

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

The Bishops and the Virginal Conception

RICHARD BAUCKHAM

The Nature of Christian Belief,¹ the 1986 report of the House of Bishops, probably raises as many questions as it answers. This in itself is no criticism. After all, so did the Creed of Nicaea, with which this report is certainly not to be compared! The criticisms I shall offer are made in a spirit of general sympathy with the intentions of the report and by way of taking up some of its loose ends. These seem to me especially noticeable in the report's treatment of the Virginal Conception, and since this topic was also the most problematic, though not the most important, matter of controversy in the background to the report, I confine myself to it here. I shall proceed by stating and explaining a series of six theses on the Virginal Conception.

1. There is no Orthodox Doctrine of the Virginal Conception!

It is a pity that the bishops did not make clearer an important point which has been sadly neglected in the debate: that the church has never reached an agreed understanding—still less promulgated an orthodox doctrine—of the significance of the Virginal Conception. It has, of course, been the universal teaching of the church, at least from the time of Ignatius of Antioch,² that Jesus was born of a virgin, and the bishops rightly point this out (§62). But in view of their own assertion that the events of salvation-history are not 'bare facts,' but facts with meaning (§18), it should have been a matter of importance to them that there is no accepted orthodox understanding of the meaning of the fact of the Virginal Conception, except perhaps an extremely vague belief that in some way the Virginal Conception indicates the special status of Jesus.

The point can be illustrated rather pointedly by the treatment of the Virginal Conception in the *Cur Deus Homo* of Anselm of Canterbury, an Archbishop of Canterbury whose orthodoxy and theological perspicacity have rarely been equalled among his successors. Anselm's attempt (in *Cur Deus Homo* II.8) to find a reason for the Virginal Conception is entirely secondary to his treatment of the reason for the incarnation. There is no suggestion that the incarnation entailed Virginal Conception. The latter does not have the demonstrable necessity which Anselm thinks attaches to the incarnation. Rather, Anselm is content to show that the Virginal

Conception has a kind of appropriateness, which recommends itself to us in an aesthetic, rather than a logically compelling, way (cf. I.3–4).³ To show that the Virginal Conception is 'more fitting' than any other way in which Jesus could have descended from the race of Adam, Anselm first approves the view, inherited from the western Fathers, that to be brought into existence without sexual union is 'nobler and purer' than to be the product of sexual desire. But this suffices only to show that Jesus must have originated from only one human parent, who could have been either male (as with Eve's origin from Adam) or female. Few theologians can have considered, for the sake of argument, as Anselm does, the possibility that the divine Son could have taken his humanity from a human father, without having a human mother. But only by doing so can Anselm satisfy himself of the appropriateness of the Virginal Conception. There are, he says, four ways in which God can create a human being: from a man and a woman, as in normal generation; from neither a man nor a woman, as in the case of Adam; from a man without a woman, as in the case of Eve; and from a woman without a man: 'Wherefore, in order to show that this last mode is also under his power, and was reserved for this very purpose, what more fitting than that he should take that man whose origin we are seeking from a woman without a man?'⁴ For good measure, Anselm points out the appropriateness of the antithetical parallel between Eve and Mary: that as a woman brought sin into the world, so a woman should bring the Saviour from sin into the world (cf. I.3).

I imagine that few modern readers will find that Anselm's treatment clarifies the significance of the Virginal Conception. Instead, it makes us realise how obscure the subject has been in the tradition. Of course, we may well feel that Anselm is pushing the question too far. We may not feel obliged to explain why Jesus had a human mother only rather than a human father only. But if we fall back on Anselm's basic and traditional reason why Jesus could not have had two human parents we are not likely to find it satisfying. That human sexual relations are so inherently impure that any child produced by them must be tainted is not, we shall say, biblical. But if we reduce that view to the softer claim that sinless humanity cannot have been produced from the human race in the ordinary way without special divine intervention, then we shall no longer be able to perceive any significance in *virginal conception* as distinct from some other kind of miracle in Jesus' human origin, such as the immaculate conception which Roman Catholic dogma claims for Mary.

