jesus' faith does not merit further consideration. And again, during his discussion of Rom. 3.22, Professor Dunn maintains that the likelihood of the verse referring to Christ's faith (fulness) is rendered less probable as this theme receives no further consideration in the letter (*Romans*, vol. 1, 166); but this assumes that other possible references should not be taken in this way (e.g. Rom. 1.17; 3.25–26; also Gal. 2.16, 20; 3.22; Phil. 3.9). This atomising approach inevitably shrouds the cumulative force of the case for Jesus' faith; see also 'Once More', 737.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that we are not concerned directly with whether the earthly figure of Jesus demonstrated faith; however, it would be naïve to suppose that our findings have no bearing upon this issue. For example, if it can be shown that the early church was interested in the faith of Jesus, the question of where that interest originated becomes pertinent.

to identify areas of correspondence or similarity between traditions reflecting such interest.

In order to provide a framework within which evidence can be understood and its cumulative significance assessed, we have adopted the notion of a trajectory.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in addition to assessing the contribution of individual sources, we shall also consider each one as a node on a trajectory running through Christian tradition and, as such, as part of a broader trend or concern. The model of a trajectory is helpful here in that it accommodates the ideas of progression and correlation without ignoring the particularity of individual texts or requiring us to demonstrate either literary dependency or a precise path of development. It must be emphasised that we are not trying to superimpose a degree of homogeneity upon otherwise divergent material, but to provide a fresh perspective on evidence suggestive of interest in Jesus' faith which, when viewed in isolation, lacks coherence against the broader backcloth of development in Christian thought. In consequence, it may prove necessary to consider a more complex pattern than a single linear progression and entertain, for example, a number of parallel trajectories.

There are, however, ramifications implicit within this methodology which should be recognised from the outset. Firstly, the study is not exhaustive in that we have not been able to survey every relevant source nor, indeed, to discuss fully those included. As a result, the emphasis has been upon establishing the existence of and basis for interest in Jesus' faith by focusing upon representative instances. The issue of Jesus' faith is such that, once a case has been made, a much greater selection of evidence becomes pertinent.

Secondly, our case is ultimately a cumulative one. Whilst each chapter is an independent unit and may be judged on its own merits, evaluation of whether the early church was interested in Jesus' faith rests upon assessing the trajectory or trajectories as a whole. Without this perspective, it is impossible to do justice to the evidence since however eloquently a text may speak of Jesus' faith, it will always appear to be a solitary island in a sea of silence. To this end, it is hoped that by adopting a broader outlook we shall be able to suggest contexts in the life of nascent Christianity where talk of Jesus' faith would have been meaningful.

<sup>12</sup> The notion of trajectory as a means of understanding developments in early Christianity was introduced by Robinson and Köster, *Trajectories*; see also, for example: Dunn, *Unity*; Köster, *Introduction*; Kloppenborg, *Formation*.

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Thirdly, there is inevitably a degree of circularity involved in our approach: a trajectory is only the sum of constituent nodes, the grouping and significance of which may only exist as part of that trajectory, which then contributes towards the meaning of each individual node. However, we maintain that this dialectical relationship between phenomena and hermeneutical framework is integral to all interpretation and cannot be circumvented;<sup>13</sup> we do not believe, therefore, that our method is qualitatively more or less subjective than those underpinning views which will be challenged in the course of this investigation. As with all interpretation, we ask that our conclusions be judged in terms of their adequacy in relation to the phenomena they purport to explain and their coherence with respect to broader canons of understanding.

One further presupposition which has been adopted is that Christian believers in the early centuries could have considered the figure of Jesus to be important not only for what he revealed of God, but also for what he revealed of human response to God. This point hardly needs substantiation, but is none the less easily overlooked when evaluating traditions in which the primary focus is Jesus' theological significance. However, the nature of the gospel form,<sup>14</sup> the correspondence between Jesus and the disciples as characterised by the Synoptic Evangelists<sup>15</sup> and the parallels between the ministries of Jesus and those of the apostles as seen in Luke-Acts,<sup>16</sup> all suggest reflection upon Jesus in terms of Christian discipleship.

