

Part Two

*Solidarity With God*

## 4

# The Origins of a Mission

Having set the stage for Jesus with his humanness and historicity, we now need to say more. Yet, whatever more we say, we never want to let go of this foundation. Jesus' humanity is the base upon which we build. Yet it is the base and not the whole building.

Jesus was not only someone like us; he was someone called and sent by God. We begin with early events in the public life of Jesus: his baptism, a period in the wilderness, the return to Galilee. Then we focus on Jesus as a man of prayer and a prophet. In all of these Jesus is found in his humanness but as a human being called by God. This call from God, however, does not make him any less one of us.

### *The Baptism of Jesus*

The baptism of Jesus of Nazareth by John is one of the first facts in the story of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> It leaves us with two questions: What was the relationship between Jesus and John? What was the significance of the baptism for Jesus?

<sup>1</sup>Concerning the baptism of Jesus, see Joseph Fitzmyer, *A Christological Catechism, New Testament Answers* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 39-43; Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology, The Proclamation Of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 49-56; Walter Kasper, *Jesus*

Many have suggested an Essene influence on John, and he may have joined an Essene community as a young man.<sup>2</sup> The evidence for the latter suggestion is not conclusive however. Similarities between John and the Essenes do exist. They were an ascetical and devout community, calling themselves "the penitents of Israel." They had a strong dislike for "official" Judaism and had broken away from worship in Jerusalem. Their beliefs included the expectation of an imminent coming of the Lord. Yet today many scholars are skeptical about a direct relationship between John and the Essene community at Qumran itself.<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not John spent time in an Essene community, whether or not he spent time as a solitary either after leaving the community or at some other time, the traditions are unanimous in associating John with the wilderness (Mt 3:1; Mk 1:4; Lk 3:2; Jn 1:23, 28), preaching and baptizing there. He had the gift of the Spirit and was seen as a prophet. Prophecy in Israel had faded out with the prophetic writings replacing living prophecy and the spoken word. Prophecy and the gift of the Spirit were considered by many to be eschatological phenomena that would accompany the end

*The Christ*, trans. V. Green (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 65-71; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man*, trans. Lewis Wilkins and Duane Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 137-41; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus, an Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 136-39.

Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke, I-IX*, Anchor Bible, vol. 28 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 388-89, respects the hypothesis of a relationship between John and the Essenes while recognizing that we cannot make such a suggestion more definitive. Jean Steinmann, *Saint John the Baptist and the Desert Tradition* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), 51-61, hypothesized that John had joined the Essenes during late adolescence, had been fully initiated into their life, and then became a dissenter from the community.

<sup>3</sup>Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), 376, n. 2. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Qumran and the New Testament," in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, eds. Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae (in preparation). Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls, Qumran in Perspective* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1978).

times (Joel 2:28).<sup>4</sup> The appearance of John as a prophet indicated to those influenced by messianic expectations that the eschatological age was close at hand. Matthew 17:10-13 and Mark 9:11-13 identify John as Elijah, which shows that John had come to be seen among the disciples of Jesus as an eschatological prophet. In Luke, the Elijah role assigned to John is ambiguous, not explicitly denied as in the Fourth Gospel (1:20-21), nor affirmed as in Mark and Matthew.<sup>5</sup>

John's message proclaimed the coming of the Lord as a time of judgment. It was the time to prepare and repent as the anger of God would soon manifest itself (Mt 3:7-12; Lk 3:7-9, 16-17). John used the example of a farmer with his winnowing fork separating the wheat from the chaff (Lk

<sup>4</sup>Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, revised edition, trans, Shirley Guthrie and Charles Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), 14; Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*. 80-82. C. H. H. Scobie, *John the Baptist* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), writes, "Prophecy was dead; its rebirth will be a sign of the new age" (123).

Scullmann concludes that John's disciples considered John to be the prophet, especially the prophet like Elijah, a direct forerunner of the Lord (God); but that Jesus and his disciples saw John as the forerunner of the Messiah or of another; and that John saw himself either as a forerunner only in the second sense or quite simply as a Prophet (Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 26-28).

Brown states that John saw himself as directly preparing the way of the Lord. Christian interpretation, however, assigned to him the role of Elijah as found in Malachi and of a forerunner to Jesus. As time passed and the disciples of John and a Baptist community continued to persist and perhaps even became hostile to the disciples of Jesus and vice-versa, the subordination of John to Jesus became even more explicit, as in the Fourth Gospel, where John is not even Elijah (1:20-21), where John gives explicit witness to Jesus (1:7, 30-31), and where John becomes an incipient Christian. With respect to Luke, Brown suggests two stages of development. An early stage (4:25-26,9:54) identified *Jesus* with Elijah, a stage represented in Luke's portrayal of the ministry of Jesus. A later stage, dominant in the infancy narrative, composed after the Gospel as a whole, stressed Jesus as God's Son and John as Elijah (Brown, *The Birth*, 275-79, 282-85).

In the sources behind the Fourth Gospel, J. Louis Martyn identifies a tradition identifying Jesus as the Elijah-prophet, and concludes that "it is the fourth evangelist who bears the responsibility for the disappearance from subsequent Christian thought of the identification of Jesus as the eschatological Elijah" (53). *The Gospel of John in Christian History* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 9-54. Also see Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: University Press, 1968).