There have, of course, been other, competing views of the significance of the Virginal Conception: that it was the necessary condition for Jesus' sinlessness since original sin is transmitted through the male, not the female, line; that it was the necessary means of the incarnation since the divine Son could only have entered

human nature in a miraculous way; that it was a sign of a new beginning in human history, pointing to the Second Adam's discontinuity as well as his continuity with the race of Adam. And so on. The suggestions are many, and my point is that this should be fully recognized. No single view of the significance of the Virginal Conception has gained general acceptance in the church. Most of those who in recent controversy have been the most stalwart defenders of the *importance* of belief in the Virginal Conception seem to me to believe *either* that somehow the Virginal Conception is necessary to the incarnation of a divine Person in human nature *or* that somehow the Virginal Conception is needed to guarantee the perfection of Jesus' humanity. Both approaches are suggested, in the form of questions, in §61 of the bishops' report. They are, it should be noted, alternative approaches, and if this paragraph of the report intends to give the impression of strengthening the theological case for the Virginal Conception by combining both approaches, it must be pointed out that this impression is illusory. We must face the fact that, if we say, 'Belief in the Virginal Conception is very important because it means that . . . '—there is no agreed way of ending that sentence.

2. No understanding of the Virginal Conception must compromise the real humanity of Jesus.

If there has been no generally accepted positive understanding of the Virginal Conception, Christian teaching has been consistent on a negative point in respect of the Virginal Conception: that the miraculous *manner* of Jesus' human origin in no way reduces his fully human *nature*, as *homoousios* with us, sharing our human nature as a full member of the same human race. This negative point is of great importance as delimiting acceptable interpretation of the Virginal Conception. By the standard of orthodox incarnational Christology, an interpretation of the Virginal Conception which reduces Jesus' real humanity is much more seriously heretical than is a denial of the Virginal Conception on the grounds that it must reduce the real humanity of Jesus.⁵ Controversies about the Virginal Conception, including the recent one in the Church of England, tend to bring to the surface the sadly common popular misconception that Jesus could only be divine by being less than fully human, and that therefore the Virginal Conception was required because, by restricting his humanity, it, so to speak, made room for his divinity. On this view belief in the incarnation entails belief in the Virginal Conception because incarnation is disastrously misunderstood as the production of a divine-human hybrid. Against such a misunderstanding, it needs to be clearly stated that, *if* Virginal Conception is understood to imply that Jesus is less than fully human, *then* denial of it is more orthodox than belief in it. Failure to state this clearly will indicate

that statements of orthodox belief are being treated as shibboleths rather than as means of understanding the faith.

Of course, Scripture does not suggest and orthodox tradition has never allowed that the Virginal Conception implies that Jesus was less than fully human, but from this point of view one paragraph (§59) in the bishops' report is rather disturbing. It begins by correctly pointing out that the credal affirmation of Jesus' birth from the virgin Mary was actually used in the patristic period—from Ignatius onwards—to stress the reality of Jesus' humanity against the docetic claim that Jesus merely passed through Mary's womb without actually taking his humanity from her. While the Fathers took it for granted that Jesus had only one human parent, the polemically important point for them, in referring to his birth from Mary, was that he did have a real human parentage and shared our human nature.⁶

But §59 of the report continues: 'At the same time it is important to remember the understanding of human reproduction in the ancient world. The mother was thought of simply as a vessel to contain and feed the child. It was the father alone who contributed all the human material that would develop into the future person. To affirm creation by the Holy Spirit, with no human father, as both Matthew and Luke do, is therefore to affirm a completely new beginning, a human person without biological ancestry.' These words appear to attribute both to the evangelists and to the Fathers the belief that Jesus did not share our human nature. His humanity, on this view, must have been a completely fresh creation by God, not derived from Mary at all. At least this shows that biology cannot be declared entirely irrelevant to belief in the Virginal Conception, as some modern theologians have wished. The biological opinion which the bishops state to have been *the* ancient understanding of the matter would make the Virginal Conception a flat contradiction of the church's incarnational faith: that God became *homoousios* with us. What is virtually incomprehensible is how the bishops can blandly assert, without further comment, that so theologically horrifying an implication was required by belief in the Virginal Conception in the context of the ancient world. Careful rereading of §§59–61 makes one wonder whether the bishops themselves sufficiently realise the importance of Jesus' participation in the same common humanity as ourselves.

