

# PRAYER AND THE INCARNATION

An approach to the identity of Jesus through  
religious experience

By JUSTIN KELLY

*I live; now, not I, but Christ lives in me.*

(Galatians 2, 20)

*... Christ plays in ten thousand places,*

*Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his,*

*To the Father through the features of men's faces.*

(Hopkins, 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire').

MUCH HAS been written in recent years about the inner life and self-consciousness of Jesus. Most of it is the work, naturally, of biblical scholars and exegetes.<sup>1</sup> This article attempts to approach the same subject by a different route: that of prayer and religious experience. Assuming a fundamental unity between the prayer-experience of Christians and that of Jesus himself, it seeks to understand the latter through the former. Because this approach may seem (literally) preposterous, a few preliminary words of explanation are called for.

According to Karl Rahner, if we can and must begin from Christ in order to understand what 'man' ultimately is, the opposite is also true: we can begin from man (that is, from the experience of our own humanity) in order to say who Christ is.<sup>2</sup> The experience of Jesus — including his experience of God — is in every essential way like ours. For 'the humanity of God', says Rahner, 'is in *itself* favoured with nothing essentially more or less in the line of closeness to and encounter with God, than that which is in fact provided for *each*

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of brevity I will refer the reader only to three: Jeremias, J.: *The Prayers of Jesus* (London, 1967); Guillet, J.: *The Religious Experience of Jesus and His Disciples* (St Meinrad, Indiana, 1975); and Dunn, J. D. G.: *Jesus and the Spirit* (Philadelphia, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> Rahner, K.: 'Current Problems in Christology', in *Theological Investigations*, vol 1 (Baltimore, 1961), pp 166, 184.

man in grace'.<sup>3</sup> This article will describe some aspects of that intimacy with God offered to each of us, as a means of understanding the Incarnation more fully. That is, beginning from that in Jesus which makes him essentially one with us, it will try to arrive at that in him which is utterly unique: his incarnate Sonship.

Such an approach to the meaning of Christ through the faith-experience of Christians need not stand in opposition to an authentic biblical Christology. Ideally, it should both illuminate and complete the latter. And in fact the worship of the christian community has always been a living hermeneutic: part of the process by which believers have come to know and express who Christ is.<sup>4</sup> Some of the earliest Christologies, as is well known, seem to have been hymns used in liturgical worship.<sup>5</sup> St Paul speaks of his version of the Good News as deriving from 'a revelation of Jesus Christ' — something directly experienced 'in the Spirit' rather than a human message learned by hearsay, even from the other apostles.<sup>6</sup> And many, if not all, of the 'I-sayings' attributed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, sayings which proclaim his own understanding of himself and his mission, may owe their origin to prophetic utterances of one of his early followers. If so, they may still be regarded, in the perspective of christian faith, as inspired and 'authentic' interpretations of the mind of Jesus; yet they are nonetheless revelations given by the Spirit in religious experience.<sup>7</sup>

Thus the attempt being made in this article — to use the experience of Christ alive in us to shed light on the Christ-life 'in itself' (that is, in Jesus) — has roots in scripture and the earliest christian tradition. One obvious advantage of this approach, moreover, should be to make the inner experience of Jesus more accessible, by stressing its similarity to our own. Less obviously, but not less importantly, it offers a perspective capable of reconciling the fact of growth in Jesus's own religious awareness with christian faith in him as the eternal Son of the Father. This perspective is absolutely necessary today, when the Incarnation is so easily dismissed as mythology — a falsification of the meaning and message of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> The divinity of Christ, I believe, is

<sup>3</sup> Rahner, K.: 'On the Theology of the Incarnation', in *Theological Investigations*, vol 4 tr. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore, 1966), p 112.

<sup>4</sup> Hence the dictum: *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which may be roughly rendered: 'As we pray, so we believe'.

<sup>5</sup> Phil 2, 5-11, is an outstanding example.

<sup>6</sup> Gal 1, 12ff.

<sup>7</sup> John 16, 14, has Jesus saying of the Spirit: 'All he tells you will be taken from what is mine'.

<sup>8</sup> A recent provocative but scholarly statement of this view is Hick, J. (ed): *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia, 1977).

best understood by approaching it by analogy with our own religious experience.

In the following pages I will focus (selectively) on five aspects or stages of christian prayer-experience: (1) the search for God; (2) the discovery of God; (3) the discovery of life as a gift; (4) the offering of the self; (5) being born anew, or 'numinous sonship'. It should be clear that these 'stages' are not always distinct in experience or temporally successive. The first two in particular are inseparably bound up with each other.

*Prayer: Hide and Seek*

In our experience, prayer has two basic moments: seeking and finding. It begins with the quest for God, the longing for salvation, the often unrewarded (as it seems) effort to find the hidden object of one's deepest desire. 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you': the famous line on the first page of St Augustine's *Confessions* puts into words the strange, unappeasable hunger which urges on the human quest. Often the search appears fruitless, the hunger goes unsatisfied; every believer sometime or other finds himself saying, 'Truly you are a hidden God, O God of Israel'. But there is also the moment of discovery: the sudden, unexpected, beatific encounter, the finding that follows the seeking and yet seems out of all proportion to it — for it comes, not as a reward for one's earnest efforts, but as sheer unmeritable gift. 'For I greet him the days I meet him', says Hopkins, 'and bless when I understand'.<sup>9</sup>

Such moments of meeting and blessing are full of surprise. The one who prays is apt to find his perspective reversed — to discover that he is not so much the seeker as the sought, not only the finder but the one found. The Holy, who before may have seemed far off, abstract, problematical, is revealed as dazzlingly, overwhelmingly real. 'I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear', says Job in awe before the whirlwind, 'but now my eye sees thee'.<sup>10</sup> This passing from hearsay or theoretical knowledge to direct experience is the crux of the religious encounter. The holy God, moreover, is manifested as *good* — so good that the goodness of everything else pales into insignificance. Job, at the climax of his vision, finds that no answers (to his complaints and grievances) are necessary, because no questions

<sup>9</sup> 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', part I, stanza 5.

<sup>10</sup> Job 42, 5.

are possible. What was empty is now full; what was sought is now found. 'To know you is to live, and to serve you is to reign'; the knowledge that is life is the experience of God given in such moments of discovery.

