JESUS AND THE SPIRIT


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A Study of the Religious and
Charismatic Experience of Jesus
and the First Christians
as Reflected in the New Testament

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JESUS' EXPERIENCE OF GOD – SONSHIP

§2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 What was Jesus’ experience of God? It should be noted at once that I am not asking, What was Jesus’ concept of God, his teaching about God? The two questions are of course closely bound up: Jesus’ personal experience, if accessible at all, is accessible only as conceptualized experience. Nevertheless, the distinction between teaching about God and experience of God remains viable and valid. The more public teaching of Jesus about God is easier to track down and has frequently been treated in modern studies of Jesus’ life and ministry. But it is the subject of Jesus’ more private experience of God on which I wish to focus attention, and that is a much more difficult, less tangible question, for obvious reasons.

Our question can be posed thus: What was it in Jesus’ own experience which he referred to God? Assuming that Jesus believed himself to be inspired by God, what does the phrase ‘inspired by God’ mean in Jesus’ case for Jesus himself? What were the evidences, the signs which convinced Jesus that the Supreme Being of the universe was working in and through him? Or to pose the issue at the same time more broadly and more precisely, What was the correlate in Jesus’ experience of his belief in God?

2.2 But is this a legitimate quest? This response may come from two sides. First, traditional, classic Christianity strongly affirms the deity of Jesus – that Jesus of Nazareth was God become man. In what sense can we speak of the God-man’s experience of God? In fact, however, traditional Christianity would not wish to press this question too far; for the classic creeds have always seen the need to affirm the humanness of Jesus as strongly as his divinity – as an adequate doctrine of incarnation requires. Thus traditional Christianity has recognized, however inadequately, that whatever else he is, Jesus is (a?) man
before God. It could hardly do otherwise in view of the tradition present in all four gospels, not to mention Hebrews, that on several occasions at least Jesus took himself off into solitude to pray to God—as we shall see (§3). He who prays to God, whoever or whatever else he is, is man. And the experience of prayer is part of the experience of God we must attempt to examine.

Even if the question of Jesus’ experience of God is posed in classical terms of Jesus’ humanity, Logos Christology (Jesus = the Word, Logos, become flesh) and the doctrine of Jesus’ two natures (divine and human) may appear to make it rather absurd. But this only happens if we forget that traditional Christology, including the two natures doctrine, had to wrestle with much the same question, though in its own terms: viz., not just, What was Jesus’ relation to God?, but also, What was Jesus’ own experience, consciousness of the divine in him?2 Furthermore, Chalcedonian Christology would presumably claim to be an abstraction from the NT material. Our own investigation of the synoptic evidence will therefore have the secondary effect of providing a check on traditional formulations.

The second criticism as to the legitimacy of pursuing these questions comes from this century. F. D. E. Schleiermacher, the ‘father of modern theology’, had argued that while Jesus was ‘like all men in virtue of the identity of human nature’, he was unique precisely because of the quality of his experience of God, his unique God-consciousness: ‘like all men . . . but distinguished from them all by the constant potency of His God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in Him’.3 Following Schleiermacher, Liberal Protestantism’s ‘quest of the historical Jesus’ often involved reconstructions and evaluations of Jesus’ messianic- and self-consciousness—an aspect of the nineteenth-century quest which brought it into greatest disrepute when the advance of gospel criticism showed the impossibility of such reconstructions and when A. Schweitzer’s well known critique of the quest pointed out that it revealed more of the psychology of nineteenth-century Christians than of Jesus.4

Since then it has become almost commonplace to deny the possibility of writing a biographical study of Jesus or of saying anything about his self-consciousness or ‘inner life’.5 Unfortunately these two things are often linked together, the denial of the former being taken as a denial of the latter. But while a biography of Jesus is indeed impossible, particularly a biography in the modern sense which traces out the hero’s growth in self-awareness and in understanding of himself and his world, that does not mean that we can say nothing at all about Jesus’ self-consciousness and spiritual experience at some
points in his ministry. On the contrary, it is my contention that we are in a position to see fairly deeply into Jesus’ experience of God at certain points, and so may begin to understand how he conceived of his relation to God. Indeed, we may well be able to apprehend something of the heart of that experience – in so far as any man can apprehend the experience of another. By this I do not mean that we can trace the development in his experience and self-consciousness. I mean simply that we can see something of the experiential basis of Jesus’ faith in God.

2.3 The importance of this investigation need hardly be stressed. For a strong tradition of Christian thought Jesus’ supreme role has been as exemplar for faith. In modern theology this was particularly strong in Liberal Protestantism, and, apart from its widespread popular appeal, has reappeared in the revived Liberalism of, for example, G. Ebeling (Jesus ‘the witness of faith’)\(^6\) and increasingly in so-called ‘secular Christianity’.\(^7\) It should also be noted that it is possible to argue for a clear strand of \textit{imitatio Christi} in the NT itself.\(^8\) For this whole tradition the question of Jesus’ own experience of God becomes important – important for our faith in God, perhaps even for the possibility of faith in God. Given that Jesus was a ‘religious genius’ at the very least – that is, his consciousness was open and attuned to wider dimensions of reality than the great bulk of other men, that he had insights into the human condition and relationships which come to few – given this, then Jesus’ understanding of his experience of these wider dimensions, as well as his response to his neighbour, may become paradigmatic and determinative for my faith and world-view.

Our quest is important also for those who reject exemplarist Christology and hold rather to a kerygmatic Christology – that is, they deny that Jesus’ chief significance is as example of faith, and stress that Christianity centres on Jesus who died and rose again; they affirm that Christian faith is not merely repeating the faith of Jesus, the man of Nazareth, but is essentially faith \textit{in} Jesus, the Lord of glory. It is important because kerygmatic theology cannot simply ignore Jesus of Nazareth as the forerunner of the kerygma, the John the Baptist of the church. Theology must always attempt to clarify afresh the relation between the gospel of Jesus and the gospel \textit{about} Jesus – that is widely recognized. But so too should be the fact that the \textit{experience} of the early believers was at the \textit{heart} of their gospel: their gospel was in large measure the expression of their \textit{experience}.\(^9\) More fundamental therefore is the question of the relation between Jesus’ experience of God and the experience of the early believers
after Jesus' death. Does Jesus' own experience of God provide a blueprint for later Christian experience? How does Paul's experience of Jesus as exalted relate to Jesus' experience of God? Unless some sort of correlation can be established between the two, and unless Jesus' experience can be shown to be not only archetypal but in some way determinative of the experience of Paul, then the old charge that Paul and not Jesus is the founder of Christianity will revive with renewed force.

2.4 How shall we pursue our quest? Two avenues immediately commend themselves. The first may be called the nineteenth-century way of Liberal Protestantism — to which we have already alluded above; the second, the twentieth-century way of eschatology. The first focusses on Jesus' consciousness of sonship; the second on his consciousness of Spirit. In chapters II and III we will explore these avenues, and, particularly in chapter II, probe the strengths and weaknesses of earlier conclusions. In chapter IV we will broaden the inquiry into an investigation of the question, Was Jesus a charismatic?

The Liberal Protestant quest after the religious consciousness of Jesus achieved what is probably its classic expression in Adolf von Harnack's famous Berlin lectures, *What is Christianity?* Earlier treatments, including especially those of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, had been too heavily dependent on John's gospel. But Harnack endeavoured to make his case on the basis primarily of the historically more defensible synoptic tradition. Moving out from Matt. 11.27 Harnack maintained:

It is 'knowledge of God' that makes the sphere of the Divine Sonship. It is in this knowledge that he came to know the sacred Being who rules heaven and earth as Father, as his Father. The consciousness which he possessed of being the Son of God is, therefore, nothing but the practical consequence of knowing God as the Father and as his Father. Rightly understood, the name of Son means nothing but the knowledge of God. Here, however, two observations are to be made: Jesus is convinced that he knows God in a way in which no one ever knew Him before, and he knows that it is his vocation to communicate this knowledge of God to others by word and deed — and with it the knowledge that men are God's children. In this consciousness he knows himself to be the Son and instituted of God, to be the Son of God, and hence he can say: My God and my Father, and into this invocation he puts something which belongs to no one but himself.10

Two points are worthy of attention here: first, the focus on sonship in terms of consciousness, as an experienced relationship; second, Harnack's emphasis on the uniqueness of this consciousness — 'the Son of God'. If these points remain valid for us today, then an important first answer to our opening question has already been given. But
much water has flowed under the bridge since Harnack delivered these opinions, and Liberal Protestantism is regarded by most modern theologians as passé. We must therefore review the synoptic evidence which provides the strongest support for Harnack's conclusions and see whether it still bears the weight Harnack put upon it.

Where do we start? The way of Liberal Protestantism often started as, or quickly became, the path leading to Jesus' 'messianic self-consciousness'. The problem for us is that this path soon disappears in a tangle of theological thicket and dogmatic undergrowth. The chief difficulty is that no one is quite sure what 'Messiah' here signifies: how much of its meaning derives from pre-Christian Judaism, how much from Jesus, and how much from developing Christian thought. The same problem and liability to frustration attends any attempt to approach Jesus from the angle of christological titles, since in fact it is highly questionable whether Jesus thought of himself in terms of titles at all.¹¹

A more promising way is indicated by A. Deissmann in his 1923 Selby Oak lectures.¹² Too little known in all the talk about old and new quests of the historical Jesus, they can be regarded as one of the last attempts of Liberal Protestantism to uncover the 'inner life of Jesus'.¹³ Moreover, they commend themselves to us by virtue of the fact that their aim and scope comes closer to that of the present study than any other work of that era — though at a much more popular level and without the concern for charismatic experience. Above all, perhaps, they provide us with the starting point for our investigation; for before examining 'the communion of Jesus with God the Father . . .', Deissmann looks first at 'the prayer-life of Jesus as the reflex of his communion with God'. This too is where we begin before moving on to the central issue of Jesus' consciousness, particularly in prayer, of God as Father.

§3. THE PRAYER LIFE OF JESUS

It has been well said that a religious man is most truly himself in his private prayers.¹⁴ What part did prayer play in Jesus' life? And can we somehow 'listen in' on Jesus' praying and so gain an immediate insight into what Jesus experienced in his prayers? The answer to the first question is clear enough; the answer to the second less certain.

3.1 The importance of prayer for Jesus becomes apparent both from his teaching on prayer and from the tradition of his own praying. The
value Jesus placed upon prayer is stressed in all four strata of the synoptic tradition. Mark 11.17 pars. – the Temple is valued precisely as a house of prayer (quoting Isa. 56.7) – a legion whose authenticity is indicated by the presence of the distinctive note of Jesus’ eschatology. Mark 11.24 – the disciples are encouraged to an astonishing boldness in prayer: ‘Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will’! From Q comes the well-known exhortation to ask, seek and knock with the confidence of children before their Father (Matt. 7.7-11/Luke 11.9-13). The two versions of the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ possibly derive from Q, but more likely belong to divergent traditions (Matt. 6.9-13; Luke 11.2-4). Also from Matthew’s special material comes the strong denunciation of the abuse of prayer (Matt. 6.5-8; cf. Mark 12.40/Luke 20.47). And to Luke’s pen we owe the preservation of the parable of the friend at midnight, the challenge to ‘unashamed prayer’ (Luke 11.5-8), as perhaps also the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18.1-5). Although some of these sayings stand in a developed tradition it can hardly be doubted that Jesus regarded prayer as of first importance.

Since Jesus encouraged his disciples so emphatically to avail themselves of prayer, it can hardly be doubted that prayer was at the basis of his own relationship with God as Jesus understood and experienced it. But here the problems start to come thick and fast, for as soon as we begin to probe into Jesus’ own practice of prayer the question marks begin to gather round the relevant material.

3.2 The lack of strong evidence. We know next to nothing about Jesus’ appreciation and experience of corporate worship. We are told that he attended the synagogue and may assume that this was his regular practice – although according to our evidence his primary purpose in doing so was to teach and proclaim his message (Mark 1.21ff. par.; 1.39 pars.; 3.1 pars.; 6.2 par.; Matt. 9.35; Luke 4.15f.; 13.10). His zeal for the functioning of the Temple as a place of prayer is on record (Mark 11.17 pars. – see above §3.1). But that is the extent of our knowledge. As to personal prayer, J. Jeremias concludes from various allusions within the gospel material that

with all probability no day in the life of Jesus passed without the three times of prayer: the morning prayer at sunrise, the afternoon prayer at the time when the afternoon sacrifice was offered in the Temple, the evening prayer at night before going to sleep.

But this deduction is by no means certain, and is put in question by the fact that so much of Jesus’ teaching was critical of traditional Jewish worship.
Even the synoptic testimony that Jesus maintained a discipline of private prayer is not so strong as it at first appears. There are nine references to Jesus praying in Luke, that is true – 3.21; 5.16; 6.12; 9.18, 28f.; 11.1; 22.41-5; 23.34, 46. But a straight literary comparison with Luke’s Markan source would seem to indicate that seven of these references have all been added by Luke. In Q there are no references, except the unique Matt. 11.25f./Luke 10.21, to which we shall return.

In Mark, apart from the Gethsemane tradition (see below §3.3), the only references to Jesus praying are 1.35 and 6.46. But 1.35 stands in what appears to be an editorial section (1.35–9). Matthew does not reproduce it. Even more striking is the fact that Luke omits the reference to prayer in his parallel (Luke 4.42); and since, as we have seen, Luke likes to include references to Jesus at prayer, it is just possible that Mark’s ‘and he prayed’ is a later addition not present in Luke’s copy of Mark. Mark 6.46 is less controversial on literary grounds, but it occurs in the context of two of the miracles most difficult for modern man (the feeding of the 5,000 and the walking on the water). Matthew simply reproduces the whole passage more or less. But again Luke leaves us somewhat puzzled, since he follows the feeding of the 5,000 with the episode of Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi, but begins it with one of his non-Markan descriptions of Jesus at prayer: ‘One day when he was praying alone in the presence of his disciples, he asked them . . .’ (Luke 9.18). Why does Luke omit the second Markan reference to Jesus’ praying, or was this fourth Lukan reference to Jesus praying prompted by Mark 6.46? At any rate, the evidence of Jesus’ prayer habits is not the soundest.

3.3 The Gethsemane tradition – Mark 14.32-42 pars. When so much else is uncertain the account of Gethsemane assumes considerable importance as the strongest synoptic testimony of Jesus’ dependence on prayer – and also as the only explicit testimony that Jesus addressed God as ‘Abba’ (see below and §4). We must therefore subject it to some scrutiny, since without it we are too much dependent on inference and secondary tradition.

Many doubts have in fact been cast on the historicity of the Gethsemane scene. For Bultmann it has ‘a thorough-going legendary character’. M. Dibelius argues that the scene presents Jesus as the ideal martyr whose sufferings correspond to those spoken of by the psalmist and so constitute proof of his messiahship. And the difficulty of resting a claim to historicity on eyewitnesses who were asleep! has often been noted.
On the other hand, a number of considerations weigh heavily in favour of the substantial historicity of the episode at the point which concerns us, viz., the prayer of Jesus:

(v.35) [Jesus] prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. (v.36) And he said, ‘Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; take this cup away from me. Yet, not what I want but what you want’.

(a) The number of independent sources which testify to it. It is probable that Mark (or his source) has drawn v.35 and v.36 from independent traditions, or, more likely, drawn in v.36 from an independent tradition when taking up the (fuller) tradition containing v.35. Verse 36 is not simply a development of v.35, as the quite different metaphors ‘hour’ and ‘cup’ show; the ‘hour’ is thematic for the construction of the whole (vv.35, 37, 41), but there has been no attempt to integrate the cup metaphor in a similar way (contrast Mark 10.38f.). Moreover, it is precisely the two versions of Jesus’ prayer which give least evidence of Markan redaction; and the appearance of abba in v.36 suggests both independence from v.35 and age (see below). Matthew follows Mark in a straightforward fashion, except that he runs the two versions of Jesus’ prayer together. But Luke very likely has access to a third independent source. In addition we must note Heb.5.7, which probably refers to this period of Jesus’ life and which again appears to be almost entirely independent.

Finally there is John 12.27: ‘Now is my soul in turmoil. And what shall I say? “Father, save me from this hour”? No, for this purpose have I come to this hour’. This is probably not independent since John seems to be denying here a possible (even likely) interpretation of the Mark 14.35 tradition – ‘Jesus prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him’ – viz., that Jesus asked to be relieved from his messianic task. Two important points emerge however: first, that John preserved the tradition of Jesus’ praying, even though he was all too conscious of its inconsistency within his overall portrayal of Jesus (cf. 11.41f.); second, that the tradition of Jesus’ prayer for deliverance from ‘the hour’ was well established in Christian circles. Both points confirm that the episode in Gethsemane was too well rooted in Christian tradition for John to ignore it.

(b) There is certainly a degree of editorial stylizing in Mark’s treatment of his source(s) and particularly in his portrayal of Jesus’ prayer thrice repeated. But the whole account can hardly be said to have originated from the martyr tradition. Verse 35 sounds more like a request for escape from martyrdom; only in the second version, v.36, do we find the martyr-like submission – ‘but it’s not what I want
that matters, only what you want'. Both Matthew and Luke seem to recognize the weakness of the v. 35 tradition – Matthew by conflating it with the v. 36 tradition, and Luke by ignoring it. John, as we noted above, seems deliberately to deny the unmyr-like interpretation of v. 35.

Nor can it be demonstrated that the account derives its central elements from the Psalms. Certainly v. 34 echoes Pss. 42.5, 11; 43.5 – 'Why are you cast down, O my soul' – but the echo might as well have been in the mind of Jesus as in the reflection of the early church. More decisive is the fact that the actual prayer itself, unlike Mark 15.34, is not framed in words from the Psalms. At its central point the origin of the Gethsemane tradition lies elsewhere.

Equally significant is the strength of Mark's language in v. 33 – particularly ἐκθαμβεῖοναί, a word which seems to denote shuddering horror. 'The Greek words (ἐκθαμβεῖοναί καὶ ἀδημονεῖ) portray the uttermost degree of boundless terror and suffering'. This language is too strong even for the psalmist, and the martyr parallel is here marked more by contrast than by agreement. Again Matthew is all too conscious of the seeming discredit to Jesus and softens Mark's horrifying picture by substituting the lighter λυπεῖον (to be sad, distressed, grave) for ἐκθαμβεῖοναί. For myself I find it difficult to attribute the origin of this record to any other source than the all too vivid scene brutally etched on the memory of even the dullard disciples. The presentation of Jesus in such emotional straits, so utterly drained of his usual strength of character and purpose, is not the sort of creation which would occur to any but the consummate artist and most skilful novelist, and Mark certainly does not deserve such acclaim.

(c) There is no denying that there is some tension between the report that the disciples slept while Jesus prayed and a claim that the disciples overheard Jesus' prayer. If it were simply a matter of treating Mark as a straightforward historical narrative there would be little problem: one could readily speculate that the closest disciples, only separated by a little (μικρόν) according to Mark, heard something of Jesus' praying before they fell asleep, or even were occasionally disturbed by his praying ('loud cries' – Heb. 5.7). But if one grants that theological motifs also shaped the narrative, then this too strengthens the case for the historicity of Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer – for the strongest evidence of theological redaction is not the praying of Jesus (see above p.18), but the sleep of the disciples: it is of a piece with the motif of the so-called 'messianic secret' which contrasts the clarity of Jesus' perception of his task with the dullness of the disciples
(cf. Mark 9.5f.). Alternatively, the report that the disciples slept could simply be a mistaken inference from the use of "\(\gamma\rho\tau\mu\omega\epsilon\iota\epsilon\)te" ('Keep awake'). Whatever the correct solution, it is evident that the objection of Goguel lacks penetration.

(d) Finally there is the use of \(\dot{\alpha}\dot{b}\beta\dot{\alpha}\) (abba) in Mark 14.36. Principally as a result of the painstaking researches of Jeremias, to whose conclusions we shall refer more fully below (§ 4), it is now generally accepted that with abba we reach back to the very speech and language of Jesus himself. Few would dissent from the statement of F. Hahn, that 'the Aramaic form of address abba can be regarded with certainty as a mark of Jesus' manner of speech'. The presence of abba in Mark 14.36, its only occurrence as such in the gospel traditions, must weigh strongly, though in itself not decisively, in favour of the age and authenticity of the prayer which contains it.

Thus the historicity of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane stands on solid ground. It follows that, despite the literary difficulties present in many of the other passages in Mark and Luke, a tradition of Jesus' private prayer which includes Gethsemane cannot be lightly dismissed or ignored. When taken in conjunction with the strong presumption concerning Jesus' own practice of prayer which follows from his teaching on prayer, we can be confident that Jesus' turning to prayer in Gethsemane was an action born of habit as much as anything. It was not the despairing cry for help of a man unaccustomed to prayer reduced to clutching at any straw. It was rather the action of one who had always found strength in prayer now desperately searching for that same strength through the usual channel.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Despite the difficulties then in the other Markan and Lukan references to Jesus' praying they probably give a fair representation of Jesus' habit. We may therefore call upon their testimony, even though with some reserve. Particularly noteworthy is the consistent emphasis in both Mark and Luke that Jesus liked to get away, to be alone (Matt. 14.23; Luke 9.18; cf. Luke 9.28f. with Mark 9.2) in his prayer, either in the desert (Mark 1.35; Luke 5.16), or on a mountain (Mark 6.46; Luke 6.12; 9.28) away from the crowds (Mark 1.35; 6.46; Luke 5.16), sometimes going off very early in the morning (Mark 1.35), sometimes spending much or the whole of the night in lonely prayer (Mark 6.46; 14.32–42; Luke 6.12). Note-worthy also is the fact that each of the three occasions recorded by Mark seems to have been a time of stress and crisis; while Luke portrays Jesus consistently resorting to prayer on occasions of great moment and decision (Luke 3.21; 6.12; 9.18, 28f.; 22.41–5). It is
therefore more than probable that prayer was Jesus' regular response to situations of crisis and decision.

§4. JESUS' SENSE OF SONSHIP – ABBA

Having established the importance of prayer for Jesus the next question to be answered is obviously, Why? Why was prayer so important to Jesus? What was his experience in prayer which made it so valuable? What was the source of Jesus' strength in his aloneness? On what power and assurance did he fall back in times of crisis? At first sight these might seem to pose a hopeless quest. Jesus has left us no writings, no personal diaries. How can we begin to approach him in his aloneness, in his inner strength? Fortunately, however, the tradition does enable us to 'listen in' and to gain an insight into Jesus' experience in prayer. And fortunately we have the benefit of what must rank as one of the more important advances in the quest of the historical Jesus in the past few decades. I refer to Jeremias's researches into the use of the word abba.

4.1 The use of abba in Jesus' prayers. Jeremias notes that all five strata in the gospel tradition agree that in prayer Jesus addressed God as 'Father' – in Jesus' speech, 'Abba', as preserved in Mark 14.36. Their testimony is also unanimous that Jesus used this address in all his prayers.47 It must be said at once that the evidence is not substantial in quantity: Mark 14.36: Q – Matt.6.9/Luke 11.2; Matt.11.25f./Luke 10.21; Luke 23.34, 46; Matt.26.42; John 11.41; 12.27f.; 17.1, 5, 11, 21, 24f. Yet, although some of the material is suspect as to whether it preserves the actual words of Jesus, particularly John of course, the fact remains that it appears in every one of the gospel traditions and that there is no contrary testimony. The one passage where Jesus does not preface his prayer with 'Abba' is the cry on the cross – 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15.34/ Matt.27.46). But here, as Jeremias has reminded us, Jesus has expressed his feelings in the words of Ps. 22.1 (see further below p.23). Thus where Jesus prayed in his own words the testimony remains unshaken that his emotions and faith found clearest expression in the word 'Abba'.48 When we 'listen in' on Jesus' prayers the distinctive word we hear is 'Abba'.

Since the abba-prayer was evidently in currency in the early churches (Rom.8.15; Gal.4.6), it could be argued that it stemmed originally from the Aramaic speaking communities – like 'Maranatha'
(I Cor. 16.22) – and that Mark 14.36 etc. is a reading back of the churches’ later practice into the Jesus-tradition. But, as we shall see below, to address God as ‘Abba’ was very unusual in Judaism, since ‘abba’ was the language of family intimacy. And if Jesus did not take the step of addressing God so intimately, which of his followers would? Moreover, it is clearly implied in Rom. 8.15 and Gal. 4.6 that *the early Christians’ experience of sonship was understood as an echo and reproduction of Jesus’ own experience*; it is precisely the Spirit of the Son who cries ‘Abba’ (see below pp. 319f.). This reinforces the testimony of the gospel traditions that the *abba*-prayer was the distinctive characteristic of Jesus’ own prayer; the alternative of postulating an unknown fountainhead of devotional influence in the early churches hardly carries as much weight.49

The significance of this address to God is clear. The OT has made us familiar with the Hebrew concept of fatherhood as implying a relationship of care and authority on the one side and of love and obedience on the other (Deut. 1.31; 8.5; 14.1; Isa. 1.2; Jer. 3.19; Mal. 1.6).50 ‘Father’ for the Hebrew denoted ‘absolute authority and tenderness’.51 Significantly, both of these aspects find clear expression in the Gethsemane prayer. This, together with his more negative attitude to traditional Jewish worship, strongly suggests that Jesus’ calling on God as ‘Father’ was *the language of experience rather than a formal address*. It was his experience of God which found expression in the *abba*-prayer. It was because he found God in the experience of a love and authority which constrained him as from beyond that he addressed God as ‘Father’.52

But can we say more than that? Was Jesus’ experience of God as Father distinctive within contemporary Judaism? Was it indeed something unique – denoting a unique relationship between Jesus and God? These questions are posed by Jeremias’s study, and we must pursue them closely since important corollaries obviously hang upon their answer.

4.2 *Was Jesus’ use of abba distinctive within contemporary Judaism?* Jeremias’s thorough investigations have highlighted two points of immediate relevance.53 First, *abba* was in common currency at the time of Jesus as a family word – a word which children, including tiny children, used to address their fathers. It was thus an address of courtesy and respect; but much more, it was the expression of warm intimacy and trust. Second, nowhere in Judaism is *abba* used by an individual in prayer to God:
In the literature of Palestinian Judaism no evidence has yet been found of 'my Father' being used by an individual as an address to God . . . there is no instance of the use of 'Abbā as an address to God in all the extensive prayer-literature of Judaism, whether in liturgical or in private prayers.

Jeremias sums up this 'fact of fundamental importance':

We do not have a single example of God being addressed as 'Abbā in Judaism, but Jesus always addressed God in this way in his prayers.54

If Jeremias is right then we have to conclude that Jesus' abba-prayer expressed an unusual and unprecedented sense of intimacy with God.

This conclusion, however, does have to be qualified at two points. First, it is not in fact true that we have no examples of a Jew saying 'my Father' to God. I am thinking here particularly of Ecclus. (Ben Sira) 23.1, 4: that the Greek πάρεπ is like the πάρεπ of Jesus' prayers (except Mark 14.36) and denotes a sense of intimate trust, is strongly suggested by Ecclus. (Ben Sira) 51.10.55 We cannot therefore maintain that Jesus' use of abba was unprecedented. Of course, 'Abba' was not simply an occasional usage by Jesus, rather, so far as we can tell, his regular way of speaking to God in prayer. All we can say then is that when we compare the literature available to us, Jesus' regular approach to God as 'Abba' appears to be unusual for his day.

Second, H. Conzelmann points out that abba 'need not have had a connotation of familiarity'.56 This is quite true. Jeremias does note that abba was used in the pre-Christian period as a respectful address to old men. But this usage is clearly an extension of the family usage.57 The more regular and typical use of abba at the time of Jesus was within the family and did express family intimacy. Obviously it was precisely because of this note of intimacy that abba was so little used by Jesus' contemporaries in addressing God.58 More important, this is the note which is present in the uses of abba in the NT (Mark 14.36; Rom.8.15; Gal.4.6), as in Matt.11.25ff.; Luke 23.46. In all these cases 'Abba/Father' expresses more than respect – viz., childlike confidence and obedience. It is significant that the only occasion we know of where Jesus did not use abba in prayer to God was in his cry of dereliction on the cross (Mark 15.34) – in his awful experience of abandonment by God he could not cry 'Abba'.59 It is difficult therefore to escape the conclusion that Jesus said 'Abba' to God for precisely the same reason that (most of) his contemporaries refrained from its use in prayer – viz., because it expressed his attitude to God as Father, his experience of God as one of unusual intimacy.60

It would appear then that Jeremias has pressed his argument too far. But nevertheless much of value remains from his researches. In
particular, we are not being over bold if we conclude that Jesus’ use of abba enables us to see into the heart of his relationship with God as he understood it. The divine reality he experienced in those moments of naked aloneness was God as Father. This experience was so vital and creative that it had to find expression in an address to God which would have sounded shockingly familiar to the great majority of his contemporaries. We may presume that this language alone could express the unusual intimacy he found in prayer – the intimacy, trust and obedience of a child with his father.

4.3 Does Jesus’ use of ‘Abba’ imply a unique sense of sonship? Did Jesus think of his sense of sonship as something all might enjoy? Did he think of the relationship with God which it implied as one already shared by all men, if only they realized it? The testimony of the gospel tradition is fairly clear cut at this point. Jesus certainly taught his disciples to pray in the same way (Luke 11.2), but it was precisely his disciples that he so taught. The passages in question all seem to be addressed to his followers; they all speak in one way or another of the trust and obedience of disciples; that is, they are addressed to those who have already begun to recognize, to trust and obey God as Father. This conclusion cannot be regarded as certain, for the simple reason that the relevant material has come to us through the early churches, a process which may have filtered out more universalistic teaching, or which may have set more generalized statements (Matt. 5.45?) within a context of particular teaching to disciples. Consequently, some have argued that Jesus said ‘your Father’ to all his hearers. On the other hand, the dominance of the eschatological note in Jesus’ preaching (see below ch. III) and what Bultmann calls the ‘either-or’ of his challenge, does imply that Jesus envisaged something new in God’s relations with men and that the eschatological relationship into which he called men can not be separated from their response of repentance and commitment (cf. e.g. Matt. 3.7–12/Luke 3.7–9, 16f.; Mark 10.23b, 25; Matt. 7.13f.; Luke 9.60a, 62; 14.26). And since Jesus’ teaching on divine fatherhood can hardly be isolated from this ‘either-or’, we should hesitate before blunting the latter’s sharpness by defining the former in terms of a generalized concept of divine benevolence. The association of ‘fatherhood’ with ‘discipleship’ implied in the passages cited above in n. 61 therefore probably belongs to the original teaching of Jesus.67

The question then becomes one of the relation between Jesus and his disciples. Granted that Jesus encouraged his disciples to address God as ‘Abba’, did he think that they might enjoy precisely the same
relationship with God as he did himself, or did he regard his own relationship as something unique? Bornkamm argues for the latter alternative:

Although we find numerous passages where Jesus says ‘My Father (in heaven)’ and ‘thy Father’ or ‘your Father’, there is nowhere a passage where he himself joins with his disciples in an ‘Our Father’. We have no reason to doubt that this usage was truly characteristic for Jesus himself, and certainly as an expression of his mission.68

On the other hand, we know from Rom.8.15 and Gal.4.6 that Jesus did not keep the ‘Abba’ form of address to himself, but rather encouraged his disciples to use it (Luke 11.2).69 Consequently we must ask, Did Jesus never join with his disciples in corporate prayer, using an ‘Abba’ form like the ‘Lord’s prayer’? It is a question which our sources do not permit us to answer. But certain considerations counsel against giving it too much weight, whatever the answer.

(1) If it was only his disciples that Jesus encouraged to pray ‘Abba’, then the implication is that their use of abba was somehow dependent on their relationship with Jesus, that their ‘Abba’ was derivative from Jesus’ ‘Abba’.

(2) We should not assume too quickly that ‘the basic difference between “my Father” and “your Father” is a matter of the Christological style of the community’ (Conzelmann). For the community was quite able to retain the christological distance between Jesus and his followers without removing any element in the tradition which set Jesus and his disciples on the same level. Thus, in particular, the tradition in which the earthly Jesus calls disciples ‘brother’ (Mark 3.34f. pars.) caused them no difficulty or embarrassment, even though elsewhere it is only the exalted one who so speaks (Matt.25.40; 28.10; John 20.17). So too Rom.8.15 and Gal.4.6 both heighten and reduce the christological distance between Jesus and Christians in a striking way. On the one hand, there is a recognition that their sonship depends on and derives from Jesus’ sonship (the Spirit of the Son); yet, at the same time, the Spirit who cries ‘Abba’ makes the believer not just a son (at one remove from Jesus as it were) but a fellow-heir with Christ (Rom.8.17; Gal.4.7). In fact, deliberate christological distancing at this point only really becomes evident in John’s gospel with the fourth evangelist’s reservation of ἑιδὴς (son) for Jesus alone: there are many ‘children of God’ (τέκνα Θεοῦ – John 1.12; I John 3.1f., 10; 5.2), but only one ‘Son of God’ (ὑιός Θεοῦ).