Happily, the bishops are mistaken about the Fathers and about ancient biology. In the first place, the Fathers constantly state, as unambiguously as could be desired, that Jesus derived his human nature from Mary. The *material* of Jesus' humanity was not a fresh creation in Mary's womb, but derived through Mary from the common human stock from which we all derive. For example, Pope Leo, in his *Tome* (§2), authorized by the Council of Chalcedon, made this clear in opposing what he took to be Eutyches' error:

Eutyches might have refrained from speaking deceptively and asserting that 'the Word was made flesh' in the sense that Christ, after his birth of the Virgin, possessed the form of a human being but not the reality (*veritatem*) of his mother's body. Is it possible that the reason he thought our Lord Jesus Christ was not of our nature is that the angel which was sent to the blessed, ever-virgin Mary said, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and therefore what will be born of you will be called holy, the Son of God' [Luke 1:35]—as if because the Virgin's conception was effected by God, the flesh of the child conceived was not taken from the nature of the woman who conceived it? But that uniquely wonderful and wonderfully unique birth must not be understood in such a way as to suggest that the novelty of the method by which the child was produced entailed destruction of the characteristics of the human race (*ut per novitatem creationis proprietatis remota sit generis*). It was the Holy Spirit who made the Virgin fertile, but the substantive reality (*veritas*) of the body was derived from her body.⁷

The bishops might have been expected to notice, in view of their treatment of the authority of the 'catholic Creeds' (§4), that this point acquired credal status, for the western church, in the *Quicumque vult*, which says of the two natures of Christ: 'God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the substance of his mother, born in the world.'

The reason the Fathers could take this view was that they did not share the biological opinion which the bishops claim to have been the ancient view of human reproduction. There were, in fact, a variety of views on the subject in antiquity. Empedocles, for example, thought that the two parents contribute equal parts to the formation of the child. There is no way of knowing what Matthew or Luke thought. But it seems clear that the Fathers in general took Aristotle's view, which is expounded in detail in his *De generatione animalium*. Aristotle explained the male and female contributions in procreation by means of his habitual distinction between form and matter. The mother provides all the *matter* from which the embryo develops, but this purely passive matter needs the active principle of the semen (which does not become part of the embryo) to give it form and movement.⁸ It is not difficult to see how, on this account, the divine creative activity could substitute, in the Virginal Conception, for the male rôle, but without needing to create any of the material of Jesus' humanity, which derived entirely from Mary and so was entirely *homoousios* with ours. This was clearly the common patristic view. Thomas Aquinas later appealed explicitly to Aristotle's view that a child's matter derives solely from its mother, in order to show that the body of Christ was thoroughly human, though he did also allow for the possibility that the semen contributes matter to the foetus (*Summa theologiae* 3a, 28, 1 ad 5; cf. 3a, 31, 5).

3. The Virginal Conception is not a means or condition of the Incarnation, but a sign of it.

The bishops rightly make a clear distinction between the Incarnation itself and the Virginal Conception (§62), but, in focusing on the question of whether the latter is a historical fact as well as a symbol, they fail to grasp the real nettle of the relation between the Virginal Conception and the Incarnation and so fail to clarify what is actually involved in believing in the Virginal Conception. The suggestions they offer in §61 seem to fall into the familiar pattern of arguments for the Virginal Conception as a necessary means or condition of the Incarnation, but the history of debate on this subject seems to me to indicate clearly that such arguments must be abandoned. That Jesus could be free of original sin only by means of a virginal conception, or that the divine Person of the Son could only take human nature by means of a virginal conception—such arguments have never proved convincing and should be recognized as trying to prove too much.⁹ It is not a venture of faith but of theological hubris to go beyond the witness of Scripture into *this kind* of speculation. Not that speculation as such is always unwarranted, but that such arguments indulge in the worst kind of theological speculation: speculation divorced from real religious interest. Even if we could believe the physical or metaphysical theories which purport to explain the Virginal Conception as a necessary mechanism for incarnation, they would be of no religious concern to us. They could not be relevant to *religious belief* in the Virginal Conception.