3:17-18). Through baptism John gathered together those who repented into a people who awaited the coming of God. During the century prior to Jesus there were penitential and baptist movements of varied sorts along the Jordan River. The centrality of baptisms and ritual baths in lieu of Temple sacrifices was common to many of the movements.<sup>6</sup> Those baptized by John immersed themselves in his presence, a symbolic action which signified conversion or repentance, a turning to the Lord to await the last days. Unlike ritual bathing among the Jews, John's baptism was performed but once. Some of those baptized followed John, while others returned to their homes to live a new life and await the coming of the end times. John's message included repentance, baptism, the imminent reign of God, a call to ethical living,<sup>7</sup> and may also have included the expectation of another whose way he himself was preparing.<sup>8</sup>

Edward Schillebeeckx situates John within the post-Maccabean, apocalyptic, penitential, baptismal, conversion movements of pre-Christian Judaism. John was "a penitential preacher prophetically announcing the imminent judgment of God." It was not so much God's imminent reign but God's imminent judgment that John announced. Yet,

<sup>6</sup>See Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*, 108. Also Frederick Houk Borsch, *The Son of Man in Myth and History*, New Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1967), 177-218, esp. 201-18; Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 117-18, also 116 for the bibliography under conversion and baptismal movements.

<sup>7</sup>The ethical aspect of John's repentance and preaching can sometimes be neglected. E.g., Lk 3:10, concerning sharing food and clothing; 3:12-13, concerning tax collectors; 3:14, concerning soldiers.

<sup>8</sup>This aspect of John's preaching is not primary and is difficult to determine. See footnote 5. How much of this aspect of his message was "historically John" and how much "Christian interpolation"? It could be either. John could well have spoken of "one to come"; the idea was common in the Judaism of that time. Yet it could be the way in which Christian tradition would reconcile the popularity of John and his relationship to Jesus. That John identified the coming one with Jesus is most probably a Christian perspective. Schillebeeckx suggests that the coming one for John was "the son of humanity"; here John "borrows" an apocalyptic idea (*Jesus*, 132). Even if John did preach another one to come, this was probably a secondary aspect of his preaching.

<sup>9</sup>Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 127. For Schillebeeckx's discussion of John, see *Jesus*, 126-36, and *Christ, the Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 368-72.

according to Schillebeeckx, John does not manifest Jewish apocalyptic motifs as much as earlier, classical, prophetic ones. He was not an apocalypticist, but a prophet of the old school.<sup>10</sup> Apocalyptic thought may have influenced John's perception of the imminence of the divine judgment, but John was more typically a prophet of the older tradition. John's innovation with respect to the old school or earlier Israelite prophecy, however, was baptism. He preached baptism (Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3; Acts 20:37; 13:24), and this baptism of repentance and its accompanying *metanoia* (change of heart) was the one thing necessary for participation in the imminent reign of God.

John was an ascetical and prophetic preacher of repentance who baptized and proclaimed the closeness of the impending judgment. Jesus evidently was less ascetical (Mk 2:18; Lk 7:31-35) and did not baptize as extensively as John (John 3:22, 26 presents Jesus as baptizing; however see John 4:1-2). Both Jesus and John, however, were prophets and preachers. Both, unlike the scribes, preached out of doors and both called people to repentance. Repentance was not the center of the preaching for Jesus as it was for John but was still part of his message. In submitting to John's baptism, Jesus recognized John's prophetic quality, and many of Jesus' early disciples had been disciples of the baptizer

<sup>10</sup>Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 129. Schillebeeckx points to the fact that three key words used in the New Testament to denote John's proclamation of judgment - the axe, the winnow, and fire - belong not to apocalypticism but to ancient prophecy. How apocalyptic or non-apocalyptic John was will remain an open question. There is little doubt that John comes across quite clearly as a prophet. Raymond Brown states that the lamb of God to which the Baptizer refers in John 1:29 can best be interpreted as the conquering lamb who will destroy evil in the world of Jewish apocalyptic (*The Gospel According to John* I-XII, [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1966] 58-60). However, this reference is probably not the historical John. Yet Josephine Massingberde Ford attempts to trace the major New Testament apocalyptic, *The Book of Revelation*, to the Baptizer and his disciples. See Massingberde Ford, *Revelation*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 38 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 28-37, 50-57. Massingberde Ford acknowledges John's traditional prophetic character. She writes, "John the Baptist, without doubt, was regarded as a prophet *par excellence*" (28). Yet she also sees the expression "Lamb of God" associated with John the Baptizer as the apocalyptic lamb (30-31) as does Brown, and speaks of "the Baptist's prophetic apocalyptic and 'fiery' tendencies" (56).

first (Lk 7:29-30; Jn 1:35-39, 3:26). Jesus expressed respect for John and solidarity with his movement (Mt 11:7-11). Both John and Jesus would have been interpreted by many as "eschatological prophets."