How then are we going to identify interest in Jesus' faith? On the one hand, faith is a polymorphous concept which cannot simply be

<sup>13</sup> For example, consider two current interpretative models drawn from the philosophical writings of H.-G. Gadamer (e.g. *Truth*, esp. 267–74, 333–41) and L. Wittgenstein (e.g. *Investigations*). Firstly, the notion of interpretation as a dialectical process leading to a fusion between the horizons of the early Christian author and the modern exegete. Secondly, the construction of a 'language game' on the part of the interpreter which gives meaning or significance to the ancient text. Both these methodologies recognise the substantial contribution of the interpreter within the process and, in this respect, are similar to the 'trajectory approach'. All three acknowledge that we have no access to early Christian or other ancient traditions apart from our own 'subjective' apprehension of them; to this end, 'objective' interpretation is a matter of providing a hermeneutic in which a text can be heard, given meaning and understood. See the discussion of Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, esp. 293–325 and 386–427.

<sup>14</sup> Stanton, *Jesus*, 117–36; also BurrIDGE, *Gospels*, esp. 191–219, 240–59.

<sup>15</sup> Hengel, *Leader*, 38–88, and Riesner, *Jesus*, 408–98.

<sup>16</sup> Franklin, *Christ*, 145–72; Miller, *Character*, 231; Neiryneck, 'Miracle Stories', 182–8.

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equated with a particular word group;<sup>17</sup> on the other hand, the πιστεύω root, which is the principal referent to faith for Christian traditions written in Greek, has a broader semantic field than is relevant to our study.<sup>18</sup> It seems that we need to be both more specific than a word study and more encompassing at the same time. Our primary concern is with faith as a relational phenomenon normally demonstrated by a human being in response to God; by investigating Jesus' faith, therefore, we are looking for evidence suggesting interest in or reflection upon Jesus' faith-relationship with God.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, there are many aspects of Jesus' life which could be considered characteristic of his faith, such as his prayer life<sup>20</sup> and his miracle-working ability.<sup>21</sup> Whilst such phenomena can be interpreted in this light, they need not be and, as a result, prove inconclusive for our purpose. We shall, therefore, focus primarily upon contexts where the πιστεύω group is present.<sup>22</sup> This approach has at least two advantages: firstly, it removes much of the ambiguity regarding whether reference to Jesus' faith is intended and,

<sup>17</sup> Good introductions to the philosophical and theological dimensions of faith are provided by: Binder, *Glaube*, 11–28; Bogdan, *Belief*; Evans, 'Faith', 1–19 and 199–212; Hick, *Faith*; Mackey, 'Theology', 207–37; Swinburne, *Faith*. On faith as a phenomenon in the Christian tradition, see especially: Baillie, *Faith*; Buber, *Two Types*; Hahn and Klein, *Glaube*; Hermisson and Lohse, *Faith*; Lührmann, *Glaube*; Schlatter, *Glaube*.

<sup>18</sup> The classic treatment is that of Bultmann and Weiser, 'πιστεύω', 174–228; additional material is presented in: Burton, *Galatians*, 475–85; Ebeling, *Word*, 201–46; Jepsen, 'ἰσθῆ', 292–323; Lampe, *Lexicon*, 1082–8; Lohse, 'Emuna', 147–63; Lührmann, 'Pistis', 19–38.

<sup>19</sup> Much of the difficulty regarding the possibility of Jesus demonstrating faith stems from a failure to distinguish between the phenomenon of faith and the belief structure through which it is articulated. However, the fact that Jesus Christ was considered central to Christian belief after the resurrection, does not mean that he may not have been thought to share in faith at a stage when it was expressed in more theological (as opposed to christological) terms. On faith as a phenomenon prior to belief, see: Cook, 'Call', 679–700; Panikkar, 'Faith', 223–54; Smith, *History*, esp. 36–99; *Faith*, esp. 128–72; cf. Wainwright's criticism of Smith ('Wilfred Cantwell Smith', 353–66). Whilst the distinction between 'faith' as a mode of being and 'belief' as a means of communicating such faith can be helpful, the relation between these two elements is intimate and two-way.