This is not to say that prayer is not real outside of such 'peak experiences', or that times of dryness and patient searching for God are not equally blessed. 'For seeking is as good as beholding', says Julian of Norwich, as long as the Lord chooses to let us remain in that condition.<sup>11</sup> One must not set up, in place of christian faith, what has been called 'the religion of religious experience'.<sup>12</sup> Prayer, like love, cannot be defined only in terms of its ecstatic moments. But neither can it be understood without them. For it is in such moments that we know what prayer and love (and life) are all about; what they mean, and why they are good. In them we know who God is, and know ourselves as his. Such revelatory encounters, and the memory of them, give us the courage to be: to be faithful, to trust, and to persevere in love. For though the ecstasy of vision passes, the truth glimpsed remains.

Descriptions of such experiences abound in the bible and in the religious literature of Christianity. Elsewhere I have gathered some typical 'religious experiences' of people today and analysed their most striking or recurring features.<sup>13</sup> Here I will merely call attention to the ecstatic prayer of Jesus reported in Matthew and Luke, where Jesus (in Luke's version) is 'filled with joy by the Holy Spirit' and exclaims: 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever, and revealing them to mere children. Be it so, Father, since this is what it has pleased you to do'.<sup>14</sup> If the saying is authentic, as many scholars believe,<sup>15</sup> it would seem that Jesus too experienced sudden, intense moments of religious awareness, that he also was capable of being 'surprised by joy' at the sudden unveiling of the Father's mysterious design. Could it be that for him, as for us, times of absence and longing led to moments of meeting and blessing?

<sup>11</sup> *The Revelations of Divine Love of Julian of Norwich*, tr. and ed. James Walsh (St Meinrad, Indiana, 1974), ch 10, p 65.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, Huston: 'Do Drugs Have Religious Import?', in *Journal of Philosophy*, vol 61 (October 1964), p 528.

<sup>13</sup> Kelly, J.: 'Faith and Experience', in *The Way* (April 1977), pp 83-87.

<sup>14</sup> Mt 11, 25-27; Lk 10, 21-22.

<sup>15</sup> Dunn, *op. cit.*, pp 28-34, makes a strong case for its authenticity, while giving full recognition to the weight of contrary opinion.

God's revelation of himself to 'mere children' in such unforeseen moments in no way removes the radical and unfathomable *mystery* which he is; rather, it intensifies it, for it is the revelation of his Godhead precisely *as* mystery. Significantly, Jesus in the passage cited praises the Father in the very incomprehensibility (in human terms) of his action — choosing the simple and the uneducated rather than the learned and the clever. He praises that choice *because* it violates our natural expectations: the Father manifests his divinity by behaving in a way that surpasses human understanding, and yet is known as strangely good and wonderful even as it does so. 'Amen, be it so, Father, since this was your good pleasure'.

As God's self-disclosure deepens the mystery instead of removing it, so in a strange way the discovery of God does not put an end to man's seeking and longing but intensifies it. God, like Shakespeare's Cleopatra, makes hungry where he most satisfies. In fact, only he longs for God who has already in some way discovered him. Perhaps the ultimate paradox of the quest for God is precisely this, that the finding has to precede the seeking. In Jesus's parables, it is the person who first stumbles on the hidden treasure, or glimpses the pearl of great price, who is willing to sell all he owns to acquire it. Paul must first experience 'the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus' in order to count as loss everything he once regarded as gain.<sup>16</sup> At the heart of the love that casts everything away is some experience of surpassing value, a vision of the absolute reality of God.

The paradox of a discovery which precedes the search for it, of an initial revelation that arouses the desire for what is revealed, runs all through human life. C. S. Lewis's allegorical fantasy, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, depicts such a process in the life of a boy named John, who in early childhood glimpses through a window in the garden wall an island on the other side of the world. So exquisite is its alluring loveliness that he pursues this vision until, despite many strayings from the path, he finds it.<sup>17</sup>

In the same way, certain experiences — the excitement of learning, the first discovery of the pleasures of literature, art, music, the deep satisfactions of love and friendship — may create an appetite even where none existed previously. Even scientific knowledge, according to Michael Polanyi, arises from the passionate pursuit of a still hidden

<sup>16</sup> Mt 13, 44-46; Phil 3, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Lewis, C. S.: *The Pilgrim's Regress*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1958), p 24.

reality, of whose existence we have been given intimation.<sup>18</sup> The end of all our exploring, says T. S. Eliot, will be to arrive where we started 'and know the place for the first time'.<sup>19</sup>

### *God as the Ground of Prayer*

Prayer is perhaps the supreme example of this reciprocal priority of finding and seeking, of revelation and the desire for it. In the seeking which is prayer, one is drawn forward as if by a hidden magnetic force, rather than pushed from behind by one's own power. Paradoxically, it is the God we know in prayer who makes it possible for us to pray to him. It is the Spirit who prays in us, 'crying out Abba, Father'.<sup>20</sup> In fact, a central discovery of prayer is precisely this, that its well-springs are deeper than one's own will and conscious effort. What at first appears to originate in oneself alone is ultimately revealed as an activity of God. Prayer is in fact 'a co-authored work', as a contemporary writer puts it.<sup>21</sup> Or in Julian of Norwich's words, God is 'the ground of our beseeching'.<sup>22</sup>

It follows that union with God is the result of what Julian calls an 'updrawing' and not a lifting of oneself by one's shoelaces. Human effort and longing do play an indispensable part: it is to the seeker that the revelation is given, the door is opened to the one who knocks. But this human desire and activity are in every way aroused, sustained, and brought to fulfilment by God. Our prayer, like our salvation, is from beginning to end *his* act. This fact is the key to understanding the Incarnation as both a human process and an act of God in 'oneing' man to himself.

### *Discovery of Life as Gift*

So the seeking which takes place in prayer is in reality a response, the pursuit of the fulness of which one is given a foretaste. Thus David Burrell describes prayer as 'responding to the unsuspected discovery that my life is a gift, by learning how to receive it'.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Polanyi, M.: 'Faith and Reason', in *The Journal of Religion*, vol 41 (October 1961), pp 237-47 *passim*, and especially p 243: 'Our active foreknowledge of an unknown reality is the right motive and guide of knowing in all our mental endeavours'.

<sup>19</sup> *Four Quartets* (New York, 1971), 'Little Gidding', V.

<sup>20</sup> Rom 8, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Hanley, Katharine R.: 'An Age of Change and Its Challenge to Prayer', in *Prayer: the Problem of Dialogue With God*, ed. Christopher F. Mooney (New York, 1969), p 129.

<sup>22</sup> *Revelations*, ch 41, p 113.

<sup>23</sup> Burrell, D.: 'Prayer as the Language of the Soul', in *Soundings*, vol 54 (Winter, 1971), p 394.

A sense of the miraculous gift-quality of life is at the heart of prayer. 'I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made; your works are wonderful'.<sup>24</sup> This feeling of numinous awe about creation itself pulses through the Old and the New Testaments. The praises of God sung in the Psalms and by the prophets reach a kind of climax in the ecstatic prayer of Jesus already referred to, and in Paul's cries of wonder: 'How rich are the depths of God's wisdom and knowledge, how unsearchable his ways! . . . All that exists comes from him; all is by him and for him'.<sup>25</sup> Hopkins's well-known sonnet, 'God's Grandeur', captures the sudden streaming-forth of the divine splendour hidden within creation: 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God; It will flame out, like shining from shook foil . . .'. Such sudden transfigurations of the world confer a directly felt value and unique worth on something which otherwise may seem little more than a drab, monotonous desert where 'generations have trod, have trod, have trod'. Such was the feeling of the heroine of Hardy's Victorian classic, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, whose life-experience little inclined her to praise the Creator: 'The doubtful honour of a brief transit through a sorry world hardly called for effusiveness'.<sup>26</sup>

This attitude is natural and understandable. In fact, it might be called the 'natural' attitude of human beings apart from the experience of God. It takes a revelation for someone to make the 'unsuspected discovery' that life is a gift and a miracle. A person normally inclined to complain that things are not better than they are is suddenly filled with awe that they are at all. It is the intuition of the Giver that transforms the merely 'given' into Gift.

That this sense of giftedness was part of the religious consciousness of Israel seems beyond question. It reaches its highest expression in Jesus's familiar words about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.<sup>27</sup> His perception of the Father's love behind and within such 'natural' phenomena was in every sense a personal discovery, a mystical intuition. While rooted in Israel's religious tradition, it had to be appropriated and re-discovered by Jesus, who added to the psalmist's

<sup>24</sup> Ps 139, 14. (The first half is often translated 'You are fearful and wonderful'.)

<sup>25</sup> Rom 11, 33-36.

<sup>26</sup> In a more modern idiom, one of Beckett's tramps declares: 'That's how it is on this bitch of an earth'. Beckett, Samuel: *Waiting for Godot* (New York, 1957), p 27.

<sup>27</sup> Mt 6, 23-34; Lk 12, 25-31. The resistance which this saying often provokes in 'realistic' and achievement-oriented people only confirms its character as something non-obvious, in need of discovery.

awe at God's majesty his own unique sense of the divine closeness. The familiarity of Jesus's most characteristic address to God, 'Abba', reflects a new awareness of Yahweh's personal love. It is that awareness which is at the core of Jesus's proclamation of a kingdom no longer remote, but even now 'at hand'.

The kingdom is in fact a gift upon a gift. If life itself is something offered and bestowed, the term of an ongoing act of divine generosity, then learning how to receive it gratefully and with joy is nothing less than entry into the kingdom of God. To open one's arms wide to receive the initial gift is to embrace at the same time the gift within the gift: that is, the Giver. It is 'eternal life', the kingdom that can be won only by an act of childlike surrender. 'Truly I tell you, unless you become as little children . . .',<sup>28</sup> Not ambitious rivalry, but unquestioning trust and naïve openness, attains what human striving cannot grasp. True reality, as Wallace Stevens says of poetry, 'reveals itself only to the ignorant man':<sup>29</sup> that is, to the one who comes to it without prejudices and pre-formed ideas, without demanding that it be thus and so. In the same way, the kingdom gives itself only to those who first surrender to it, who open themselves to the giver of the first Gift.

It is no accident that the central christian act of worship was called *eucharistia*, meaning 'blessing' or thanksgiving. For at its centre is the remembrance and making present of God's act in reconciling the world to himself through the death of Jesus, and the reception of a gift of bread which, to the believer, is the body of Christ, the very presence of God. The rite celebrates an act of love which is first and foremost God's act: 'This is the love I mean: not our love for God, but his for us, when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice which takes our sins away'.<sup>30</sup> This love, and the promise contained in it, cannot be earned but only received: as one eucharistic liturgy puts it, 'our only offering is to recall your gifts and marvellous works'. This receiving and recalling, however, are the opposite of passive. They imply an active reaching-out in faith to what is offered, an active recollection (*anamnesis*) of what God has done in Jesus. This 'remembering', which cherishes and makes present the source of its

<sup>28</sup> Mk 10, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Stevens, Wallace: 'Adagia', in *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Samuel French Morse (New York, 1957), p 160.

<sup>30</sup> 1 Jn 4, 10.



deepest meaning, is very similar to what Gabriel Marcel termed 'creative fidelity', or 'the active perpetuation of presence'.<sup>31</sup>

A similar sense of the present reality of God's love permeates the tradition of mysticism. Perhaps the central mystical insight is the simple realization that, in Merton's words, 'we have what we seek'. The pauline *pleroma*, the fulness of God and his kingdom, is present in every now; but the only way to attain it is to relinquish our grasp on things in an act of self-surrendering love. It is the open hand, and not the closed grip or clenched fist, which can receive the gift that is God himself. This is the fact that makes the 'poor in spirit' blessed, and the reason why one must lose one's life in order to find it. So Jesus is presented, in the hymn in Philippians, as one who did not try to grasp at his own likeness to God, but emptied himself.<sup>32</sup> This, the central mystery of existence, has to be continually rediscovered and made real in one's own life. But Jesus witnesses to the possibility of living and dying in the light of this discovery, by having realized it so totally in his.

Prayer, then, in a sense both begins and ends in an act of discovery — discovery of the gift which is existence. It follows that prayer involves more of listening than of talking: it supposes an attitude of quiet but active expectancy. Ultimately it becomes a loving surrender to the mystery which encompasses us and our life: a trustful acceptance of that mystery as *good*. Prayer reveals, as nothing else, that it is truly good to be, despite the misery of the world and our own sinfulness. It is good because we know ourselves (in prayer) as rooted in the very being of God, 'in whom we live, and move, and are'.<sup>33</sup> In the words of Julian of Norwich: 'For as the body is clad in clothes, and the flesh in skin, and the bones in the flesh, and the heart in the breast; so are we, soul and body, clad and enclosed in the goodness of God'.<sup>34</sup> Prayer is ultimately nothing but a 'yes' pronounced in the face of this mystery, and a living out of that 'yes' in loving hope: 'responding to the unsuspected discovery that life is a gift, by learning how to receive it'.

Where does this bring us in our effort to understand the inner life of Jesus? Simply here: that at the heart of his life, as of ours, is an act of grateful receiving, based on a personal discovery of the wonder

<sup>31</sup> Marcel, G.: 'On the Ontological Mystery', in *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, tr. Many Harari (New York, 1956), p 36.

<sup>32</sup> Phil 2, 6-7. See Cullmann, Oscar: *The Christology of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (London, 1963), pp 176-81.

<sup>33</sup> Acts 17, 28.

<sup>34</sup> *Revelations*, ch 6, p 56.

of unmerited divine love behind and within the gift of creation; and, springing from this, a return gift of self which in Jesus is total and complete. It is to this movement of giving in return that we will now direct our attention, using the ignatian prayer, 'Take and Receive', as a kind of model or archetype for what takes place both in us and in Jesus.

*The 'Suscipe' as Archetype*

The impulse to surrender the self wholly to God, in response to his gift of himself, finds a classical expression in the famous prayer of St Ignatius, the *Suscipe*. It is part of the 'Contemplation on the Love of God', which both climaxes and concludes the Spiritual Exercises. The retreatant, after being reminded that 'love consists in a mutual sharing' and that it manifests itself 'in deeds rather than words', is asked to ponder 'with deep affection how much God our Lord has done for me, how much he has given me of what he possesses, and finally how much, as far as he can, the same Lord desires to give himself to me'. The only reasonable and just response to such love, Ignatius suggests, is to offer to God 'all I possess and myself with it'. He then invites the retreatant, 'as one moved by great feeling', to dedicate himself with this prayer or something similar:

Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will, all I have and possess. You have given it to me; to you I return it. It is all yours: dispose of it wholly according to your will. Give me your love and grace, for that is enough for me.

As a verbal formula, the *Suscipe* (no less than the Lord's Prayer) is marked by the time and place of its origin, the religious world of the late middle ages and the Renaissance. (To cite only the most obvious example, there is the threefold division of the spiritual powers of the person into the faculties of 'memory, intellect, and will'.) It is, moreover, characteristically ignatian in the implicit 'activism' of its orientation: the one who offers prays that God will not merely accept but in some way *use* the gifts of liberty and intellect being placed at his disposal. 'Dispose of it wholly according to your will'. This is enough to distinguish the ignatian offering, in form at least, from more 'eastern' approaches to divine union. Nevertheless, I believe that the prayer's essential spirit transcends the historical particularity of its form. It is simply the putting-into-words of the liberated and trans-

formed spirit of man in its highest and deepest impulse: the longing to be wholly 'gift' in an outpouring of love for the first Giver.

Is it anachronistic and arbitrary to attribute such an attitude to the human Jesus? If, as I have suggested, the *Suscipe* is truly an archetype of prayer, the expression of a fundamental and trans-cultural religious attitude, the answer is clearly 'no'.<sup>35</sup> It is even more emphatically 'No!', if one proceeds on the biblically-based assumption that the spirit which informs the ignatian offering is literally the Spirit of Jesus. Whether or not the historical Jesus ever made such an explicit self-donation in any form at all resembling this one, in it is clearly visible the attitude of one who taught others to 'seek first the kingdom of God and his justice', to 'love the Lord your God with all your heart', and who acted only as the Father commanded him to act. The Letter to the Hebrews speaks repeatedly of Jesus as one who 'offered himself as the perfect sacrifice'.<sup>36</sup> Assuming, then, that the spirit (at least) of the *Suscipe* is fully realized in the person of Jesus, I would like to describe it more fully and explore some of its implications.

### *Necessity in Freedom*

A consistent and amazing feature of this impulse to give in response to God's revealed love is its freedom. It is experienced not as something demanded or imposed from without, but as something one wants to do, as the fulfilment of one's whole being. It is both free and freeing. Yet at the same time, there is a powerful necessity about it, a feeling of being in the grip of a stronger force than those emanating from one's conscious choices. Filled with the sense of God's overwhelming goodness, the one who prays feels that he or she can not do otherwise than to surrender totally to that goodness. One is *caritate Christi compulsus* — compelled, driven by the love of Christ. The necessity arises from within, is at the same time a supremely free act of the self in its most intimate and unconstrainable being: it is one's own, and yet more than one's own. Paul's 'not I, but the grace of God in me', is the scriptural

<sup>35</sup> There is an obvious difference between the ignatian approach, which presumes the duality of man (offering) and God (receiving), and the kind of mysticism which regards such dualism as an illusion, to be overcome by the realization that man is already one with God 'by nature'. Despite appearances, I believe the contrast is ultimately more a matter of style and emphasis than of theological substance, and that the same impulse towards divine union underlies both approaches, with their different methods.

<sup>36</sup> Heb 7, 27; 9, 14; 9, 28.

expression of this sense of a power which sustains and transforms freedom without negating it.<sup>37</sup>

The paradox of a freedom which grows in direct, not inverse, proportion to the influence of God's Spirit, will make sense only to the person who has in some way experienced it. Apart from such experience it may seem absurd and self-contradictory. Nevertheless there are 'natural', non-religious analogies for this kind of influence — forces which do not compel something from outside (as a hammer drives a nail into wood) but rather waken immanent powers to life. The energy of the sun's rays stirs the life within the seed, so that it puts forth roots and shoots. The smell of food draws animals to eat, triggering the digestive processes that make possible both sustenance and growth. Beyond the merely biological, at the human level, a teacher may set forth ideas so excitingly and provocatively that students become engrossed in his subject, do not merely take notes and memorize but actively follow the path of an unfolding inner logic. The knowledge gained, not only at the end of the process but at every step of the way, is in a real sense their own personal discovery, however much the teacher's presentation may have paved the way for it. On a still higher level, there is the influence of love: the undemanding, non-possessive, 'benevolent' love which gives and asks no return except what the beloved person is inwardly moved to give. It is this last, obviously, which comes closest to the liberating experience of 'grace in freedom': that is, of a free self-giving, not merely invited but made possible by the compelling power of love itself — a love which is no other than God's self-gift, his Spirit.<sup>38</sup>

This experience is the key to understanding not only the prayer of Jesus but the inner reality of what Christians call the Incarnation. When a person — any person — is moved to offer himself and his life wholly to God, he does so in the power of the Spirit. It is experienced as happening spontaneously, but not by one's own unaided efforts. It is as much something taking place in a person as something he does. As noted above, this is true of the very activity of prayer. As it is only in the Spirit that one may call Jesus 'Lord', so the simplest prayer truly addressed to God is the work of the Spirit praying in us. All we

<sup>37</sup> 1 Cor 15, 10. D. M. Baillie's classic *God Was In Christ* (New York, 1948), which takes 'the paradox of Grace' expressed in this text as the key to understanding the Incarnation, in many ways anticipates the arguments of this essay: without, however, focusing so specifically on the experience of prayer. Cf pp 106-32.

<sup>38</sup> This series of analogies is in part derived from Romano Guardini's discussion of grace in *The Faith and Modern Man* (Chicago, 1965), pp 42-45.

can do is to 'dispose ourselves to receive' the gift which is the Spirit — and even this self-disposition is ultimately revealed as not simply our work, but his. 'Without me you can do nothing'.<sup>39</sup>

The point of so insisting on the activity of God within our prayer is not simply to humble human pride and self-sufficiency, but to enable us to recognize prayer for what it is and thus to value and trust it more. If God is truly 'the ground of our beseeching', it is impossible that our prayer should not be heard — for it is nothing but God's Spirit crying out through us to the Father. Nothing, says Julian, is more impossible than 'that we should seek mercy and grace, and not have it. . . . For all the things that our good Lord himself maketh us to beseech, these he has ordained to us from without beginning'.<sup>40</sup>

### *Prayer and the Incarnation*

How does this view of prayer, in particular the prayer of self-donation, shed light on the Incarnation of Jesus? Simply by providing an analogy within our experience to something which in Jesus is total and absolute. If our own impulse to surrender ourselves to God completely is in fact the activity of the Spirit, God's 'updrawing' of us to himself, one may postulate (on the basis of the Church's Christology) that in Jesus this process arrives at its proper climax and summit. That is, one may conceive, as a kind of limiting case of one's own prayer-experience, of a wholly human being in whom the Spirit-empowered surrender of the self to God is both total and totally accepted. In this hypothetical limiting case there would not be, at the end of the process, two absolutely distinct beings — the man who offers and the God who accepts — but literally a God-man: in a word, the Incarnation.

### *Some Difficulties*

Does this notion of a process occurring within a human being (or between a human being and God) which 'results', so to speak, in God-made-flesh, sound like 'Adoptionism' — the myth of a man who pleased God so completely that God adopted him as his very own? In that case we would have, not the Incarnate Son, the Word who was with God in the beginning and is himself God, but a 'divinely

<sup>39</sup> Jn 15, 5.

<sup>40</sup> *Revelations*, ch 41, p 114.

approved' man — however special the degree of this approval is said to be. In other words, we would no longer have the Christ whom the Church's faith has acknowledged and proclaimed from the age of the apostles onward. But that is not the case here. Instead we have the situation Karl Rahner describes, where 'the nature which surrenders itself . . . belongs so little to itself that it becomes the nature of God himself'.<sup>41</sup> The human gift of the self, invited and made possible by God's own Spirit, is in the case of Jesus so complete (and so completely accepted) that there is no longer any self 'left over' which is not also God's own reality.

This alone is enough to account for that in Jesus which makes him absolutely different from us. For our self-offering, though elicited and empowered by the same Spirit, remains only a part of us: an activity of ours, an aspect of our being, but not the whole of it. The self-surrender of Jesus, on the other hand, is (*ex hypothesi*) his very being: Jesus *is* substantial self-giving to the Father. His self-offering is, again in Rahner's words, 'the unique, *supreme* case of the total actualization of human reality, which consists of the fact that man *is* in so far as he gives himself up'.<sup>42</sup>

Another difficulty — or rather another aspect of the same difficulty — is that this approach treats the Incarnation as a process of becoming, rather than something which took place 'once and for all' when the eternal Son took flesh in the womb of Mary. It seems to be a process which the man Jesus 'had a hand in', even though his efforts are seen as aroused and supported by God. In short, it seems to lead to a perspective in which 'man becomes God', rather than the reverse, which christian faith and orthodox teaching have always affirmed. Are we saying that Jesus, who originally was a man and not God, at some stage of his career 'became God', perhaps through some unimaginably intense prayer-experience? And if so, is this not only heretical, but transparently mythological?

Before attempting to reply directly to these objections, we might note that biblical Christology gives some remarkably diverse interpretations — or, better, representations — of what Christians were later to call the Incarnation. If the Prologue to St John's Gospel, for instance, speaks of a pre-existent Logos who 'became flesh and lived

<sup>41</sup> 'On the Theology of the Incarnation', p 110.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p 111. It is important to note that this implies a *dynamic* rather than a static conception of human be-ing. That is, it regards man primarily as an *activity* (ultimately, self-surrendering love) rather than as a two-legged 'substance' who happens to *do* certain things (love being merely one of them).

among us', Jesus is presented elsewhere (in the Gospel of Mark) as receiving his unique anointing and calling by God at his baptism in the Jordan. Is the latter event no more than an external confirmation, for the benefit of others, of what had already essentially taken place before Christ's birth? Or is it a real 'happening', a decisive moment in the destiny of Jesus and in human history? Is it possible that these are simply two different ways of describing the same reality?

Similarly, the early christian hymn quoted by Paul in Philippians 2, 6-11 seems to speak of Christ *both* as a pre-existent divine being who voluntarily abases himself to accept the human condition, *and* as a man who by humbly receiving his life from his Father's hands (and, as part of it, a painful and ignominious death), is raised on high and given a name equal to God's own: *Kyrios*, Lord.<sup>43</sup> Is one forced to choose between these seemingly contradictory statements, or to understand the second in so diluted a sense that it becomes only a 'poetic' expression of the first? Or are the two simply diverse perspectives on a single movement — a movement which is at once an act of God from eternity and a process occurring in time?

The Letter to the Hebrews, in the very act of affirming the unique dignity of Jesus as God's Son ('through whom he made everything there is'), speaks of him as being 'made perfect' and having to 'learn obedience through suffering'.<sup>44</sup> However one chooses to interpret these statements, it seems that for some biblical authors, at least, there was no contradiction between the 'ontological' status of Jesus as the pre-existent Son of God, and the fact of a process of becoming in the man Jesus which was only complete with his death and exaltation. This process was one in which Jesus very much 'had a hand', and yet it was somehow constitutive of his identity as the Christ.

### *Identity as Process*

All this will appear less unusual, though not less paradoxical, if seen in the context of human becoming in general. Alone among the animals, man remains curiously 'unfinished' at birth. If in one sense his humanity is already 'given' with his nature, in another sense it must still be *made* — created or constructed out of often recalcitrant materials. Human identity is the result of a process of *becoming*

<sup>43</sup> See Schoonenberg, P., ' "He Emptied Himself" — Philippians 2, 7', in *Who Is Jesus of Nazareth?*, *Concilium*, vol 11, ed. Edward Schillebeeckx (New York, 1965), pp 47-66.

<sup>44</sup> Heb 1, 2; 5, 8-10.

*human*: it involves the making of the self as a free, responsible and loving person. Some of this 'humanizing' occurs through the processes of socialization: by interacting with elders, peers, and juniors one learns to adjust, to 'fit in', to find one's place in society. The process of finding oneself as a unique and autonomous individual, of exploring and developing one's potential, occurs at the same time, but in a dialectical relationship to the former. It involves the discovery and assertion of the still-emerging self. Who a person is, his identity, is a product of both of these taken in their totality.

Thus living is a process of becoming one's own self — a self which is not an isolated monad but is co-constituted by its relationships to others and to God.<sup>45</sup> Like a work of art, it implies both creation and discovery. Becoming what one is 'meant' or called to be requires not only self-assertion but a careful listening: a willingness to hear and to respond faithfully to inner and outer signs. The demand that existence makes on each individual, the invitation life issues, is unique and can only be discovered by being open to it.<sup>46</sup> To hear that call, one must listen patiently to the echo made by one's activities and personality in the outer world, and direct oneself in response to what those echoes report.

This process, by which each person creates his or her own answer to the question 'Who am I?' is notoriously vulnerable — to chance, to error, to sin. But to its very riskiness belongs the glory of being human. One can find, or not find, one's real self; one can become, or fail to become, one's highest potentiality. Even the very preoccupation with identity and self-realization can be narcissistic and destructive, for the truest self-hood is achieved, paradoxically, in self-forgetful love; here too, ultimately, one must lose one's self in order to find it. But whatever happens, the emergent 'I' is not a static 'given' but a process of becoming, a process in which 'nature' interacts with free choice. *We are what we become*; and what we become is always partly our doing, and partly beyond our control. Yet to the extent that this process 'succeeds' in a particular case, the result appears natural, almost inevitable. Abraham Lincoln, one feels, could not have been other than

<sup>45</sup> 'Openness to relatedness with other persons and the search for self-identity are not two problems but one dialectical process'. Lynd, H. M.: *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (New York, 1968), p. 241.

<sup>46</sup> 'To feel inwardly the greatest that one is capable of doing, is really the first consciousness of what it is one's duty to do'. Guyau, Jean-Marie: *A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction*, pp. 210-11, 91 — cited by Lynd, p. 226.



Lincoln; Newman was born to be what he eventually, despite enormous obstacles, became: scholar, theologian, saint.

Can we apply these considerations to the identity of Jesus? I think we not only can, but must. Jesus is the supreme instance of 'the total actualization of human reality', one who became all he was intended to be from the beginning. This self-realization of Jesus, like ours, had turning points: decisive moments of call and response, of personal self-discovery as well as of public self-disclosure. Many others, friends and foes, had a hand in the making of Jesus's identity, as they do in ours — his mother and his 'brethren', his disciples, the Romans, the Jewish leaders.<sup>47</sup> Their responses to Jesus, positive or negative, both confirmed and challenged his own emerging inner sense of selfhood, call and destiny. Most of all, his own consciousness of the Father and prayerful self-abandonment to him produced in Jesus that correlative consciousness of his own Sonship which was the core of his identity: 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him'.<sup>48</sup>

Again like ours, the becoming of Jesus remained incomplete until his death. In his agonized 'yes' to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane, in his ultimate self-surrender to that same Father on the cross, in the whole way he bore himself during his trial and crucifixion, Jesus finalized and made definitive all that he had been during his life-time. By dying, and by dying as he did — without hatred or bitterness but in utter fidelity to the truth he had preached — Jesus 'became what he always was': 'Truly, a just man'; 'Truly, the son of God'. His victory over human ignorance and ill-will on the cross was already the beginning of that 'being raised from the dead and exalted to the Father's right hand' which Christians acclaim when they recognize as Lord and Christ 'this Jesus who was crucified'.

### *Becoming God*

Does Jesus, then, 'become God' at the Resurrection? The answer is clearly 'yes', in the sense that his full identity, the true meaning of his life, can only be 'read backward' from the ending and culmination of the whole process. In proclaiming Jesus as risen and as Lord, the Christian community simply recognizes what and who he always was

<sup>47</sup> 'All "identities" require an other: some other in and through a relationship with whom self-identity is actualized'. Laing, R. D.: *Self and Others* (New York, 1969), p 66.

<sup>48</sup> Mt 11, 27.

(in the sense of the goal towards which his life was unambiguously tending from the first). At no point in that life is it possible to say 'Jesus was not God, or not fully God, here' — any more than it would make sense to say that Lincoln was not Lincoln before becoming president, or that Newman was not Newman before his conversion to Catholicism. The meaning of the part must always be read in the light of the whole, a process understood by the end to which it leads.<sup>49</sup> If Jesus is manifested in his resurrection-exaltation as Son of the Father in an absolute, not merely relative, sense, then this is what he was eternally begotten as, or called to become; and the Incarnation, God's becoming flesh, must be seen as an act eternally one in itself, yet taking place in time through a human process of self-unfolding.

The theological reflections of the last few pages may seem far removed from our original effort to shed light on the inner life of Jesus by relating it to the experience of prayer. Yet it is all-important, I believe, to see the Incarnation *both* as something willed by God from eternity, *and* as a reality which comes to be in time through a human process of growth and choosing. For it is only in this way that its true connection with our own life of growing, search, and struggle can be clearly seen. In fact, it is only this which makes it truly redemptive — in other words, truly an Incarnation, a becoming-one-with-our flesh. For as the Fathers and the early Church saw, if Jesus is not truly and totally human, we are not redeemed. But if it is important to stress the *progressive* nature of God's enfleshment, it is no less important to see that progress for what it truly was: the gradual but total 'oneing' of the humanity of Jesus with God — a complete divinization effected by the Father through his Spirit.

### *Experienced Sonship*

Is it possible to say anything more specific about what this divinization was like? That it cannot have been for Jesus, any more than it is for us, something happening merely 'objectively', apart from his awareness, is implicit in everything said in this essay. In the words of James Dunn, 'Jesus's sense of being God's son was an *existential*

<sup>49</sup> Rejecting the case for 'resurrectional retroactivity' made by Wolfhart Pannenberg and others, James Mackey states that 'Retroactivity is a legal fiction, or just a fiction pure and simple'. See Mackey, J.P.: 'Jesus in the New Testament: A Bibliographical Survey', in *Horizons*, vol 1 (Fall, 1974), p 66. This opinion seems to reflect a somewhat exaggerated empiricism, which thinks of human reality in terms of categories derived from purely material objects.

conviction, not merely an intellectual belief'.<sup>50</sup> The concluding pages of this essay will try to describe this 'existential conviction' or sense of divine sonship by relating it to the experience of worship.

An immediate effect of worship is the experience of humility — humility before God, or before someone in whom God is felt to dwell. Rudolf Otto describes in his classic *The Idea of the Holy* how the sense of God as the 'All' arouses in the worshipper a correlative sense of his own being as 'nothing'. Abraham's 'I, who am but dust and ashes' is a typical biblical expression of this feeling. Despite appearances to the contrary, there is no question here of a servile cringing, still less of what today we call a 'poor self-image'; Abraham's words are simply a way of expressing his awareness of who Yahweh is. The focus here, as Otto notes, is not on the self at all, but on the One who is revealed as awesome and absolute Mystery. In comparison with this 'wondrous Other', all that man is, is devalued to the point of non-existence.<sup>51</sup>

This attitude recurs frequently in the scriptures. It appears, for instance, in Isaiah's response to his vision of Yahweh in the temple;<sup>52</sup> in Job's reply to the Voice who speaks to him out of the whirlwind;<sup>53</sup> in John the Baptist's reported reverence for the one who was to come after him, 'whose sandal-strap I am not even worthy to undo';<sup>54</sup> in Peter's response to Jesus after the miraculous haul of fish: 'Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man'.<sup>55</sup> The same spirit expresses itself in the words of Elizabeth to Mary in Luke's Visitation narrative: 'Who am I, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'<sup>56</sup> It is simply the instinctive and heartfelt devaluation of the self before a numinous person, one who manifests or embodies the transcendent worthiness of God.

To attribute this kind of humility to Jesus in his human adoration of the Father is to make at least a plausible inference. It is this Jesus who, in the sermon on the mount, expresses such a strong sense of the utter difference between the divine and the human:<sup>57</sup> who says to the rich young man: 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God only';<sup>58</sup> who not only calls himself 'meek and humble of heart', but seemingly includes himself among the 'mere children' to whom (precisely because they acknowledge themselves *as* children) Yahweh

<sup>50</sup> *Jesus and the Spirit*, p 38.

<sup>51</sup> Otto R.: *The Idea of the Holy*, tr. John W. Harvey (New York, 1968), pp 20-21.

<sup>52</sup> Isai 6, 5.      <sup>53</sup> Job 42, 1-6.

<sup>54</sup> Jn 1, 27.

<sup>55</sup> Lk 5, 8.      <sup>56</sup> Lk 1, 43.      <sup>57</sup> Mt 5, 34ff.      <sup>58</sup> Mk 10, 18.

reveals the secrets he has hidden from the wise and the prudent. Chief among these secrets is the radical mystery of the Son's own identity, which is known only to the Father. That is to say, who Jesus is, is something he knows only in worshipping the Father, and who the Father is, is likewise known only in the humble self-abandonment to him, which is the Son's worship.<sup>59</sup>

The very negation of the self in humility before the revelation of the divine Other results in a new sense of that self as touched by and sharing in the holy mystery. As in the parables of the lowest place at table and of the Pharisee and the Publican, humility leads to (experienced) exaltation. Awe at the mystery of God engenders awe at the mystery of oneself, as in Psalm 139: 'Truly, I am fearfully, wonderfully made; wonderful are your works'. It is this awe, which Otto calls 'numinous self-feeling',<sup>60</sup> which probably gives birth to the mysterious claim that 'we are already the children of God, but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed; all we know is that when it is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he really is' (1 Jn 3, 2). That 'seeing God' face to face in the *eschaton* will make us like him, is simply an extension of present experience. As exposure to sunlight makes the skin glow, worshipping the Holy makes the worshipper himself holy; he becomes like what he adores.

Many mystics, both eastern and western, have described such experiences. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, for instance, speaks of becoming (through contemplation) 'almost divine', and in this sense understands the words quoted by Jesus in John 10, 34, 'You are gods'.<sup>61</sup>

### *Numinous Sonship*

Adoration of the divine 'without', then, creates (and progressively deepens) a sense of the divine 'within'. This divinity within the self is quite distinct from the 'wholly other' God who is worshipped, although it shares in the same sense of awesome wonderfulness. It is not an object or 'other self': like the 'I' who prays, knows, and loves, it is not so much a 'thing' in front of consciousness as an aspect

<sup>59</sup> Lk 10, 22; Mt 11, 27.