As far as we can tell, Incarnation does not require Virginal Conception, nor does Virginal Conception prove Incarnation. (The latter point is nicely made by the fact that the Virginal Conception of Jesus is a traditional Muslim belief.) Rather the Virginal Conception is for us a sign of the Incarnation, a God-given sign which, like all the signs in the Gospels, *proves* nothing, but, properly understood, witnesses to the meaning of the Incarnation for us. It may be that, once we are prepared to accept this apparently more modest status for the Virginal Conception, its significance will become apparent from its scriptural context.

4. The Virginal Conception in Luke designates Jesus as God's absolute gift.

The point of the Virginal Conception as a sign must lie in the fact that it dispenses with *human initiative* in procreation. This surely needs no argument, once other concerns which have sometimes obscured it are cleared away. The point cannot be that the Virginal Conception dispenses with impure sexual desire in procreation, since even Augustine allowed that in the unfallen state there would have been procreation through sexual relations without sin. Nor can the

point be that the Virginal Conception dispenses with *male* activity. Karl Barth spoiled his basic insight into the significance of the Virginal Conception by adding an extraordinarily sexist reflection in which the male represents humanity as 'willing, achieving, creative, sovereign.'¹⁰ But virginal conception does not simply eliminate the male rôle in procreation; it eliminates all sexual activity by man or woman. Mary could, of course, have taken or shared an initiative in the conception of a child by Joseph: the point is not that initiative and activity are male. But in the Virginal Conception God dispenses with any human initiative, male or female, in the origin of this child.

Consequently, the Virginal Conception is a sign of the sheer gratuitousness of Jesus' human existence. As the man who owes his existence and whose existence we owe to a purely divine initiative, Jesus is the absolute gift of God's grace. Mary, of course, has a part to play. She is a willing recipient, but precisely a willing *recipient* of the divine act. She initiates nothing. Her willing acceptance and her consequent cooperation—in carrying, giving birth to, nursing and raising the child—are an essential form of human cooperation with divine grace, but they follow the divine initiative. In this way, Mary is a model of all reception of grace. God's grace does not eliminate human activity, but, by taking priority, makes human activity possible on the basis of grace.

This meaning of the Virginal Conception is subtly conveyed by Luke's narrative, in which the account of Jesus' conception parallels and surpasses that of John's.¹¹ Implicitly there is a gradation in three stages: normal conception—miraculous conception—virginal conception. In these steps human initiative in conception is reduced and then eliminated. Of course, in biblical times every child was strongly felt to be a gift of God, since conception, while requiring human initiative, was not within human control (cf., e.g., Gen. 4:1, 25; 2 Macc. 7:22–23). The sense in which the child is God's gift is then heightened in John's case, as in similar Old Testament examples, where conception could not normally have been expected at all. In John's case, however, human activity is still required, whereas in Jesus' case it is eliminated. If every child is God's gift and John is God's gift in a special sense, Jesus is God's gift in an absolute sense.

In this way Jesus is comparable only with Adam and Eve, who likewise owed their origin solely to divine activity. This is the clue to the significance of the Lukan genealogy of Jesus, which traces Jesus' ancestry to 'Adam, the son of God' (3:38).¹² The parallel with 1:35, in which the Virginal Conception of Jesus is linked with his sonship to God, is intended. For Luke, Adam and Jesus are both sons of God in the sense that both owe their human existence simply to God without human initiative.¹³ As such they represent God's absolute grace in the creation of humanity and God's absolute grace in the new creation of humanity.¹⁴ The parallel, of course, contains a

difference, in that Jesus' humanity is derived by God not from the dust of the earth but from the stock of Adam, and this difference represents, similarly, the difference between the creation of humanity and its new creation in Jesus. New creation is not *ex nihilo*, but is redemption of the old. But just as Jesus' continuity with the race of Adam comes about through no initiative of Adam's descendents, but as an act of God's grace, so it is God's absolute grace which renews our humanity in new creation. In both cases, creation and redemption, creaturely activity is subsequent to and dependent on sheer divine gift. Luke's parallel between the creation of Adam and the Virginal Conception of Jesus may warn us not to draw too sharply the distinction between nature and grace. Nature too is ultimately grace and only dependently human activity, while grace, in restoring nature, also restores our awareness that nature is grace.