In his literary and critical study of the Synoptic accounts of the baptism of Jesus, Fritzleo Lentzen-Deis points both to the facticity of the baptism and also to the interpretative elements within the text, such as the dove and the voice. He judges the literary form to be that of the "Deute-Vision," an interpretative vision for which there are parallels in the targums in which a synagogue translator abandoned the exact text and interpreted it for the hearers." In targumic versions of Genesis 22:10 and 19:12, for example, the event is interpreted by means of a vision in which one hears a voice. This interpretative vision (a distinct literary form, in contrast to a theophany narrative or a call narrative), presents Jesus as the beloved son rather than as a disciple of John. Yet Jesus is still aligned with the eschatological movement of John.

The baptism was a significant religious event in the life of Jesus. Undoubtedly he had already become aware of the significance of John's preaching and baptism (Mk 11:30; Mt 11:9, 11; 21:32; Lk 7:28,29). As Joachim Jeremias points out, "The sayings that betray such a high estimate of the Baptist are certainly authentic."<sup>12</sup> His baptism signified his conviction that the reign of God was close at hand, as well as his desire to number himself among "those who wait." The baptism must have been more than he had anticipated, however. Jesus received the gift of the Spirit on this occasion and thus was anointed as a prophet to Israel as John had been, even if the full effect of this would take time for

<sup>11</sup> Fritzleo Lentzen-Deis, *Die Taufe Jesu nach den Synoptikern. Literarkritische and gattungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Frankfurt: Verlag Josef Knecht, 1970). Feuillet speaks of Jesus' baptism as a theophany. See "Prophetic Call and Jesus' Baptism," *Theology Digest* 28 (1980), 29-33; A. Feuillet, "Vocation et mission des prophetes, Baptême et mission de Jesus: Etude de christologie biblique," *Nova et Vetera* 54 (1979), 22-40.

<sup>12</sup>Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 47.

him to fully understand.<sup>13</sup> John's baptism was not necessarily accompanied by the gift of the Spirit; Jesus' baptism was unique in that regard. Jesus himself was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness from whence John himself had come.<sup>14</sup>

Historiographically we can maintain that Jesus was baptized by John, but we can say nothing of his motivation -

<sup>13</sup>The imparting of the Spirit signifies prophetic inspiration and vocation. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, writes, "Jesus experienced his call when he underwent John's baptism in order to take his place among the eschatological people of God that the Baptist was assembling" (49). Also, "At his baptism, Jesus experienced his call" (55). I agree with Jeremias here. Yet it is going too far when he writes, "From the time of the baptism he was conscious of being God's servant promised by Isaiah" (55). Jesus genuinely experienced the gift of the Spirit at his baptism, yet it also took time for him to sort out the complete significance of this - hence the wilderness motif.

In my point of view there is no basis for pushing the reception of the gift of the Spirit and hence the prophetic vocation back prior to the baptism by John (as Schillebeeckx implies); at the same time one should not read too much into the baptismal event, as Jeremias is wont to do. We probably cannot locate on critical grounds alone the reception of the Spirit by Jesus. This remains unknowable to scientific investigation. But we can say that Jesus was aware of the gift of the Spirit and that his Spirit-consciousness very possibly originates with his experience of the baptism. This initial Spirit-consciousness, however, is not yet so articulate that he sees clearly a specific role.

For Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, the baptism was Jesus' first public act as a prophet, a symbolic-prophetic action like those of old, in which he "intimates that Israel as a whole does indeed require a change of heart" (138). For Schillebeeckx, Jesus would have been aware of his call to be a prophet prior to his baptism. But, although possible, there is no basis in the texts for this view. Schillebeeckx does not diminish the role of the baptism for Jesus, however. He writes, "For him this baptism must have been a disclosure experience, that is, a source experience that was revelatory" (137). And he recognizes that, "In the absence of sources the historian can neither affirm nor gainsay anything about the life of Jesus prior to his baptism" (137). Yet he maintains, "His undergoing that baptism was not of course his first religious experience" (137). Granting this, and its vagueness, he attempts to sustain both, "We know nothing of what he understood about himself up to that moment" (137), and "Nothing would allow us to see in this step taken by Jesus the first breakthrough of his prophetic self-awareness" (138). All his examples of these symbolic actions, however, are of those who have been prophets prior to such actions. It is this previous, pre-baptismal awareness for which there is no basis. Jesus was baptized and received the gift of the Spirit. This does not mean that the baptism account is a call narrative either. It is, however, the occasion in which Jesus receives the gift of the Spirit, the sign of a prophetic vocation, and is led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

<sup>14</sup>That Jesus was baptized by John does not mean he necessarily became a disciple of John or that he baptized as a disciple alongside John. This is impossible to determine. See Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 136-37. Jeremias (*New Testament Theol-*

whether he left Nazareth with the intention of returning there after being baptized, since not all of the baptized remained with John; or whether he had decided to become a disciple of John, and perhaps temporarily was one; whether he came simply to hear the preaching of John and was then moved to receive the baptism; or whether he already had seen himself as a prophet and the baptism was a symbolic act reinforcing John as also God's messenger. At any rate, after his time in the wilderness, Jesus eventually preaches on his own authority, and returns to Galilee, perhaps only after the imprisonment and death of John (Mk 1:14 suggests that John's arrest was the occasion for Jesus' return to Galilee). Both John and Jesus preached God, and both risked death out of fidelity to their messages.