<sup>20</sup> E. Fuchs, *Studies*, esp. 61–4, and Theunissen, 'Gebetsglaube', 13–68.

<sup>21</sup> Ebeling, *Word*, esp. 230–2, and Nolan, *Jesus*, 30–6. In a more general sense, Vermes, *Jesus*, esp. 49–54, suggests that much of Jesus' life is suggestive of a climate of 'mūnāh.

<sup>22</sup> A similar starting point is adopted by C. D. Marshall in his investigation of faith in Mark's Gospel (*Faith*, 30–3). It should be noted that where sources are not written in Greek, the equivalent word-group/s will be considered (e.g. 'āman in Hebrew, *fides* or *credo* in Latin).

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secondly, as our concern is to establish whether the early church was specifically interested in the faith of Jesus, we shall be on firmer ground when concentrating on instances where attention is drawn to it.

We have already indicated that our controlling interest is the disposition of faith and not the πιστεύω word group, although the latter has been adopted as a means to the former. We are concerned, in particular, with faith in its relational sense. This encompasses two sets of characteristics: the characteristics of the basis for the relationship (e.g. trust, belief, hope, conviction, etc.) and those of the outworkings of the relationship (e.g. faithfulness, obedience, action, petition, etc.). Where texts permit specificity, we shall indicate in what sense Jesus' faith is conceived; where this is not possible, a more general comment will be made. Unless otherwise indicated, the word *faith* is used throughout this study to embrace the overall phenomenon and not a particular element or characteristic of it.<sup>23</sup>

Before commencing our investigation, it will be helpful to explore some of the ways in which faith was understood and expressed in Jewish, Classical and Hellenistic sources prior to and contemporaneous with the early Christian traditions we shall be considering. This is an important exercise for whilst Christianity would, in due course, bring a new definition to faith and, arguably, invest it with a new level of importance as a religious response, it would be wrong to think of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the birth of faith. Faith was already an integral part of the religious mind-set at the time when the books of the New Testament were being written and it would be quite impossible to grasp the meaning of faith in early Christian traditions without an appreciation of how it was understood in Judaism and elsewhere. Our concern at this stage is not to establish firm lines of development or dependency, but to illustrate a *milieu* by offering a number of preliminary observations, supported by examples from a range of primary sources, about how the phenomenon of faith was understood and how the πιστεύω group was used.

<sup>23</sup> On the range of meaning of the English words 'faith' and 'belief', see: O'Connor, *Faith*, xi-xx; Smith, *History*, 36-69; *Faith*, 105-27.



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### 3 The meanings of faith in early Christian times

The phenomenon of faith as an interpersonal relationship between human beings or between humanity and God is by no means a Christian innovation. For instance, within the Jewish tradition it is amply attested throughout the Old Testament and is often articulated by means of the *'āman* root. It also comes to expression via more narrative forms in stories of faith relating crucial events in Israel's history or incidents in the lives of her central figures.<sup>24</sup> In this latter respect, Abraham is particularly prominent as can be seen by the way in which later interpretations often explicitly identify him as a man of faith or emphasise references to his faith attested in the pentateuchal traditions.<sup>25</sup> For example:

' . . . that words came in heaven concerning Abraham that he was faithful in everything which was told him and he loved the Lord and was faithful in all affliction . . . And I have made known to all that you are faithful to me in everything which I say to you. Go in peace.' (Jub. 17.15 and 18.16) 'Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?' (1 Macc. 2.52) 'Shema'yah says: "The faith with which their father Abraham believed in Me is deserving that I should divide the sea for them." For it is said: "And he believed in the Lord . . ." . . . And so also you find that our father Abraham inherited both this world and the world beyond only as a reward for the faith with which he believed, as it is said: "And he believed in the Lord . . ."' (Mek., Beshallah on Exod. 14.15 and 14.31) 'That God marvelling at Abraham's faith in Him repaid him with faithfulness by confirming with an oath the gifts which He had promised, and here He no longer talked with him as God with man but as a friend with a familiar.' (Philo, *Abr.* 273; trans. LCL 289.133) 'And he had faith in the word of the Lord and it was reckoned to him for merit because he did not argue before him with words.' (Tg. Ps.-J. on Gen. 15.6; trans. Bowker, *Targums*,

<sup>24</sup> In this respect, the foremost event is the Exodus, whilst Abraham, Moses and David are well used personnel. The use of these and other stories to inform the Jewish view of faith is explored by: Brueggemann, *Man, passim*; Hope, esp. 7–26; Hermisson and Lohse, *Faith*, 10–46.

<sup>25</sup> For fuller discussions of Abraham in Jewish traditions, see: Clements, *Abraham*, 52–8; Hansen, *Abraham*, 175–99; Jeremias, "Ἀβραάμ", 8–9; SB, vol. 3, 186–201.

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201; also: 2 Macc. 1.2; Neh. 9.7–8; Philo, *Rer. Div. Her.* 94; Sir. 44.19–21; Tg. Onq. on Gen. 15.6; cf. Rom. 4; Gal. 3; Heb. 12)

The use of narrative as a vehicle for exploring the meaning of faith in the Old Testament and other Jewish literature alerts us to the importance attributed to praxis in this sphere. It suggests that the definition of faith was conceived as a reactive process of reflection upon events and characters in Jewish history, rather than as a proactive construction of belief patterns dependent upon more philosophical or abstracted thinking. Whilst not necessarily indicating a polarisation between intellectual and expressive dimensions of faith,<sup>26</sup> this does indicate that certain aspects of the phenomenon of faith were considered to be most adequately communicated by the lives and conduct of key exponents. We are not denying here the hagiographical significance of literature relating the lives of the great Jewish heroes, but identifying an additional didactic or emulative function in which these figures incarnate what it means to live by faith and, by doing so, provide tangible and concrete examples for others to follow. Thus, together with more formal declarations of belief and conduct,<sup>27</sup> the substance of faith within Jewish traditions prior to and around the time of the New Testament is developed primarily in terms of people and situations rather than abstract propositions.<sup>28</sup>

General support for this assessment is provided by the case-law approach adopted in the Mishnah and other Jewish writings, whereby the conduct and utterances of figures in Israel's past act as precedents for particular directions or injunctions.<sup>29</sup> More specific-

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Martin Buber's rigid distinction between Jewish faith, characterised by a relationship of trust, and Christian faith, characterised by a relationship of acknowledgement (*Two Types*, 7–12 and *passim*); on the inadequacy of this stance, see: Lindsay, *Josephus*, esp. 165–89; Lohse, 'Emuna', 147–63; Oesterreicher, *Dialogue*, 74–98.

<sup>27</sup> Within the Old Testament these can be found, for example, in the *Shema* and the *Decalogue* (Deut. 6.4–5 and Exod. 20.1–17). On the significance and later development of statements of faith in Judaism, see Urbach, *Sages*, esp. 1–36.

<sup>28</sup> This is also apparent, for example, in the ways in which the Psalms provide a language for faith rooted in the experiences of the people; knowledge of God results from reflection upon divine encounter and absence.

<sup>29</sup> This technique is too extensive to annotate in detail, but the following examples, which are taken from the Mishnah and indicate how support for particular courses of action is provided by Abraham and Moses, should be illustrative: 'R Nehorai says [in a debate about the relative value of different occupations]: I would set aside all the crafts in the world and teach my son naught save the Law, for a man enjoys the reward thereof in this world and its whole worth remains for