The existential awareness of the Godgivenness of every child is declining for modern people as a result of increased human control over conception—both our ability, with contraception, to prevent it, and medical progress in methods of ensuring it. Control over the procreation of human life has been added to our ever-increasing control over the conditions of human life. Such control does not, of course, really diminish our contingency as created beings, who are dependent on the Creator precisely for this control as for everything else. But it has removed many of the natural *signs* of contingency which have traditionally reminded people of God's grace in creation. Hence for us the particular difficulty but perhaps also the particular appropriateness of the *miraculous* sign of the Virginal Conception, which designates the man in whom God renews his creation as God's absolute gift to us.

5. The Virginal Conception in Matthew designates Jesus as God's solidarity with us.

The only real clue to the significance of the Virginal Conception for Matthew is his citation of Isaiah 7:14. Of course, this is in accordance with his interest in scriptural fulfilment throughout the birth narrative. But in quoting Isaiah 7:14 Matthew is not concerned *simply* to show that the Virginal Conception fulfilled prophecy, but also to indicate the significance of the Virginal Conception. This is clear from the fact that he provides a translation of the name Immanuel in the Old Testament text (Matt 1:23).¹⁵ The text was not literally fulfilled as far as the naming of Jesus was concerned (cf. 1:21), but the name which it gives to the child of the virgin indicates the meaning of his virginal conception: that he is 'God with us.' In other words, for Matthew, the Virginal Conception is the sign of the incarnation as God's solidarity with us, his loving identification with us through his presence as a man in our history.

This gives a further dimension to the meaning of the Virginal Conception which we have discovered in Luke: that Jesus is God's absolute gift. As Immanuel Jesus is God's *self-gift* to humanity. The absolute givenness of Jesus, which is indicated by the absence of all human initiative in his conception, is necessary to his being God's loving solidarity with us. For solidarity means, not being willy-nilly in the same boat, but voluntarily identifying in love with the situation of those one loves. It is of the nature of loving solidarity to be gratuitous. In the incarnation God, who would not otherwise be one of us, graciously *chooses* to become one of us for our sake. His human existence as one of us is no mere product of human history, but the result of his gracious initiative in identifying with us. The Virginal Conception designates Jesus as God's gift of himself to us in loving solidarity with us.

6. The Virginal Conception may not need to be prominent in the contemporary expression of Christian faith.

It is a pleasure to find that the bishops combine their concern for orthodox belief in the church with an emphasis on the church's mission to communicate the Gospel to the world (§§9–14). This combination is of great importance if we are to avoid the two opposite mistakes which are so often made when Christians face the task of relating their understanding of the Gospel to the society in which they live. On the one hand, there are those who see the church as a haven of stability unrelated to the modern world. For them, orthodox belief means repeating what was said in the past just as it was said in the past. The result, however, as experience shows, is that Christian belief becomes shallow: it shrinks to mere formulae drained of living meaning. Orthodoxy cannot be preserved merely by being repeated. It needs to be *repossessed* as something *newly* meaningful in every age. But on the other hand, there are those who are very much concerned to communicate the Gospel and relate it to the way people feel and think in our society, but who, in order to do so, prune the Gospel of whatever seems not to fit into the modern world. The result is a reduction of the Gospel to a statement of what everybody thinks anyway. Thus *both* groups deprive the Gospel of any meaningful message for the world. Genuine orthodoxy is preserved neither by being repeated nor by being assimilated to the world. The bishops are right when they reject 'shallow truth, either traditionalist or innovatory, which fails to connect with and penetrate human life' (§67). The merely traditionalist approach fails to connect, the assimilationist fails to penetrate. Instead we need to repossess the full meaning of orthodox faith *at the points where* it connects with and penetrates human life in our society today. But that requires not

only an understanding of Scripture and tradition, but also an understanding of and existential feel for the spiritual condition and needs of our society.