### *The Wilderness Experience*

A major portion of the Pentateuch, part of Exodus and all of Leviticus and Numbers, interprets the origins and experience of the Hebrew people in the wilderness. The Lord's name, the Law, and the covenant all have their roots there. A fairly elaborate form of Israel's creed, Joshua 24:2-13, includes the sojourn in the wilderness.<sup>15</sup> Amos 2:10, Hosea 9:10 and 12:9, Jeremiah 31:2, and Deuteronomy 32:10 show the importance of the desert tradition in Israelite history. Ulrich Mauser writes, "The wilderness is the womb of a fundamental datum of the religion of the Old Testament without which its development would be unintelligible."<sup>16</sup>

The desert was not only the scene of God's revelation but also of Israel's sin. Deuteronomy recalls not only the help of

*ogy*, 45-47) points out the contrast between the Synoptic and Johannine images of Jesus and John. In the Synoptics, the contrast is limited to the moment of baptism. In John's Gospel, Jesus is a follower of John and baptizes alongside John (3:22-4:3). On this point the Fourth Gospel may well be more historical.

<sup>15</sup>See Ulrich Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 15-18. Also Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962-65), 1: 121-28, 226-31.

<sup>16</sup>Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 29.

the Lord (7:18, 8:2, 18), but also the rebellion of the people (9:7). Psalm 78 portrays Israel's history, and the wilderness theme of the sin of the ancestors is emphasized. Psalm 106 links Israel's exile to the sin in the desert.

The prophets introduced another element - the expectation of another time that Israel would have to spend in the desert (Hos 2:3, 14). Israel, for Hosea, would have to return to the wilderness because she had refused to be faithful to the Lord (2:14, 11:5). Ezekiel spoke of this second exodus and saw it as fulfilled in his own days with the exile (20:34-36). Deutero-Isaiah also used the motif of a second exodus (40:3, 48:20-21). In both Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah the wilderness became a symbol - a time of judgment, purification, and a new outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord.

Later, in early Judaism, the Messiah was expected to come forth from the wilderness. The Judean desert was often the site of messianic movements. Matthew 24:26 reflects this belief. The Qumran community saw itself as a wilderness people and the *Community Rule* stated: "And when these become members of the Community in Israel according to all these rules, they shall separate from the habitation of ungodly men and shall go into the wilderness to prepare the way of Him; as it is written, 'Prepare in the wilderness the way of ... make straight in the desert a path for our God' (Is 40:3)." <sup>17</sup>

We can say on historiographical grounds that Jesus spent time "in the wilderness," although we cannot with confidence put together the details. Questions remain. Exactly when did this sojourn in the wilderness take place (immediately after the baptism or not)? How long a time was it (forty days is symbolic)? Where was this wilderness (the geographic description is not precise)? What happened (the temptation accounts are more theologically significant than historically factual)?

To understand the significance of Jesus' sojourn in the

171 QS 8:12-16. Translation that of Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, Second edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), 85-86. 1 QS refers to the Rule of the Community or the Manual of Discipline.

wilderness, we begin with the prologue to Mark's Gospel (1:1-13).<sup>18</sup> The setting is the area around the Dead Sea and the Jordan valley. Verse two of the prologue is a quotation from the Hebrew Scriptures. It is an amalgamation of three sayings, two from the prophets (Is 40:3 and Mal 3:10), and one from Exodus (23:20). Exodus 23:20 and Isaiah 40:3 have as their context the wilderness tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures. For Mark, the messenger of the Lord of which Isaiah 40:3 speaks is John, "a man of the desert." The detail in verse 6 about the leather girdle around John's waist helps Mark to establish an identity between John and Elijah (In 2 Kings 1:8 this is a feature of Elijah's dress). John's message of repentance was rooted in the wilderness tradition.

The Baptist's call to repentance and his call to come to him in the wilderness to be baptized are but two aspects of one and the same thing. Going out into the wilderness and repentance are not two different ideas which could only be related to one another as form and content or as condition and result. Rather they are essentially one and the same - the march out into the wilderness is the repentance to which John calls.<sup>19</sup>

The Marcan account sets the scene for Jesus. How will the wilderness relate to the call and ministry of Jesus? Is the wilderness for him a transition to a ministry elsewhere whereas for John the ministry remained in the wilderness? Will Jesus remain associated with the wilderness?

Jesus too went to the wilderness as a sign of repentance. He fully realized what it meant to go there; to be determined to live under the judgment of God. Going into the wilderness itself was symbolic. Jesus was aware of what he was doing by going into the wilderness to be baptized. He was already prompted by God-consciousness when going there. Did he receive the call once there but prior to being baptized? Did it come during the experience of the baptism?

<sup>18</sup>Ulrich Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 77-80, identifies Mark 1:1-13 as a unit and as a prologue to the Gospel.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 87-88.

During the days in the wilderness after the baptism? How much time had he spent in the wilderness prior to the baptism? After the baptism? To these questions there is no answer from the data available. Baptism and wilderness, although historical, have two sides to them, the factual and the symbolic.

To penetrate more deeply into the wilderness episode in Jesus' life we must thus let go of historiography and enter theology. According to the account in Mark, the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness after his baptism. This suggests going more deeply into the wilderness, but this need not be primarily geographical. It is symbolic of what lies ahead - Jesus' wrestling with the powers of evil and with his own call by God.

"Forty days" is symbolic. Moses spent forty days on Mount Sinai; Elijah wandered forty days through Mount Horeb (Ex 24:18; 34:28; 1 Kgs 19:8, 15). Nor for any of these was the forty days something passed through once and for all, but rather a symbol of more to come, a focused look at who they are as God's servants. Temptation or testing was at the core of the wilderness experience. In the Hebrew Scriptures, God tested and purified the people there. In the New Testament, Satan was often the tempter. For Mark, Jesus continued to be tempted; his whole life embraced the struggle that the wilderness theme symbolized. He was not victorious until the end.

The content of the ordeal Jesus underwent in the wilderness, the character of the struggle, the so-called temptations are not recorded in Mark. Mark simply writes:

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him. (1:12-13)

Matthew and Luke flesh out this period in the wilderness with three struggles in particular, although for them not all three are located in the wilderness itself; one was at the Temple in Jerusalem. Although the particular character of Jesus' struggle in the wilderness is not something which can

be arrived at historiographically, it is well not to dismiss the content of Matthew's and Luke's narratives too quickly. They are certainly symbolic of the struggling Jesus who was still in the midst of that same struggle as he went to Gethsemane before his death, the struggle to know and persevere in following the will of God. "Not my will, but Thine be done," was a prayer Jesus learned in the school of struggle (Heb 4:15-5:10). Although the particular character or content of Jesus' wilderness experience cannot be determined historiographically, nevertheless the fact that struggle was central to the life of Jesus is historical. David Hill writes, "Although the narrative [Matthew's] is thus theological (strictly, Christological) rather than biographical, it certainly implies the reality and historicity of Jesus' temptation and spiritual struggle, else it could hardly have been composed."<sup>20</sup>

One of the more thorough and historically sensitive discussions of the temptation narratives is Birger Gerhardsson's discussion of the Matthean text. He maintains that the shorter narrative in Mark and the longer narratives in Matthew and Luke are two versions of one tradition and that the Marcan version is an abbreviated form of a longer narrative. He holds for the priority of the Matthean version.<sup>21</sup> No agreement on the relationship between Mark and Matthew exists, however. Gerhardsson suggests that Matthew is earlier. Mauser, however, says that Mark is earlier and that Matthew and Luke rely upon Mark.<sup>22</sup> Murphy-O'Connor considers them as independent traditions.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup>David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New Century Bible (Greenwood, S.C.: The Attic Press, 1972), 99.

<sup>21</sup>Birger Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son: An Analysis Of an Early Christian Midrash* (Lund, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1966), 10-11. Fitzmyer holds that the order of the temptations in Matthew's version is more original than Luke's, *The Gospel According to Luke, I-IX*, 507. For the opposite point of view, see T. W. Manson, *The Sayings Of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979), 42-43.

<sup>22</sup>Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 144-49.

<sup>23</sup>Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, class notes. Also see this opinion in Jacques Dupont, "L'Origine du récit des Tentations de Jesus au desert," *Revue biblique*, 73 (1966), 30-76, esp. 45-47. Dupont gives a detailed study of the temptations in *Les Tentations de Jesus au desert* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1968)

And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'People shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'." (Mt 4:2-4)

**The first of the temptations took place in the wilderness. Its background was in Deuteronomy 8 in which the Lord led Israel into the wilderness for forty years to test them. Jesus' forty days corresponded to Israel's forty years. The Matthean narrative was a Christian midrash on Deuteronomy 6-8. For Gerhardsson, the key term in the Matthean narrative is "son of God." Jesus' sonship was being put to the test. Jesus remembered what his people had learned during the desert wandering, and his response to the tempter was a quotation from that precise passage in Deuteronomy (8:3).<sup>24</sup>**

**But what had Israel learned? What was the sin with which Jesus was being tempted? The sin of Israel was that of having a divided heart, a discontent with what the Lord had provided, hence a lack of trust in and fidelity to the Lord (Ps 78:18-22). In Deuteronomy 8 and in this first temptation, the wilderness was a setting for a trial designed to reveal what lay in one's heart. Israel did not pass the test; Jesus did. Jesus' trust was in the Lord. He did not grumble, but remained faithful.**

**It was not only a question of Jesus' fidelity, however, but also of Jesus' struggle. Jesus was quite aware that "people do not live by bread alone." His response almost sounds easy. And it would have been easy for Jesus, had he not been portrayed as having been fasting for forty days. The account is almost humorous when it informs us that Jesus was hungry. Jesus saw the suggestion coming from the devil rather than from God. All three temptations involved that same aspect - the choice between following the suggestion**

<sup>24</sup>Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son*, 42.

of the devil and doing the will of God. But what was the will of God for Jesus? That question lies at the core of his struggle. That was what Jesus had come into the wilderness to discern. The wilderness represents Jesus' struggle with his call and the origins of his mission.

Was Jesus perhaps tempted to live an ascetical, penitential life from which the tempter tried to dissuade him? Given the ascetical, penitential movements of Jesus' day, this must have been a possibility for him. John himself was something of an ascetic; the Essenes even more so. Was this the direction that Jesus himself should follow as he prepared for the coming of the Lord? Later Jesus comes out of the desert, preaching and healing and driving out demons and criticized for not being as ascetic as John.<sup>25</sup> Did his own consciousness of his mission begin here to part company with that of John's? Later Jesus fed the hungry and taught others to do likewise. Neither in asceticism (perhaps a real temptation for Jesus) nor in comfort is life to be found, but only in fidelity to God.

The context for understanding both the Matthean and Lucan versions of the story is the wilderness experience of Israel itself as developed in Hebrew tradition. Matthew 4:4 is a quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3 in the Septuagint form of the Scriptures. Likewise the second and third temptations parallel Deuteronomy 6:16 and 6:13. Jesus was not unlike Moses (Dt 9:9-18). The fasting of Jesus recalls that of Moses (Ex 34:28). In the tradition behind both Matthew and Luke, however, Jesus was seen more in contrast to Israel as a whole. Israel was tested in the desert and found wanting. Jesus was tested and found faithful. Jesus' will was to do the will of the Lord. But we cannot presume at this point that Jesus knew what that will was. He was still in the process of discovering that.

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the

<sup>25</sup>Mt 11:18-19; Lk 7:33-34. See Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 48-49. Also Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 201-18.

Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" (Mt 4:5-7)

There is a difference in the order of the temptations within Matthew and Luke. For Matthew, the order is desert, Jerusalem Temple, a high mountain. For Luke it is desert, view of kingdoms of the world, Jerusalem Temple. The first temptation in Matthew's narrative would have led to the sin of infidelity because it would have tempted God, would have put God to the test. So likewise the second was another temptation to put God to the test. Rather than tempting God to satisfy one's hunger, however, it was tempting God to provide protection. The setting here was the Temple because the Temple was the presence of God to God's people. The background is again Deuteronomy 6-8 and also Psalm 91. The reply of Jesus is specifically Deuteronomy 6:16.

John typified the ascetical movements in Judea. Not all of John's disciples remained itinerant with him, however; some returned home to await there the dawning of the end times. Could this have been what God was asking of Jesus? Certainly this would have been an attractive possibility for Jesus, to return to Nazareth and continue to live his "hidden life." Just as Jesus could have been drawn toward a more ascetical life, so he could have been pulled toward a peaceful and quiet life. Yet it was a public ministry the Lord had in store for Jesus. He was not to return to Nazareth and would never have that kind of life again. In resisting the temptation of the devil to test God, it was becoming clearer to him what God might be asking of him. Jesus resisted the diabolical temptation to be the occasion for the working of a great miracle. Just as there were ascetics enough, so there were wonder workers enough in those days. Jesus resisted two extremes: he would not be leaving the wilderness in order "to stay at home" or "to perform miracles." He was being

called to a ministry for the sake of others. Throwing himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple would have been a marvel indeed. But in resisting it, he was beginning to get some sense of his own mission and he remained faithful to God.

Again the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" (Mt 4:8-10)

The setting this time is a mountain. Deuteronomy depicted Moses on a high mountain beholding the glories of Canaan. And Jesus' response came from Deuteronomy. "You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him, and swear by his name" (Dt 6:13).

Certainly the kingdom of the world that the devil offered Jesus must have been something to pass through his mind. His world not only had its ascetics, and its wonder workers, but also its messiahs or messianic expectations. Jesus must have wondered about and feared that he might be that Messiah. He may not have been tempted by earthly kingdoms so naively offered by the devil, but to be the Messiah of Israel, the liberator of God's people and to set up God's reign on earth may indeed have been what the Lord was asking. The Lord was calling him not to an ascetical life in the wilderness, not to a quiet life at home, perhaps then to this earthly mission for which he felt so ill prepared. Moses after all felt the same way.

Yet by this time in his search Jesus may have become willing to accept a ministry rather than the ascetical life, and willing to accept a public ministry for his people rather than a quiet ministry back in Nazareth, but at least a public ministry that might be non-offensive, non-political, and non-violent: a public ministry that would not create con-

flict. Certainly God would spare him the personally offensive, politically dangerous, and potentially violent character that his mission eventually involved. But no. His was to become a most delicate balance to maintain - neither a strictly messianic mission nor religious compromise. His heavenly Father was calling him into the thick of this religiously varied and controversial world, this politically tense and potentially explosive world. No, he was not to be the Messiah in the sense that most of Israel expected one. In fact, God was calling him to run the risk of being a heretic as Jeremiah had been. The devil offered comfort and fame and power; Jesus may have preferred solitude and quiet and staying out of trouble. Yet these are not to be his either. God would lead him out into the world where the battle was to take place. The struggle remained with Jesus throughout his life. The ordeal never went away.

One's approach to the Matthean and Lucan narratives is legitimately imaginative, midrashic as the narratives themselves are. The narratives are symbolic of Jesus' historical but inaccessible struggle - inaccessible in its innermost depths. It is not a question of psychologizing, nor of assuming as historiographical what has been interpretatively developed. It is, however, a question of an encounter with the Jesus who struggles, in this case with his call and his mission. For it is from within this wilderness experience, whatever it consisted in, that Jesus' sense of call gets further clarified and his sense of mission originates - even if that mission and its particularities only get further clarified during the course of the life and ministry which still lay ahead. The wilderness experience was a time of search, of questioning, of struggle - with himself, with the devil, and with his God. The unfolding of the mission will continue beyond the wilderness events themselves. We will later see the search continue and the mission further clarified when Jesus is with his disciples in the region of Caesarea Philippi.

Deuteronomy 6-8 provides the background for the Matthean temptation narrative. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is the famous *Shema* of the Jews.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

Jesus realized at his baptism or in the wilderness that he was being called to be a prophet, like unto Moses but at a much different period of history. *Jesus was being asked to live by faith alone.* He had to trust and not resist the Lord. He had been given the gift of the Spirit. Jesus had come through his time in the wilderness, strengthened, afraid, ready, with a heightened experiential knowledge of the Father's love: God *only* shall you serve. Yes, he would be a servant of the Lord - even until death if that was where it would take him, although he was still not yet fully aware where in fact it was all going to take him. That part of the story had to be lived.

All three narratives, Mark, Matthew, Luke, are more theology than they are history or geography - although this does not mean that the historical and geographical reality is to be dismissed. Mark, Matthew and Luke each has a theological purpose and all use earlier traditions for that purpose. Gerhardsson reminds us of an important aspect of biblical exposition, namely, the "inexhaustible wealth of meaning" within the sacred writings, meaning "additional to and beyond that which was traditionally ascribed" to a text. He writes, "We must remember that no rabbi assumed that the text could only have one meaning. The same expositor could on different occasions, or even on the same occasion, demonstrate that a single passage had many different things to say. This is particularly true of the haggadic exegesis."<sup>26</sup> In other words, the historical basis of the text and the theological intentions behind them still do not exhaust the possible approaches to the text.

What we find is that both critical biblical study and a theological imagination move us in the same direction. Both approaches suggest that in the wilderness after the baptism, and throughout his ministry, Jesus' faith and fidelity were

<sup>26</sup>Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son*, 72-73.

put to the test: was he willing to put the will of his Father first? Was he willing to be God's son, which did not mean doing what the Essenes did, or what John was doing, or what others expected, but doing what the Father asked of him? In the wilderness Jesus learned to pray, "Thy will be done." Jesus left the wilderness a new man, a servant of the Lord, God's son, the obedient one who had been put to the test and remained faithful. Here was a human being willing to entrust his life to the Father, who trusted the Father no matter where this would lead, who lived by faith.

These temptations not only had a basis in the life of the Christian community, but also in the life of Jesus himself. It is highly unlikely that a Christian community with its post-resurrection exalted understanding of Jesus would have developed this tradition from nowhere. Elsewhere the Scriptures give witness to the struggle of Jesus to be God's son, as in the prayer in Gethsemane and in *Hebrews*. In the wilderness Jesus was put to the test and this was an ordeal he would not forget. Jesus himself may well have spoken of it.

Joachim Jeremias helps us to appreciate the genuinely trying character of this experience for Jesus.

"Temptation" is a misleading designation. The word *peirasmos* occurs twenty-one times in the New Testament. In no less than twenty of them, however, it has the meaning of "trial, testing, ordeal"; only in one passage does it clearly denote "temptation to sin" (1 Tim 6:9). It is to be rendered "testing, ordeal" even in Luke 4:13. For the meaning of the so-called "temptation story" is not that Jesus was put in the way of sin and resisted it; rather, the story is about Jesus' acceptance of his mission. It is better, therefore, to avoid the term "temptation story," the moralizing tone of which can easily be misunderstood. The Jesus who confronts us is not the one who has been tempted, but the *one who has emerged from his ordeal*.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 74. See 68-75 for Jeremias' discussion of the temptation narratives. For Jeremias "all three variants of the story are con-

There is both a historical and also a symbolic or theological side to Jesus' being driven into the wilderness. The historical side consists in the fact of his being tested, perhaps shortly after his baptism, while still in the wilderness.<sup>28</sup> The actual character of this ordeal, however, is not historiographically ascertainable.<sup>29</sup> Jesus left Nazareth and Galilee for the wilderness area wherein John was baptizing. While there he received the baptism of John as well as the gift of the Spirit. Called by God as a prophet to Israel, the Spirit drives him further into the wilderness during which time his faith and fidelity and sonship are put to the test. In that ordeal Jesus may have experienced God more personally as his Father. His prayer may have been to do his Father's will. He is willing to trust whatever the Father will ask. He, unlike Israel, is the obedient one, the Son in whom the Father is well pleased. Mauser's interpretation of Mark is that Jesus clashed with Satan who attempted to direct him from an unswerving obedience to the Father's will. Gerhardsson's interpretation of Matthew is that Jesus was tried in every way that Israel was, but remained faithful. Fitzmyer's interpretation of Luke is that Jesus was obedient to his Father's will by refusing to be seduced into using his power of authority as Son for any reason other than that for which he has been sent. I suggest in addition that Jesus had to learn from experience God's will and to live by faith.

In attempting to understand Jesus, we cannot leave this desert/ wilderness motif behind once Jesus moves into his Galilean ministry. There were in Israelite and Judean history two particularly formative traditions: the Moses-

cerned with one and the same temptation: *the emergence of Jesus as a political messiah*" (71). Also see Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke, I-IX*, 514, concerning the word for temptation, test. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, revised edition, trans. S. H. Hooke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 122-23, suggests that the three temptations or episodes originally existed in separate forms. "It is preferable, therefore, to speak of three versions of the account of the temptations, rather than of three temptations. The subject of all three . . . is the overcoming of the temptation to entertain a false messianic expectation" (123).

<sup>28</sup>T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 46, suggests that the stories do report a genuine experience of Jesus.

<sup>29</sup>See Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke, I-IX*, 509-10.

exodus-wilderness tradition especially significant in the north, and the David-Jerusalem-Zion tradition of greater value in the south or Judea.<sup>30</sup> Of these two, the former will remain more important for interpreting and understanding Jesus than the latter, the Mosaic prophet-servant more important than the Davidic king-messiah. As we proceed, we will see that Jesus is better understood in the context of prophecy than in that of messianism. The ordeal in the wilderness may have already involved Jesus in struggle with a messianic call - one which he so far effectively resists and interprets as diabolical. Both Jesus' baptism and the wilderness experience are stories that point to the origins of a mission which is still to unfold, and to be further elaborated even for Jesus himself. The wilderness and the symbolic value which it held in the history of Jesus' people, the ancient tradition of prophecy and the prophets of old, particularly the historical and symbolic roles of Moses: all of these will continue to be influential as Jesus enters upon his mission and ministry.

### *A Man of the Shema*

According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus was baptized (1:9-11), then went further into the wilderness where he was put to the test (1:12-13), then left the wilderness and returned to Galilee after the arrest of John (1:14). After the wilderness experience Jesus was found in Galilee proclaiming the good news of the closeness of God's reign (1:15). In the first chapters of Mark Jesus is portrayed as preaching, healing, and casting out devils. He also attracted four significant disciples - Simon, Andrew, James and John. Much of this ministry took place in Capernaum. Verses 35-39 of the first chapter of Mark provide us with the two sides of Jesus which are closely interwoven throughout his public life - prayer and ministry.

<sup>30</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 1, 46-48, 69-77, 334-47.

35 And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and those who were with him pursued him, 37 and they found him and said to him, "Every one is searching for you." 38 And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out." 39 And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons. (Mk 1:35-39)

Verse 35 presents Jesus alone at prayer. Before the day's work began, Jesus went off to a place where he could be alone with God, where he perhaps recaptured the nearness of God that had been his experience in the wilderness.

Jesus participated in the annual festive religious celebrations of the Jewish people, the traditional festival of Pesach or Passover, the greatest and oldest of the Jewish festivals; and the Feast of Sukkoth or Tabernacles (Tents, Booths, or Ingathering), the autumn agricultural festival. Both of these were pilgrim festivals that brought thousands to Jerusalem. We can assume that Jesus as a practicing and devout Jew often went to Jerusalem for these festivals during his life, perhaps annually.<sup>31</sup> Jesus also observed the sabbath.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. (Lk 4:16)

In addition to the sabbath, Jewish men prayed three times daily. This seems already to have been a custom by the time of Jesus - prayer at sunrise, in the afternoon around 3 p.m.,

<sup>31</sup> On the Jewish festivals, see Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 2 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 484-517; Theodor Gaster, *Festivals of the Jewish Year* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1953); Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Worship in Israel, A Cultic History of the Old Testament*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966); George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. 2 (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 40-54; Henry Renckens, *The Religions of Israel*, trans. N. B. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966); Hayyim Schauss, *Guide to Jewish Holy Days, History and Observance*, trans. Samuel Jaffe (New York: Schocken Books, [1938] 1962).

and at sunset. The daily prayer involved the recitation of the *Shema* (*shema`*) twice a day, at the morning and evening hours, and the *Tephillah* (*t philldh*) three times a day at all three hours.

The *Tephillah*, or "Prayer," is a litany of benedictions known at the end of the first century C.E. as the *Shemoneh Esreh* (*shemoneh 'esreh*), "Eighteen Benedictions," to which one could add personal petitions. It was to be prayed by all including women and children.<sup>32</sup> The *Shema* we have met as the background and context for the testing of Jesus in the wilderness.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets before your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Dt 6:4-9; also Dt 11:13-21, Nm 15:41)

This was to be recited twice daily by men and boys over twelve. Jesus would have been taught, would have recited, and would have meditated upon these words for at least twenty years prior to his baptism. No wonder he would have felt them in his heart and found them ready at hand during the test in the wilderness. These words above any others were the ones upon which Jesus based his life. His own restatement or the summary of Jesus' teaching on the Law involves the *Shema* as the first of the commandments. In

<sup>32</sup>Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1967), 70-72; *New Testament Theology. The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 185-88. For a translation of the benedictions, see Ernst Lohmeyer, *Our Father* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 302-4. Also see Evelyn Garfiel, *Service of the Heart, A Guide to the Jewish Prayer Book* (North Hollywood, