

## **Faith in Context: Inculturation within Scripture**

It was one of my better lines on a class handout – though not one I expected to be able to repeat too often. ‘The Canaanite gods lived on Mount Zaphon (Jebel el Aqra) not far from our Samuel and Arpine.’ I was teaching Old Testament studies at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, Lebanon, in the early 1980s. The class was a mixture of nationalities: Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, Iranian, Sudanese and others besides. A variety of different denominations and churches were also represented. Among the students were Samuel and Arpine, two members of the Armenian Evangelical Church who were husband and wife. Arpine, originally from Iran, now lived (out of term time) with her husband Samuel in Kessab, his village in North Syria, on the slopes of the spectacular and dramatic mountain – Jebel el Aqra – which rose almost sheer from the Mediterranean Sea a few miles north of the modern Syrian city of Lattakia.

It was not far from Lattakia that in the 1920s, at a place called today Ras Shamra, a farmer ploughing his fields had one day turned up some ancient pottery, and during the archaeological excavations which followed, the remains of the ancient city of Ugarit had been discovered. Among the treasury of tablets and artefacts that were unearthed were a whole series of texts which gave a revealing glimpse into the religious world of the people of Ugarit, which had been hitherto largely unknown. Up till that time in so far as we knew anything about the Canaanite gods and their religion and mythology, it largely came from the Old Testament, which, superficially at least, presented a very hostile picture.

One of the things which quickly became very clear from those newly discovered texts was that Mount Zaphon – Jebel el Aqra – occupied a special place in the religious world of the Canaanite inhabitants of Ugarit. Although there are many texts which refer to the importance of building a temple, or ‘house’ for each of the gods in the city of Ugarit itself, at the same time (and apparently without any sense of contradiction) the heights of Mount Zaphon were regarded as the real ‘home’ of the gods. It was, if you like, viewed as the Mount Olympus of the Canaanites. In fact the word Zaphon is interesting in itself. In the Canaanite language (and Hebrew, which is very similar) it means ‘north’. Perhaps it derived this name from the fact that the mountain rose a few miles to the north of the city of Ugarit. But possibly because of its particularly dramatic vista the mountain, or at least its name, seems to have become associated with ‘divine dwelling’ by other peoples of the ancient Middle East too – including even the Israelites. Realising this helped to make sense of two verses in the Old Testament which hitherto had puzzled many people.

One of them is Psalm 48.1 which reads (in the NRSV translation)  
Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised  
In the city of our God.  
His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation,  
Is the joy of all the earth.  
Mount Zion, in the far north,  
The city of the great King.’

This particular psalm is reflecting on the way God is intimately linked with Mount Zion, and will therefore protect the city from any enemies. Unless the writer of the psalm was physically located in Arabia, Africa or Antarctica, by most criteria Mount Zion cannot be described as being 'in the far north'. Jerusalem and Mount Zion are basically towards the south of the settled area of Israel/Palestine. Yet reading the verse of the psalm alongside the discovery of the Ugaritic texts enabled it to be illuminated in a helpful way. Perhaps it was not so much a geographical reference, but rather a way of asserting that Zion was in some special sense the dwelling place of God? So the Liturgical Psalter (which was the Psalter incorporated into the ASB) rendered the reference to 'north' with the phrase 'where godhead truly dwells', in my view an inspired translation which precisely captures the point the psalmist was seeking to convey. And this has also been echoed by the Psalter which is included in *Common Worship*, which reads here, 'On Mount Zion, the divine dwelling place, stands the city of the great king'.

The other biblical text which seems to allude to the tradition of Zaphon as the home of the gods occurs in Isaiah 14.13. The NRSV reads here, 'I will sit on the mount of assembly on the heights of Zaphon', adding in a marginal note 'Or *assembly in the far north*'. The verse forms part of a strange oracle (*Isaiah 14.12-15*) in which the prophet is predicting the downfall of the king of Babylon. But the imagery used is redolent with mythological overtones, drawing on stories told throughout the Eastern Mediterranean world. So the king is portrayed as a sort of demi-god who, through hubris, is seeking to usurp the throne of the 'Most High' which is located on the divine mountain where the gods have their dwelling, but who is ultimately doomed to failure and punishment. The story works on a number of levels – in one sense it can be treated an observation how the light of the 'Day Star' or Venus inevitably fades into oblivion when confronted by the brighter light of the rising sun. It has also been used by later Jewish and Christian tradition to explain the fall of Satan or Lucifer (= Day Star). But my present purpose in mentioning it is because the oracle as a whole, and the reference to Zaphon in particular, is quite a startling example of the willingness of the writers and editors of our Old Testament to owe at least a linguistic debt to the Canaanites, whose mythology and religious beliefs are so vividly illustrated by those texts from Ugarit. In a book in which various aspects of contextualisation or inculturation are being explored this is a point worth pondering.