A minor criticism of the bishops here is that, in discussing the task of contemporizing the Gospel, they focus on relating Christian belief to *new knowledge* (§§9–12). This is necessary, but even more important is gaining and articulating a sense of the cultural and spiritual climate of our society—the kind of values and spiritual needs which actually shape people’s lives in our particular kind of secular culture, along with, of course, the structures which embody these values and needs. To do that in connexion with attempting to understand the Gospel will be to discover the points where the central beliefs of Christian orthodoxy really connect with and speak to human life in our society. The point then will not be to *defend* orthodoxy as a sort of fragile inheritance from the past which has to be protected if it is to survive today. The point will be that orthodox belief recovers its own meaning and power and relevance when we put it back where it belongs: on the edges of the church in contact with the world. The bishops’ report will serve a useful purpose if it points us in this direction: away from our inner-ecclesiastical disputes, which so quickly degenerate from the ecclesiastical-doctrinal to the ecclesiastical-political, and in the direction of the Gospel’s missionary relationship to the world.

Without wishing to prejudge the issue, I suspect that the Virginal Conception is not one of the more important points where the truth of the Gospel is likely to connect with and penetrate human life today. That seems at least to be indicated by the fact that the Virginal Conception is scarcely ever mentioned in sermons today (except polemically when the Bishop of Durham denies it). This need not disturb us. Not every credal belief features on the cutting edge of Gospel in every context. I have tried to indicate the significance which the Virginal Conception can have for us, but this significance is to point to the meaning of the incarnation of God in Jesus. In the task of relating the Gospel to our society it will probably not be necessary to delay too long over the sign. The message is what it signifies: Jesus himself, as God’s gift to us of a new humanity and as God’s gift of himself in solidarity with us.

RICHARD BAUCKHAM is Lecturer in the History of Christian Thought in the University of Manchester.

NOTES

- 1 *The Nature of Christian Belief: A Statement and Exposition by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 1986).
- 2 The second-century evidence, minimized by H. von Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church* (E.T.; London: SCM Press, 1964).

- is given due weight by R.E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973) pp.47–52.
- 3 Later, in his *De Conceptu Virginali*, Anselm developed what he regarded as a necessary reason for the Virginal Conception: that only the lack of a human father could keep Jesus free from original sin. For Anselm's distinction between necessary and fitting reasons, see J. Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972) pp.48–50; M. Root, 'Necessity and Unfittingness in Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 (1987) pp.211–230.
 - 4 Translation from *Saint Anselm: Basic Writings*, trans. S.N. Deane (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1962) p.249.
 - 5 For one example of such a denial, see J.A.T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (London: SCM Press, 1973) pp.50–56.
 - 6 See von Campenhausen, *op.cit.*, p.18 n.1; pp.30, 47, 51. This is not to deny that the Fathers could also see the Virginal Conception as an indication of Jesus' divinity.
 - 7 This translation is adapted from the translation in R.A. Norris, *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) pp.147–148.
 - 8 For an account of Aristotle's view, see A. Preus, *Science and Philosophy in Aristotle's Biological Works* (Hildersheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1975) pp.52–63.
 - 9 Cf. Brown, *op.cit.*, pp.40–42; A.N.S. Lane, 'The Rationale and Significance of the Virgin Birth,' *Vox Evangelica* 10 (1977) pp.48–64.
 - 10 K. Barth, *C.D. I/2*, pp.192–196; and cf. the criticisms in W. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (E.T.; London: SCM Press, 1968) pp.144, 147–148.
 - 11 Cf. R.E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1977) pp.300–301; J.A. Fitzmyer, *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) pp.61–62.
 - 12 This point is missed in the usual interpretation of 3:38: that Luke is here indicating Jesus' status as Son of God—surely an odd way of doing so! See J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX* (Anchor Bible 28; New York, Doubleday: 1981) p.504; whereas I.H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978) p.161, sees the problem in the usual interpretation, but not the solution.
 - 13 The parallel was later developed by Irenaeus as part of his recapitulation theology: von Campenhausen, *op.cit.*, pp.35–37, cf. pp.39–40.
 - 14 Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, p.314, brings out the significance of the new creation imagery in 1:35.
 - 15 Cf. Brown, *ibid*, pp.152–153.