<sup>60</sup> Otto prefers the term 'numinous self-feeling' to Schliermacher's 'numinous self-consciousness', regarding the latter as potentially misleading (p 203, n. 1).

<sup>61</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counselling*, ed. William Johnston (New York, 1973), p 135.

of consciousness itself — the see-er, not the seen. Similarly it is not someone or something prayed *to*, but a reality *received* in the act of prayer. It is the very being of the pray-er, transformed and re-created by the experienced love of God. The words of the second psalm — 'You are my son; *this day* I have begotten you' — convey the heart of this experience in its existential now-ness, as something which happens anew in the very moment of worship.

An analogy (which is in reality more than an analogy) to this experience of numinous selfhood or sonship can be found in the charismatic experience of 'prayer in the Spirit'. One who prays in this way feels interpenetrated and transformed by a power not his own — energized, swept up by, 'in the grip of' the Spirit. He may feel himself moved to utter things beyond his ordinary knowledge, and indeed beyond human knowledge and speech. He does not pray to but in the Spirit; as far as his experience goes, it is not even he who prays, but the Spirit who prays through him. This is in fact good biblical theology, whatever judgment may be made about the validity of individual charismatic experiences. For the New Testament, the Spirit is not 'another God', but a power emanating from the one God which enables man to pray and to love with a power beyond his own — a power not human but divine.

So, as Otto acutely observes, the statement 'God is love',<sup>62</sup> means more than simply 'God is one who loves', or 'is a loving person'. He literally pours himself out in order to *become* the love whereby Christians love him and one other. God experienced in this way is both immanent and transcendent — a supra-personal energy or force inhabiting the finite self. In this sense, says Otto, the christian 'God is more than merely "god"'.<sup>63</sup> That is, he is not merely 'another' being who stands over against me (a You to my I), but one who so indwells in and interpenetrates my being that there is no longer any separation between us. Instead there is a mysterious two-in-oneness: in the Spirit I am, in a true sense, divine.<sup>64</sup>

'Numinous sonship' is analogous to this in being an experience of the divine Other within the self. It is more than *merely* analogous in so far as it is an effect of the same indwelling of the Spirit. For 'consciousness of sonship and consciousness of Spirit', says Dunn, are simply 'two

<sup>62</sup> 1 Jn 4, 8; 4, 16.

<sup>63</sup> Otto, p 201.

<sup>64</sup> Cf Panikkar, Raimundo: *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (Maryknoll, New York, 1973), pp 31-35, 62.

sides of the one coin'.<sup>65</sup> In so far as someone prays to and loves the Father in the Spirit, that person knows himself as loved by the Father and re-begotten — in short, as beloved son (or daughter). This experience is given in its fulness to Jesus precisely so that it might be shared by us all: as Paul puts it, 'so that his Son might be the eldest of many brothers'.<sup>66</sup> And in fact the sense of the self as a numinous mystery leads directly to a recognition of the same numinosity in others, as sharers in the one Spirit.

### *Absolute Sonship*

Thus what is true of us is true above all for Jesus. To the extent that Jesus worships the Father, he knows him *as* Father, and knows himself as son — even as *the* Son. To the unique completeness of Jesus's self-donation in the act of worship belongs a unique completeness in his experience of himself as begotten: he is not just 'a son', but the absolute Son. For anyone to claim this for himself would be arrogant, even blasphemous; what keeps it from being so in the case of Jesus is that he in no way seeks it for himself. It is simply the reality of what he is — wholly the gift of the Father, the effect of being known and loved by him. In psychological terms, there is precisely the opposite of pride and self-assertion: Jesus discovers his absolute Sonship in being wholly abandoned to the Father whom he worships. In humbling himself, he is exalted.

This view fits well with the biblical evidence — not only with the vision of voluntary self-abasement in the Philippians hymn, but with the conclusions of modern New Testament scholarship. The latter inclines strongly to the view that the 'historical Jesus' probably used few, if any, messianic (let alone 'divine') titles when speaking of himself.<sup>67</sup> It is true that no one speaks and acts with such supreme self-assurance as the Jesus of the gospels; but it is an assurance born of humility rather than pride. Because his identity as Son is wholly gift, something he neither grasps at nor has to assert, he is utterly secure in the possession of it. As something bestowed by the Father, it cannot be lost or diminished. Not even the experienced desolation and

<sup>65</sup> *Jesus and the Spirit*, p 66.

<sup>66</sup> Rom 8, 29.

<sup>67</sup> 'It is highly questionable whether Jesus thought of himself in terms of titles at all': Dunn, p 15. For a handy summary of modern scholarship on the question, see Bruce Vawter: *This Man Jesus* (Garden City, New York, 1975), pp 91-139, and also Raymond E. Brown: 'Who Do Men Say That I Am? Modern Scholarship on Gospel Christology', in *Horizons*, vol 1 (Fall, 1974), pp 35-50.

abandonment of Gethsemane and Golgotha can remove it altogether. It simply *is*, for ever and for ever.

So Jesus's consciousness of unique Sonship does not arise out of an ambitious striving to be somebody, a superstar, or an arrogant assertion of specialness. On the contrary, it consists in a whole-souled response to the mystery of God — a response which leaves no room for such striving and grasping, but permits the discovery of sonship as an utter gift. 'This is my Son, the beloved; listen to him'.<sup>68</sup> In his humble surrender to the ever-greater God, Jesus receives from him that which makes him the perfect and final expression of God, is given the 'Name above every other name'. Thus the two sayings of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel which appear most inconsistent — even flatly contradictory — 'the Father is greater than I', 'I and the Father are one'<sup>69</sup> — are in fact correlative: mutually necessary ways of expressing the one simple essence of Jesus's identity. Only in this perspective, I believe, can the Jesus of meek and humble heart be reconciled with the Jesus who knows that only he knows the Father. His sonship is simply the acceptance of an unmerited and unmeritable divine gift — a gift he shares with all who are willing to receive it.

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<sup>68</sup> Mk 9, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Jn 14, 28; 10, 30.