(3) If we accept the tradition that Jesus chose an inner circle of twelve disciples during his ministry, as seems most probable,70 then the significance lies in the fact that he chose twelve and not just eleven.
Jesus himself was not the twelfth; the circle was complete without him. That is to say, the Israel of the end-time (cf. Matt. 19.28b) was represented not by himself plus eleven others, but by the twelve as such. Jesus' own role was something else and distinctive.

There are grounds therefore for holding that Jesus was conscious of some degree of distinctiveness in his relation with God over against that of his disciples, and that the 'my Father', 'your Father' distinction is a reflection of that consciousness as it came to expression in Jesus' teaching, rather than something later imposed on the Jesus-tradition. Here is a conclusion of great importance, even though the uncertainties of the synoptic tradition mean that it can only be put forward tentatively.

4.4 Conclusion. In short, we can say with some confidence that Jesus experienced an intimate relation of sonship in prayer: he found God characteristically to be 'Father'; and this sense of God was so real, so loving, so compelling, that whenever he turned to God it was the cry 'Abba' that came most naturally to his lips. We can also say, though with less confidence, that Jesus himself thought or sensed this relationship with God to be something distinctive - not unique, but distinctive: he encouraged his disciples to pray in the same way, but even then he seems to have thought of their relationship as somehow dependent on his own, as somehow a consequence of his own. Whether this last conclusion has any stronger backing in the synoptic traditions is the next question to be investigated.

§5. JESUS' SENSE OF SONSHIP - MATT. 11.27(?) et al.

A first answer appears to be emerging to our initial question: What was it in Jesus' experience that he referred to God? What was the correlate in his experience of his belief in God? The answer can be simply expressed - a sense of sonship - the sense that God cared for him as an individual with a fatherly care, the sense that he had a filial duty to God which no personal wishes could set aside (Mark 14.36), the sense of something distinctive in this relationship. There is other relevant evidence which, while it would not stand on its own, may possibly serve to buttress this conclusion - the synoptic testimony that Jesus spoke of himself as God's son (or should we say God's Son?).

5.1 The view of the evangelists. It is quite clear that for the writers of the gospels Jesus' sense of sonship was unclouded and unique: he
knew himself to be the Son (of God) and his assurance of sonship was fundamental to his mission. This comes out most explicitly in the narratives of Jesus’ experience at Jordan (Mark 1.9–11 pars.) and in the Q account of Jesus’ temptations (Matt. 4.1–11/Luke 4.1–13). It is still widely accepted that there is a deliberate allusion to Ps. 2.7 in the Markan report of the voice from heaven (Mark 1.11); 72 and it is quite possible that the original Lukan text quoted only Ps. 2.7; ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you’. 73 The Synoptics are thus in no doubt that Jesus was hailed as God’s Son at Jordan. Was it the strength of divine approval and commissioning which sent Jesus forth to his ministry? This is certainly one of the intended implications of the temptation narrative, since two of the tests focus primarily on Jesus’ conviction of sonship – ‘If you are God’s son . . . ’ (Matt. 4.3, 6/Luke 4.3, 9). 74 The evangelists therefore intend their readers to understand that Jesus’ consciousness of divine sonship was a fundamental factor in his decision to move out into the public eye.

In addition we may recall the Lukan account of Jesus’ boyhood visit to the Temple (Luke 2.41–51), 75 and the transfiguration episode (Mark 9.2–8 pars.). In the former we are clearly intended to understand that Jesus’ sense of sonship was already deep-rooted and mature prior to Jordan. And in the latter, Jesus is again hailed as ‘my beloved Son’ (Mark 9.7 pars.). 76 As for the Fourth Gospel we need refer only to John 5.19–26; 8.35f.; 10.36; 14.13; 17.1, where Jesus speaks of himself openly and without reserve as ‘the Son’.

The question inevitably arises: How justified historically are these reports? Did Jesus think of himself as the Son? Was this consciousness fundamental to his sense of mission? Did he speak of himself as ‘the Son’? The best way to answer these questions is to scrutinize the synoptic logia in which Jesus speaks of himself as God’s son. 77 If they give an affirmative answer we need look no further. If they give a negative answer we are thrust back upon the abba material and must be content with the conclusions already drawn. The passages in question are Matt. 11.25–7/Luke 10.21–2; Mark 13.32; Mark 12.6; Luke 22.29.

5.2 Matt. 11.27 is a verse of particular importance. It was the passage out of which Harnack drew the exposition cited above (p. 14), and has regularly offered itself as the corner stone for other attempts to penetrate back to Jesus’ self-consciousness. Others have found it to be more a stumbling block!

Everything is entrusted (παρεδόθη) to me by my Father; and no one knows (ἐγνώσκει) the Son except the Father,
and no one knows (ἐπιγνώσκει) the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (ἀποκαλύψαι) (NEB). 78

Is this an authentic word of Jesus, and if so does it give us an insight into Jesus’ self-awareness in his standing towards God?

It must be said at once that the weight of opinion among the front-runners in NT studies over the past sixty years or more has come down against finding here the ĵpissima verba of Jesus. 79 The three principal reasons are as follows.

(a) The whole saying is untypical of the synoptic material and has a distinctively Johannine ring; it therefore shares the presumption of post-Easter theological development which inevitably attaches to the Johannine discourses. 80 In particular,

(b) the idea of mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son together with the ἀποκαλύψαι marks v. 27 as a ‘Hellenistic Revelation saying’. 81

‘The function of the Son as the Revealer rests clearly on the fact that the Father recognizes him and that he therefore knows the Father. But that is an idea of Hellenistic mysticism quite foreign to Judaism’. 82

In v. 27 ‘Jesus speaks as a gnostic redeemer’. 83

(c) The absoluteness and exclusiveness of the relation here postulated between God and Jesus is unprecedented in the Synoptic Gospels and smacks of later christological development.

Here indeed a Christological narrowing has obviously taken place. Originally every one could say ‘Father’, now access to the Father is tied to Jesus. 84

Similarly the claim to ‘unrestricted authority’ in v. 27a, when compared with Mark 13.32 and Matt. 28.18, must belong to a relatively late layer of tradition. 85

(a) The comparison with John is a two-edged argument. For it is most unlikely that a Q logion derives from Johannine theology, which, in the only (written) form we know, is at least thirty years later than Q. If there is any influence between the two, direct or indirect, and the ‘Johannine’ nature of the saying makes this very likely, then the direction of influence is almost certainly from the Q saying to John. That is to say, the Johannine Father–Son theology is probably developed from a small block of early sayings tradition which Q has preserved in part at least. 86 And this is wholly to be expected; unless John’s portrayal of Jesus is to be regarded as totally the creation of an early prophet and theologian, without any regard to actual words and deeds of the man from Nazareth – and the ‘Johannine school’ itself repudiates the suggestion (John 1.14; 19.35; I John 1.1–3) – then it is surely most natural to explain much at least
of the Fourth Gospel’s discourses as the end product of lengthy reflection on original sayings of Jesus. The problem of why only two sayings are preserved (in Q and Mark 13.32) is thus open to other solutions than that of late origin.

(b) The question of formal and verbal parallels is disputed. Long ago G. Dalman noted that the two clauses referring to the mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son ‘really constitute a detailed Oriental mode of expressing the reciprocity of intimate understanding’. More recently the doyen of Aramaic specialists among NT scholars has repeated Dalman’s opinion: the chiastic parallelism of the two lines ‘is simply an oriental periphrasis for a mutual relationship: only father and son really know each other’. As to the actual terminology, knowledge of God is a common theme in the OT, and W. D. Davies has drawn particular attention to passages in the Dead Sea Scrolls where ‘insight into the eschaton and intimate “knowledge” of God are conjoined’ in a manner parallel to Matt. 11.25ff. and distinct from Hellenistic gnosis. The parallels Davies cites, however, are not very close. More convincing are those in Jewish Wisdom literature, most recently noted by F. Christ and M. J. Suggs, particularly Wisd. 2.10–20, where it is said of the righteous man:

He claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord.

and boasts of having God for his father (cf. Ecclus. 4.10; 51.10).

The most striking feature of v. 27 in this context is the emphasis on the unknowability of the Son in line 2. This lacks any real parallel in gnostic literature and indeed is offensive to gnostic thought, which would stress rather knowledge of the Son. The closest parallels are again to be found in Wisdom literature (Job 28.1–28; Ecclus. 1.6, 8; Bar. 3.15–32; cf. 1 Cor. 2.11), but without the conciseness of v. 27. Indeed, the conciseness of the saying, like those preserved in the Sermon on the Mount as compared with Wisdom and rabbinic parallels, could perhaps be regarded as a mark of Jesus’ own style.

In addition, the more firmly Matt. 11.27 belongs to its context the stronger the Wisdom associations become. In particular, the parallel between Matt. 11.25–30 and Ecclus. (Ben Sira) 51 has been familiar since Norden’s work. Verses 28–30 certainly have all the marks of a Wisdom saying and translate easily into Aramaic. But the absence of these verses from the Lukan parallel and their reappearance as an isolated saying in the Gospel of Thomas (logion 90) puts the original unity of vv. 25–30 in doubt, and so reduces the support which forward
context might afford to the view that Wisdom provides the background of v. 27. The link is firmer between v. 27 and vv. 25ff., where again the Wisdom background and Aramaic origin are clear enough. Indeed, it would be difficult to argue for the independence in origin of vv. 25ff. and v. 27, since subject matter is so closely connected, and structure is precisely parallel — four lines in both cases, each with the two middle lines in antithetic parallelism contrasting hiddenness with revelation, and each with an emphatic last line. There are good grounds therefore for Jeremias’s judgment that 'language, style and structure thus clearly assign the saying to a Semitic-speaking milieu'.

The arguments from religionsgeschichtliche parallels are therefore indecisive. The later parallels in Hermetic and gnostic writings provide no proof for the lateness of 11.27’s formulation. Nor do the pre-Christian parallels in Wisdom literature serve to establish its early date. Wisdom speculation appears to have provided a borderland between Judaism and other near Eastern and Hellenistic cultures from the first, where hellenizing and gnosticizing influences were most active. In such a situation it is almost impossible to determine by means of form-criticism the point of origin of such a passage as Matt. 11.27 — as indeed 11.25–30 itself most clearly demonstrates, with its closest links both with pre-Christian Jewish Wisdom literature on the one side and with the Gospel of Thomas on the other.

Granted then that here we have a saying which emerges from Jewish Wisdom speculation, the question becomes, Could Jesus have been influenced by such reflection? Was Jesus familiar with that borderland of Jewish thought where Hellenistic influences were most rife? The strongest considerations in favour of an affirmative answer are these: (1) v. 27 hangs together with v. 25 which can be assigned to Jesus with greater assurance (abba-prayer, straightforward Jewish character, positive use of προφάνειας (babe, infant), lack of christological claim). (2) Jesus was certainly influenced by the more popular type of Jewish wisdom, and was probably not unaware of its more Hellenistically developed variations. Thus, in particular, we can detect the influence of Ecclus. (Ben Sira) in at least one other undisputed passage where Jesus teaches his disciples in intimate fashion — Matt. 6.12 (Ecclus. 28.2); also Matt. 6.13 (Ecclus. 23.1; 33.1). (3) Perhaps also, as already suggested, the conciseness of the saying could be regarded as a mark of Jesus’ own style. Whether these considerations are strong enough to allow us to make a firm claim for the authenticity of the saying as a word of Jesus is another question. The religionsgeschichtliche and formal criteria simply show that it is by no
means impossible for Jesus to have so spoken; but it must be recognized that, in the absence of better parallels within the Jesus-tradition, the balance of probability tips only in favour of the possibility of authenticity and leaves the issue open.

(c) The third reason for denying Matt. 11.27's authenticity as a word of Jesus has probably been the most decisive in the history of the debate. A claim to 'unrestricted authority' (v. 27a) and to unique sonship (the Son) is more readily recognizable in the faith of post-Easter Christianity than on the lips of the pre-Easter Jesus. But this antithesis can be posed much too sharply.

In the first place, v. 27a does not constitute a claim to 'unrestricted authority'. The 'all things' (πάντα) which the Father has delivered to Jesus can be nothing other than 'these things' (ταῦτα) which the Father has hidden from the learned and wise (v. 25 - the 'twin' stanza). That is, 'all things' must refer to knowledge, not to power and authority. This is implied also by the παραδίδοναι (a technical term for the transmission of doctrine, knowledge, holy lore) and the talk of ἐπηγινώσκειν and ἀποκαλύφαι in the rest of v. 27. The 'all things' delivered to Jesus are therefore the 'mystery of revelation', and the closer parallel is the 'all things' of Mark 4.11 rather than the 'all authority' of Matt. 28.18. In short, according to Matt. 11.27a, Jesus claims to have received a divinely given understanding of God, which is the basis of his whole understanding of his mission.

Secondly, we should take note of Suggs's observation that in Matt. 11.25-7 Jesus presents himself as 'the mediator of revelation', the envoy of Wisdom, not as Wisdom itself (cf. Matt. 11.19/Luke 7.34f.; Luke 11.49ff.). Only with the addition of vv. 28-30 is Jesus actually identified with Wisdom. While it is reasonable to assume that the identification of Jesus with Wisdom was first made by the post-Easter community (by Paul at Corinth and Matthew in Syria?), there are no substantial grounds for denying that Jesus saw himself in the former role. The charge that Matt. 11.27 represents Jesus as making a claim to 'unrestricted authority' is therefore unfounded. The relatively more modest claim to being a recipient of divine revelation, specially appointed as a channel of divine Wisdom, is certainly consistent with what we know of the historical Jesus in his proclamation of God's rule and in his teaching on the law (see below §§ 7, 8, 13).

Thirdly, Hahn's characterization of Matt. 11.27 as a 'Christological narrowing' has also to be questioned. Once it is recognized that Jesus addressed God as 'Abba', the expression of an unusual personal intimacy with the God above all gods, then it follows as an
almost inevitable consequence that Jesus thought of himself as son, God's son. R. H. Fuller's criticism of Hahn is therefore justified: 'Matt. 11.27 is not a "christological contraction", but an explicit expression of the implicit Christology of Jesus' own use of Abba'.

However, even with these qualifications, the key question still remains: whether Jesus actually spoke of himself as 'the Son' in such an absolute and exclusive manner. Jeremias has attempted to soften the sharpness of this question by elaborating a further suggestion of Dalman: he argues that the definite articles with 'son' and 'father' have to be understood semitically in a generic sense. The middle couplet he thinks should be translated:

> Only a father knows his son
> and only a son knows his father.

Thus for Jeremias, what we have originally is 'a quite general statement about human experience: only a father and a son really know each other'. But can one so readily abstract the middle couplet from v. 27 and argue for its authenticity independently of the other two lines? The whole verse obviously follows from vv. 25f. and cannot be so easily dissected. Furthermore, the saying which Jeremias claims to uncover is hardly memorable and is only of doubtful truth as a general proverb. No! v. 27 almost certainly stands or falls as a whole. And if Jesus or the early church did incorporate such a proverb in the saying of v. 27, then the first and last of the four lines make it quite plain that the middle couplet applies the proverb to Jesus' own relationship with the Father; that is, the verse as a whole speaks only of Jesus' sonship. The exclusiveness and absoluteness of the claim remains!

The question of the authenticity of Matt. 11.27 thus reduces itself finally to the key question: Could Jesus have spoken of his relationship with God in such an absolute and exclusive manner? The answer cannot be a clear cut 'Yes', since the saying is itself unique among synoptic logia and has its closest parallels in post-Easter Christology. But neither can it be an unequivocal 'No'. For we have already noted the sense of distinctiveness which seems to have characterized Jesus' abba-prayer. The presence of the abba-prayer in vv. 25f. and the 'by my Father' in v. 27a could quite well indicate that the language of v. 27 arises directly out of Jesus' experience of God as Father, and that the father-son references in the middle couplet carry the same note of distinctiveness which Jesus felt marked out his relationship with God. This in turn makes it more plausible that the absoluteness of the claim made in the opening clause of v. 27
and the exclusiveness of the claim made in the final clause of v.27 is an authentic echo of Jesus' teaching. But great uncertainty remains, and I can do no more than leave the reader to decide for himself. The alternatives may be posed thus: In these words do we hear Jesus himself boldly elaborating his sense of distinctive intimacy with the Father and his consciousness of commission in a moment of high spiritual exaltation (cf. Luke 10.18, 21)? Or is the elaboration the work of the post-Easter churches in reflective, or inspired or more dogmatic mood?

(d) Finally, I should perhaps make two brief comments on the thesis that the saying first originated in a post-Easter community and demonstrates the merging of Wisdom and apocalyptic motifs in their identification of Jesus as the Son of Man.¹¹⁹

First, the title ‘Son’ in v.27 is not the content of the revelation, but rather its presupposition. It is the Son who reveals the Father, who reveals, if Hoffmann is right, the Son’s dignity as Son of Man. This implies that the thought of Jesus’ sonship arises immediately as a corollary to Jesus’ addressing God as ‘Abba’ (vv. 25f.); or that Jesus’ sonship is already taken for granted by the earliest community. But the Father-Son motif did not have much currency in the early church’s tradition of Jesus’ sayings – hence the uniqueness of Matt. 11.27 within the synoptic tradition; the great elaboration of the Father-Son motif only appears at a later date.¹²⁰ This suggests that it did not have the force of new revelation or dominant category of thought in the earliest community, unlike ‘the Son of Man’ and ‘Messiah’. The other possibility therefore re-emerges that Jesus’ sonship was an aspect of Jesus’ own teaching, which lay fallow for quite some time in the early Christian communities.

Second, the thesis of post-Easter origin fails to explain why line 2 should feature as part of the interpretation of vv. 25f. – ‘No one knows the Son except the Father’. This stresses the unknowability of the Son, not a revelation about him. Whereas the earliest communities were surely more conscious of their special election as recipients of new revelation about Jesus – his Messiahship, perhaps already his Lordship (cf. I Cor.16.22), and his Son of Man dignity (Hoffmann).¹²¹ The fact that v.27 speaks more of revelation concerning the Father than revelation concerning the Son, again suggests a pre-Easter rather more than a post-Easter origin for the saying.¹²²

To sum up: can we use Matt.11.27 as evidence of Jesus’ self-understanding? Some will dismiss it at once as post-Easter speculation. Others will feel that the distance between the self-consciousness of Jesus’ abba-prayer and that of Matt. 11.27 does not extend to the
other side of Easter. For myself I confess that I remain undecided. It is certainly not impossible that Jesus should have said these words, but the evidence is such that we are left only with the possibility. Their testimony therefore should not be wholly ignored, but it would be foolish to build anything of importance upon it. We may summarize that testimony by comparing it with our earlier findings.

(1) Jesus prayed to God as Father. Here he claims to know God. In the Hebrew tradition knowledge in the context of personal relationship ‘does not denote the contemplative knowledge of the wise, but a perceiving which at the same time always includes an interior relation to the one known’. In particular, in the God-man relationship it describes ‘the responsive love and trustful surrender awakened by the unmerited love of God’. Here then is the same I-Thou relationship which is also denoted by abba. Jesus knows God with the warmth and intimacy of a son with his father. For Jesus, to know God is to know him as Father.

(2) Jesus may well have felt his relationship with God to be something distinctive. In Matt. 11.27 the note of distinctiveness becomes the note of uniqueness (contrast n. 71 above): Jesus claims to have been so specially set apart by God that he can speak of ‘all things’ having been handed over to him by God; he has been made a unique recipient of divine revelation and channel of divine Wisdom. Even more striking, his knowledge of God is unique: he knows God as no man ever has; the mutual relation he experiences with God is without parallel. At the same time, that unique knowledge of God can be shared by others – ‘anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’ (11.27d) – just as others (his disciples) can address God as ‘Abba’.

(3) In saying ‘Abba’ Jesus did not seek to escape reality but rather expressed his willingness to undergo a reality all too horrible (Mark 14.36). So in Matt. 11.27, knowledge of God expresses not mystical piety but acceptance of mission (11.27d) – a mission which contained the note of judgment as well as of gospel (11.25f.).

5.3 Mark 13.32; 12.6; Luke 22.29f. Nothing can compensate for the loss of Matt. 11.27 from among the front rank witnesses to Jesus’ experience of God. These three passages are the only others which come into serious reckoning as potential witnesses to Jesus’ self-consciousness of sonship and deserve some attention.

(a) Mark 13.32 is the nearest parallel to Matt. 11.27 – ‘Of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father’. Although an isolated saying, it belongs clearly to an apocalyptic context and must derive either from Jesus’
ministry or from the early church. The difficulty with the latter alternative is this: the earlier we postulate its origin the less need was there to attribute ignorance to Jesus, since Jesus’ generation did not die out for some decades (cf. Mark 13.30); but the later we postulate its origin, to explain the delay of the parousia, the more exalted Jesus had become in the thought of the Christian communities and the less likely that the ascription of ignorance to Jesus would be permitted (as I Cor. 12.3 and Luke’s [perhaps also Matthew’s] omission of the whole verse make plain). On the other hand, as C. K. Barrett points out, this sort of consideration can defend at most the substance, and in no way the formulation of the verse. Even if the substance of the verse is genuine ... the description of Jesus by the most honorific title available would be precisely the sort of compensation that tradition would introduce.124

In other words, the verse at most expresses Jesus’ confidence in God as Father for the future, but beyond that may confess more to ignorance of God’s designs than to possession of special revelation.125

(b) Mark 12.6. There is a widespread hesitation about accepting Mark 12.1–9 as a parable of Jesus – justifiably, because of its plainly allegorical character.126 Yet in its synoptic form it is not like the later church allegories, since the allegory does not extend to all the details; and to deny that Jesus told parables containing allegorical elements is to force through a dogmatic definition of parable in the face of strong evidence to the contrary (particularly Mark 4.3–8).127 After all, Isaiah’s vineyard (Isa. 5), the most likely source of inspiration for the Mark 12 parable, is itself an allegory.128 Likewise the threat of forfeiture and judgment is simply a variant form of Jesus’ warnings against rejecting his message (cf. Matt. 12.41f./Luke 11.31f.; Luke 13.6–9) and cannot be used as an argument to deny the parable to Jesus.129 The chief problem lies in the reference to the ‘beloved son’ (υἱὸν ἀγαπητὸν – Mark 12.6) and his death, since the whole reads so much like the early church’s representation of salvation-history. However, the simpler version of the parable in the Gospel of Thomas (logion 65) and the absence of ἀγαπητὸν in the variant version of Matthew (21.37) strongly suggest that an original parable of Jesus has been elaborated to some extent by the early church.130 Moreover, there is good evidence both that Jesus saw himself standing in the prophetic line and that he expected a violent death.131 It thus becomes quite likely that Jesus told this parable referring to his own mission under the allegorical figure of the owner’s son.132 In which case Mark 12.6 testifies to the unforced way in which Jesus thought of himself as God’s son. On the other hand, the passage says nothing about
Jesus' 'messianic self-consciousness', and nothing can be made of the
distinction between servants (prophets) and son, since the contrast
can be fully explained from the dramatic climax of the parable.\textsuperscript{133}

(c) Luke 22.29f. - 'As my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so
do I appoint for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my
kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'
These may very well be the closing words of Q (\textsuperscript{/Matt. 19.28}) - the
collection of sayings being rounded off with Jesus' testamentary
disposition of his inheritance.\textsuperscript{134} That Matt. 19.28a is an embellished
form of the saying is indicated by the repetition of the Matthean
catchword 'follow' (\textit{ἀκολουθεῖν}),\textsuperscript{135} the Hellenistic word 'regeneration'
(\textit{παλιγγενεσία}) and perhaps 'the Son of Man' formulation instead
of Luke's 'kingdom'.\textsuperscript{136} It is probable therefore that Luke does pre-
serve the earlier Q form. It is also quite likely that Q has preserved
here an authentic word of Jesus. The archaic character of the saying
has often been noted;\textsuperscript{137} and the idea of kingdom expressed in vv.
29f. coheres very closely with the 'vow of abstinence' of Mark 14.25,
a text whose claim to be regarded as the very words of Jesus must be
highly ranked.\textsuperscript{138} Since Jesus taught his disciples to share in some
sense in his '\textit{abba}-relationship' with God, sent them forth to partici-
pate in his mission of proclaiming the kingdom to Israel (see below
ch.IV, n.55), and regarded his table fellowship as a foretaste of the
life of the kingdom, the sentiments of Luke 22.29f. become readily
comprehensible within the context of the closing period of Jesus'
ministry. The explicit association of sonship ('my Father') and king-
dom is unparalleled in the Synoptics, but in the context of a testa-
mentary disposition is quite natural; nor can it be attributed to the
eyarly communities, since there the motif of sonship-inheritance-king-
dom assumes a standard pattern which is close to but not quite the
same as the thought here (Rom.8.17; I Cor.6.gf.; Gal.4.7; 5.21).
We may also note that Mark 10.33ff. provides a very plausible
situation within the life of Jesus. Indeed it is quite probable that the
request of James and John was prompted by some such saying as
Luke 22.29f. If this is so, then Luke 22.29f. provides some confirma-
tion that Jesus thought and occasionally spoke of God as his Father.
Once again the thought is of a distinctive (though not necessarily
unique) relation between God and Jesus (the 'inheritance' of the
kingdom), but also of a relation which Jesus could 'pass on' to his
disciples.

There are other passages where Jesus speaks of God as his Father,
but they cannot be quoted with much confidence since there has been
a clear tendency to introduce the title 'Father' into the sayings of
Jesus.\(^{139}\) Possibly Matt. 16.17; 18.35; 25.34 deserve consideration.\(^{140}\) Mark 8.38 is also a possible claimant, but Luke 12.8f. is probably the more original formulation,\(^{141}\) and there is no talk of ‘Father’ in the latter. Any conclusion therefore must rest upon the passages examined above in so far as they supplement the abba material treated earlier.

§6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 We began our study of Jesus’ experience of God by quoting Harnack’s exposition of Matt. 11.27. It is now clear that so far as firm conclusions are concerned we are both better off than Harnack and worse off at the same time. We are better off, because our knowledge of Jesus’ prayer-life and our appreciation of his abba-prayer shows us more clearly than Harnack saw that Jesus’ sonship was a consciousness of sonship, an experienced relationship. We are worse off, as Christian theologians, because the evidence no longer enables us to assert the uniqueness of Jesus’ sense of sonship with any certainty.\(^{142}\) In addition, Harnack seemed to use ‘Son of God’ in a more titular sense than is justified by the synoptic evidence – even including Matt. 11.27. And in summarizing Jesus’ teaching as ‘God is the Father of all men’, he failed to appreciate the close link which Jesus seems to have maintained between sonship and discipleship (cf. Rom. 8.14).

Nevertheless, even when all that is said, it must be acknowledged that Harnack’s presentation of Jesus was more soundly based and of more lasting worth than is frequently recognized. The reaction against Liberal Protestantism which has so marked twentieth-century theology has let slip one of its most valuable insights. The element in Jesus’ teaching, that God is Father, has of course been retained,\(^{143}\) but at too rational, too cerebral a level. The existential dimension has been largely lost sight of, and with it the warmth and intimacy of Jesus’ own devotion and obedience. Not the least importance of Jeremias’s work has been to confirm this insight of Liberal Protestantism into the character of Jesus and to establish its foundations at a far deeper level. For the sake of clarity I will elaborate the most important points.

6.2 For Jesus prayer was something of first importance. It was the well from which he drew his strength and conviction. This was primarily because in prayer he was most conscious of God’s care and authority, of God as Father – his Father. He occasionally gave
expression to this consciousness of sonship. But only to his disciples was it expressed in any explicit way. With others, in the one case in point (Mark 12.6), the self expression was veiled, in parable form.

6.3 This fatherly love and authority Jesus believed was focussed upon him in a particular way, for Jesus seems to have thought of himself as God’s son in a distinctive sense. Though he taught his disciples also to address God as ‘Abba’, he probably saw their sonship as somehow dependent on his own: the distinctive nature of the ‘my Father’ was retained even when he encouraged others to say ‘our Father’. This sense of a distinctiveness in his relation to God, in which nevertheless his disciples could participate, comes to expression also in Luke 22.29, and most (too?) strongly in Matt. 11.27.

6.4 Jesus’ sense of being God’s son was an existential conviction, not merely an intellectual belief. He experienced a relation of sonship – felt such an intimacy with God, such an approval by God, dependence on God, responsibility to God, that the only words adequate to express it were ‘Father’ and ‘son’. The crystallization of this awareness quite possibly goes back to his experience at Jordan, if not before (see further below §10), although the evidence certainly does not permit us to trace a psychological development in Jesus. The point to be underlined is that ‘son’ here expresses an experienced relationship, an existential relationship, not a metaphysical relationship as such. Although it is of course possible to postulate a metaphysical relationship lying behind Jesus’ consciousness of sonship, the evidence permits us to speak only of Jesus’ consciousness of an intimate relationship with God, not of awareness of metaphysical sonship, nor of a ‘divine consciousness’, (far less consciousness of being ‘second Person of the Trinity’!). Even to speak of a consciousness of ‘divine sonship’ is misleading. And certainly to speak of an awareness of pre-existence goes far beyond the evidence. After all, the whole concept of Israel’s sonship was one of adoption rather than of creation. And the king in Israel could be hailed as God’s son (Ps. 2.7), but the son is never thought of as having a divine nature, and the prophets who often criticized the kings never seem to have accused them of claiming divinity, whereas they roundly attacked the kings of neighbouring nations on this score (Isa. 14.12ff.; Ezek. 28.1–10). Similarly, the righteous man of Wisd. 2, quoted above (p. 29), would not be accused of claiming ‘divine sonship’. Of course, the title ‘Son of God’ and ultimately the dogma of a sonship of essence and substance, ‘begotten from the Father before the ages’, developed out of
Jesus' understanding of himself as God's son. And the process has already begun within the NT documents with the addition of the full title of divinity in several of the gospel narratives, and particularly in the Johannine presentation of Jesus. Moreover, and most important, as we have seen, Jesus did believe his sonship to be something distinctive (even unique if Matt. 11.27 could be accepted as an authentic word of Jesus). Yet how much we can read into that sense of distinctiveness is by no means clear, and we shall have to return to the subject in the light of our fuller investigation. At all events, the point can bear reiteration, that for Jesus himself, his sonship was primarily an existential conviction and relationship, not a merely intellectual belief nor something fully metaphysical.

6.5 Out of this confidence that he stood in a specially intimate relation with God arose Jesus' sense of mission. 'Sonship means to Jesus not a dignity to be claimed, but a responsibility to be fulfilled'. As son he had been commissioned by God. As son, according to Matt. 11.27, he was conscious of 'being in a singular way the recipient and mediator of knowledge of God'. In the same way and for the same reason, 'Abba' became the expression of the complete surrender of Jesus as son to the Father's will (Mark 14.36). In other words, Jesus' consciousness of sonship was probably a fundamental element in his self-consciousness out of which his other basic convictions about himself and his mission arose. To put it another way, this experience of intimacy in prayer gave Jesus his deep insight into both the character and the will of God. These insights probably lie at the heart of his unique claim to authority (see further below ch. III and § 13).

6.6 If we may speculate a little further, it probably also follows that Jesus' existential consciousness of sonship was the primary datum of Jesus' self-awareness which enabled him to apply the various categories and passages from the OT to himself and round which he gathered the inspiration and ideas of these passages. Contrary to a still frequently used but undeclared assumption, the primary concept for Jesus does not appear to have been messiahship. He did not first regard himself as Messiah and conclude from this that he was God's son. On the contrary, the evidence is that Jesus refused the title 'Messiah', or at least was far from happy with it. On the other hand, it may well be that for Jesus the idea of being God's son had something of a representative significance - Jesus as an individual in some way representing the collective sonship of God's people. This would be confirmed if the 'son of man' concept of Dan. 7 or the
Servant passages of Second Isaiah influenced Jesus' concept of his mission, as I believe was the case, but cannot stop here to demonstrate.\textsuperscript{159} The point is that basic to Jesus' self-consciousness and consciousness of mission was not any particular messianic title or OT concept to which he then added the concept 'Son of God'. The evidence indicates rather that Jesus' sense of sonship was primary, and that it was this catalyst and key which led him to see that certain other passages of the OT were related to and descriptive of his mission.\textsuperscript{160}

I am suggesting therefore that Jesus' self-consciousness was a lot less clear cut and structured than is frequently supposed. The concepts he used when speaking of himself were more fluid, more inchoate, than talk of 'titles' would suggest. So far as his relation to God was concerned, the concept of 'son' to God as Father was basic and most appropriate; just as in his relation to men his chosen self-reference seems to have been \textit{bar nasa} (the son of man = 'I as a man', 'one' – see particularly Mark 2.27f; Matt. 11.18f./Luke 7.33f.; probably also Mark 2.10; Matt.8.20/Luke 9.58).\textsuperscript{161} With Jesus, in short, we see the freshness of an original mind, a new spirit, taking up old categories and concepts, remoulding them, creating them afresh, using them in a wholly new way in the light of his basic experience of God caring and commanding him and of being bound to God by the closest ties of love and obedience.