In fact, of course, the very suggestion that the God of Israel might dwell in a temple or on a mountain top, – whether Zaphon or Zion – can in itself be regarded as an example of inculturating Israelite beliefs to a Canaanite environment. As the 'story line' of the Old Testament is currently presented, initially, during the patriarchal and Exodus periods, the mobility of the God worshipped by the Israelites is stressed. God travels with his people, either as part of the tribe, and/or linked in a special way to a mobile sanctuary such as the 'Ark' or 'tent'. It is only at the beginning of the monarchy that the possibility of building God a fixed temple in Jerusalem is raised. Even then Nathan's response to David's suggestion that he (David) ought to build a 'house' for God, since it is not seemly for God to remain in a 'tent', is negative (*2 Samuel 7.1-17*). God declares through the mouth of Nathan, 'I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day'. It is only during the time of David's son Solomon that this

objection seems to be overcome and the erection of a temple, as a 'house' for God on a lavish scale, can proceed. In the conflicting responses to this question about a 'house' for God, we can surely see reverberations of an ongoing debate between Israelite 'purists' and those who were willing to adopt certain aspects of Canaanite religious ideology, adapt it, and 'baptise' it into Israel's own faith. Certainly the importance of deities having a temple or 'house' of their own is stressed in the Ugaritic texts. It meant that there could be accessible to their worshippers – just as the God of Israel could, from the time of Solomon, be accessible to his worshippers in the temple in Jerusalem (see e.g. Psalm 84). However the 'flip side' was that those worshippers could now call the shots: the deity was expected to be grateful for the house that had been built for him – and to be available as required. Furthermore, it was in the vested interest of the deity to protect his 'house'/temple, and the city in which it stood from hostile forces. In other words the freedom of the deity to act as a sovereign and independent force was substantially compromised.

In the Canaanite religious world such a trade off between deity and worshipper seems to have been acceptable – but in the Old Testament, in its current form, considerable and ongoing tension is expressed as to the validity of such a 'deal'. Can the God who reveals himself as 'I am who I am' – a phrase which itself seems to emphasise his freedom – really be constrained in such a way? This argument about temple theology continues for the rest of the Old Testament, but is particularly acute during the exile when God's freedom and ability to be present with his people in Babylon, despite the destruction of his 'house'/temple in Jerusalem, is emphasised (see Ezekiel 1.1-28; 8.1-10.22). It also underlies the debate in the early post-exilic period as to whether the temple should be rebuilt (see Isaiah 66.1 and Haggai 1.1-11). One thing it illustrates however is that the question of the appropriateness and limitations of religious inculturation or contextualisation is not linked simply to particular names, epithets or symbols, but often runs at a much deeper level, posing questions about people's understanding of the very nature of God, and God's interaction with creation and humanity.

During my time as an Old Testament lecturer in Beirut one of the reasons for my interest in inculturation was the context in which I was teaching. On the face of it, Old Testament studies were unlikely to be the most popular subject among the students in the School of Theology. I was lecturing against the back drop of the Lebanese civil war, but more pertinently, for many of the students there was an inbuilt hostility to the Old Testament because of its inevitable associations with 'Israel' – by which I mean the modern political state of that name. Some of the students were Palestinians, who could identify only too readily with those who had been the victims of the Israelite 'conquest' of the land in Old Testament times. But even among the other students the awareness of the unhelpful and sometimes nefarious role that 'Israel' seemed to play in stirring the Lebanese political cauldron, hardly won friends or encouraged commitment to a part of the Bible so closely associated with the very same name. Furthermore, although the Christian Zionist movement had not then yet gained the political influence it has acquired in more recent years, both my students and I were quite well aware of groups and individuals who did regard the actions of modern day Israel as somehow justified by the pages and promises of the Old Testament. I really felt for my students, particularly the Palestinian ones, in

these circumstances. It is difficult for non Middle Easterners to realise how damaging to the sense of self-identity and self-worth of Christian Palestinians such ideas can be.

Confronted with such a 'context' for teaching the Old Testament, there were two strategies I adopted. First to engage seriously and critically with views that made a facile identification between Israel 'then' and Israel 'now'. But secondly, and more relevant to the present article, to 'recover' the Old Testament as a book which rightfully belonged to my Middle Eastern students at least as much as, if not more so than, people from elsewhere. So in my classes I overtly and intentionally sought to draw attention to the geographical, climatic and cultural contexts which had, in my view, influenced the development of the Old Testament and which were reflected in its pages. For, to a considerable extent, these contexts still influenced our lives in the Middle East, in lands such as Lebanon, Syria and Israel/Palestine. Hence the class handout mentioned Samuel and Arpine. A serious purpose underlay the humour. Lebanese and Syrian students were very aware that throughout their history a close association had been made between 'high places' and religious sanctuaries – the numerous monasteries, churches and Muslim sanctuaries which dotted the hilltops meant that the connection was still very powerfully alive.

One of the most striking examples of continuity between the world of the Bible and our lives in Lebanon during the 1980s was the climate. The alternation between a wet season which began (or was expected to begin) in mid/late October and last through to April, when the dry season commenced and then dominated life through to October again, was part of the reality that we lived through each year. Even in the urbanised context of modern Beirut it materially affected our lives. Most summer's piped water would dry up, or become intermittent, and since much electricity in Lebanon was produced by hydroelectric schemes, the dry summers would also lead to extensive power cuts. We could empathise very easily with the way that these alternating wet/dry seasons were reflected in the Old Testament.

For example from a close reading of the various Old Testament ritual calendars it is clear that the year had traditionally begun in September/October – because that was the time when, with the coming of the rains, agricultural life could begin again. Similarly in spite of the later importance given to Passover, it seems apparent that for much of the history of ancient Israel 'the' key religious festival in Israel was the Feast of Ingathering (also known as the Feast of Booths). Its prime position was due to the fact that this was the time when, at the very end of the dry season, the year's final crops (of olives, grapes etc) were gathered, but also when the religious community was praying with special longing and anticipation for the gift once again of rain and water. The Feast of Booths was quite literally the time when, each year, life hung in the balance, and religious rituals associated with the Feast were designed to protect the community, avert disaster, and ensure 'order' and prosperity into the new year. From the perspective of living in Lebanon, even in the twentieth century, we could understand such a seasonal cycle, as each year we too waited thirstily for the rains to come again in the autumn.

But it is also interesting how these climatic conditions are reflected in those writings which told the story of the religious life of the Canaanites of ancient Ugarit. The two most extensive religious texts discovered in the excavations were both narratives which told the story of the adventures of the Canaanite god 'Baal'. Although not the chief deity of the Canaanite pantheon (that honour belonged to 'El'), Baal was certainly the most active. One of the narratives recounted Baal's fierce struggle with the god Yam; the other his even more dangerous conflict with the god Mot. 'Yam' however was the personification of the unruly waters who dominated the wet Canaanite winters (the name 'Yam' simply means 'Sea'), while 'Mot' is the Hebrew/Canaanite word for 'Death' and seems to have been the personification of the summer forces of sterility. Baal's own name means 'Master/Lord/Husband' and in the Ugaritic texts he clearly has responsibility for the fertility and well being of the sown earth of which he is the master. In the text which tells the story of Baal and Yam<sup>1</sup>, Yam attempts a takeover bid in the assembly of the gods on Zaphon.

Most of the gods cower in fear: only Baal refuses to be intimidated. A fight ensues from which, although he falls seven times in the course of it, Baal emerges as the eventual victor, and as a result is proclaimed 'King' of the gods.. He then takes his revenge upon Yam: interestingly the text uses the expression that he 'disperses' him, apparently taming him by dividing his strength among water channels which could be used to irrigate the agricultural land. The text seems to be portraying in story form the events of a typical Canaanite winter, in which stormy seas and sudden downpours leading on occasion to flash floods make water, sea and rivers, a potentially fearsome and destructive force<sup>2</sup>. Only when it has been tamed can water's beneficial and life-giving qualities be employed as it is directed into the irrigation channels. Similarly the narrative of Baal and Mot explores the path of a Canaanite summer.

In this case Mot's attack on Baal seems to be successful, for Baal gradually weakens as the summer heat begins to burn and shrivel the vegetation. Eventually Mot overcomes him, and Baal apparently dies. Mot, appropriately in view of his name, is thus victorious. Death and sterility have apparently won. Yet the story is not finally over, for the cycle must continue again... and again. For in this story Baal is a 'dying and rising god', such as was common through the world of the Eastern Mediterranean (e.g. Persephone). Before he goes down to the underworld, Baal had copulated with a heifer – a sign of fertility for the future. And after his death his sister/wife the goddess Anat searches for him, weeping. It seems to be Anat's tears falling on the ground, and soaking it, that help to revivify Baal. He comes to life again, and he and Anat take vengeance on Mot, 'winnowing' him – a clear link once again to the agricultural processes which are linked to the myth.

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<sup>1</sup> In some of the Ugaritic texts the alternative name of Ltn (= Hebrew Leviathan) appears to be given to Baal's adversary. Ltn is clearly a sea-monster.

<sup>2</sup> At the Ecole Biblique Jerusalem, where I did my post-graduate study, the mausoleum in the garden witnessed to water's lethal force in the Middle East. Among those buried there were a number of people from France who had been visiting Petra, Jordan in 1963, when almost the entire party was swept away by a sudden flash flood and 23 people died instantly.

Why such detail about these two narratives? What relevance do they have to our topic of contextualisation or inculturation? A great deal in fact. Superficially at least Baal and the God of the Old Testament are poles apart: throughout the several hundred years of history recorded in the Old Testament, Baal appears to be the eternal enemy of 'Yahweh', the God of Israel. The story of Elijah's victory over the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel can be understood as a paradigm of this centuries' long struggle. Elijah's war cry, 'If Yahweh (the LORD) is God then follow him; but if Baal then follow him,' (*I Kings 18.21*) offers a stark but definitive choice for Israel. Yet it is not so simple. In reality we know, not least from the study of personal and place names that the world of Baal and the Canaanite gods exerted a powerful influence upon the people of Israel for many centuries. What do we make, for example, of the fact that the heroic figure of Gideon, apparent champion of Israel and Israel's God, had a second name 'Jerubbaal' (*Judges 7.1*), which suggests that he (or at least his parents) also owed allegiance to the figure of Baal? Or the fact that Anathoth – the village just outside Jerusalem from which Jeremiah came, seems to mean something like 'Anat's place', linked therefore to Baal's sister/wife? The response might be that this is a reflection of the religious reality on the ground, 'folk religion' if you like, but that the canonical scriptures would not tolerate any such linkage. Yet that is far from the truth – for in parts of the Old Testament we find clear echoes of the myths associated with Baal.

Resonating throughout the whole of scripture – New Testament as well as Old – is the motif of God's power and victory over the unruly sea. 'Who is this that wind and sea obey him?', ask the disciples of Jesus as he stills the storm on the Sea of Galilee (*Mark 4.41*), a valid question, since the Old Testament has taught them that God alone can control the sea. It is a mark of God's divinity and his pre-eminent power. Within the Old Testament itself the theme appears strongly in the Psalms, in Genesis, in certain of the prophetic books such as Isaiah, in Job, and (in a slightly different way) in Exodus. There are a number of reasons for its development. The physical geography of Israel/Palestine, with a straight coastline on the Mediterranean and few natural harbours, may have been a factor. For the Israelites (unlike, for example, the Greeks) the sea would always be the great and much-feared unknown.

The Exodus experience and the crossing of the sea which formed part of it was clearly another reason for Old Testament interest in this motif. Without going in detail into questions of historicity, whatever happened at or was 'remembered' as the Exodus must have had a significant influence. Yet in spite of these factors, it is doubtful that the concept of a God who shows himself king precisely because his victory over the seas would have attained such prominence in the Bible, had it not been for the Canaanite myth which ascribed such a role to Baal. In effect what the writers of some of the Old Testament books have done is 'take over' a myth that was elsewhere linked to the figure of Baal, and replace Baal with Yahweh (= 'the LORD'), Israel's own God. Of course in the process certain significant adaptations were made. The sense of real contest, and uncertainty about the eventual outcome, which forms part of the drama of the myth as it is told in the Ugaritic texts is largely absent in the Old Testament, which certainly in its present form, is largely monotheistic. God's victory is assured. One delightful expression of this occurs in Psalm 104.26.

In a variant form of the Ugaritic myth one of the alternative names for Baal's watery enemy is Ltn, which, we can assume, is the equivalent of the Hebrew sea-monster Leviathan. In the Ugaritic myth Leviathan is a feared hostile beast: as in fact he is too in Job 41.1-34. Yet in Psalm 104 Leviathan is described as follows, 'There go the ships and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it [the sea].' The sea-monster has been tamed – and is now almost God's giant bath-toy! However enough remains to suggest that the writers of the Psalms – and other parts of the Old Testament were well aware of the Canaanite mythological background – which reflected the climatic conditions in the land of Canaan, in which Israel now found itself – and that there was an intentional effort to 'inculturate' faith in such a context. It had some important spin offs. It is likely, for example, that the development of the concept of the kingship of God in certain of the psalms is linked, even if implicitly, to these myths which proclaimed the kingship of the one who had been victorious over the unruly waters. (See Psalm 93; compare Exodus 15.1-18).<sup>3</sup>

Yet if the Baal-Yam myth has left its footprints within our Old Testament, that does not appear to be the case for the other seasonal myth associated with Baal – his conflict with Mot. There are certainly hints that such a myth was known, even that it was celebrated from time to time by various groups within Israel, but within the canonical Old Testament as it now stands the tradition of the dying-rising God of fertility is effectively absent – an absence that is more striking precisely because of the willingness to draw on the myth of 'Yam.' We can only assume that this was because the concept of God that the Baal-Mot myth entailed was not something that at heart could ever be squared with Israel's deepest understanding of God's nature. Perhaps it spoke of a god who was too sexual, or too immanent – too subject to change – to be reconciled with the 'I am who I am' who is the God who burns brightly at the heart of the Old Testament. At any rate the comparison provides a very interesting reflection on the limits of inculturation: why can we go so far – but no further? Why is it that the story of Baal and Yam can be adapted into Israel's faith, but not that of Baal and Mot? I suggested above that questions about the rightness or otherwise of inculturation sooner or later have to move from external issues to exploring the very nature of God and God's role in creation. It may be that from this perspective the story of Baal and Mot was simply a step too far. It spoke of a concept of deity that was ultimately too alien.

There is in fact a biblical hint that this may well be the case. The book of Hosea is, partly because of textual problems, one of the most difficult texts to read in the Old Testament. But it does seem to address some of these issues. It is almost certain that Hosea knew of the fertility rituals which were associated with the seasonal story of Baal and Mot. The very metaphor of adultery on which the book centres hangs on these. Hosea, of course, rejects such rituals. However the words with which he chooses to describe a promised future in which Israel will be restored to her proper relationship with God ('Yahweh') are

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<sup>3</sup> I have inevitably simplified the situation. The likely reality is that as well as influence from the Canaanite Baal-Yam cycle, certain strands of the Old Testament, particularly those dating from the exilic period, have also been influenced by similar myths of a contest with the 'sea' which draw on the Babylonian context, in which the 'enemy' is identified as Rahab. However this certainly does not undermine the basic point I am seeking to make – if anything it strengthens it.

striking: ‘On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, “My husband, “ and no longer will you call me, “My Baal”.’ (*Hosea 2.16*) Underlying Hosea’s horror at the present and hope for the future was his belief in the very nature of God. Unlike the days of Elijah (a century or so before Hosea) the contest in Hosea’s time was not between two distinct deities – on the one hand, Yahweh, or the other, Baal. That contest had (probably) been won in the time of Elijah/Elisha. Now the struggle was much more insidious: that there were groups within Israel who regarded Yahweh as though he was a Baal – a deity with a deeply sexual nature who was inescapably caught up in the ongoing seasonal cycle, in all likelihood expressing their beliefs in myths that were derived from the story of Baal and Mot, and in cultic rituals that graphically portrayed such myths. Hosea challenges such an understanding of God, offering instead a deity who though intensely personal, transcends crude sexuality with a ethical covenant vision. Perhaps Hosea throws us a challenge too – when does the quest for inculturation, worthy and laudable though it be, mean that God’s own nature becomes no longer recognisable within the parameters offered by biblical or Christian tradition? And conversely are there times when the names of God we discover in other religious traditions can seem different and strange, yet we can instinctively glimpse a deity present there that is not alien to the deepest longings and desires we find expressed in our Bible.

What have I tried to express in this reflection?

- When we explore the theme of inculturation it is important to recognise that it is a process that goes on within the Bible itself. It is not simply an ‘external’ question viz. How do we inculturate/contextualise our Bible and our Christian faith in a variety of different modern cultural situations? It is rather an ‘internal’ question which is intrinsic to the compilation of our canonical scriptures.
- The reality that our Bible underwent this process of inculturation in its development, surely gives ‘permission’ for such an ongoing process in the life of the Church today.
- In the dialectical process of inculturation both the ‘host’ religious tradition and the new religious or cultural tradition which is being appropriated may well be subject to transformation. Both the ‘Israelite’ and the ‘Canaanite’ religious traditions were significantly reshaped by their encounter.
- There are points where, through inculturation, we can discover important insights into God’s role and nature. In the case of the Old Testament it seems likely that the development of the concept of God as King, for example, drew, in part at least, on the language of some Canaanite mythological traditions.
- There are limits to inculturation. Why is it that the Baal – Yam cycle can be ‘adopted’ and ‘adapted’ but not the Baal = Mot cycle? What can we learn from this for our context today? How can we establish such limits?
- Inculturation is not simply about using different or fresh names and terms. Ultimately it affects how we understand the nature of God.



Finally, in a seminal article written a number of years ago Walter Brueggemann<sup>4</sup> identified what he called two ‘trajectories’ or theological trails in the Old Testament. He referred to them as the ‘liberation’ trajectory and the ‘royal’ trajectory, and he sought to analyse the respective characteristics of each. Unlike the ‘liberation’ trajectory, the royal trajectory is tolerant of mythic language – and gives attention to the intimate connection between myth and cultic worship. The royal trajectory was particularly influential in the royal court of Jerusalem and the Temple. As Brueggemann makes clear each of the two trajectories tends to be identified with specific parts or books of the Old Testament. For example the Book of Deuteronomy, and literature produced by those writing under the influence of this book, is a clear exponent of the ‘liberation’ trajectory. In such parts of the Old Testament there would be few, if any, clear examples of contextualisation which borrows from the mythology of Israel’s neighbours. Separation and distinction rather than inculturation is the order of the day. However parts of the Old Testament, such as the Book of Psalms, which have links with the ‘royal’ trajectory are marked by considerable openness to the religious traditions of Israel’s neighbours. It is tempting perhaps to suggest that the ‘liberation’ trajectory = good and the ‘royal’ trajectory = bad, but though Brueggemann does veer in that direction at times, it is not his final judgment on the matter. Rather that the power and dynamism of the Old Testament taken as a whole come precisely from the interplay between the two trajectories, and that both are needed to balance the other. I would suggest that this ‘tension’ is important to bear in mind when we explore the possibilities for inculturation in our world today. We too need to hear both voices: the ‘royal’ and ‘liberation’ voices of our own day. We need to take seriously both the voices from within the Christian tradition who are prepared to take seriously the ‘mythologies’ of others and seek to baptise them into the Christian faith, and those voices which offer a check or hesitation about such a process. From such dialectic, fresh insights are quarried about the God who works within and beyond history.

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Brueggemann, ‘Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel’, originally published in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979). Reprinted in Walter Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament*, Fortress, 1994..

<sup>5</sup> This article explores inculturation within the development of the Old Testament. It would of course also be interesting similarly to reflect on inculturation during the formation of the New Testament. The Gospel of John could provide an interesting case study, although it is not a straightforward issue. In the development of the Gospel of John, the voices of Hellenism, and a number of strands of Judaism (some of which have already been profoundly influenced by the Hellenistic world) mingle together – and all the different contextual voices are subject to the sharp critique offered by the life, ministry and passion of Jesus Christ.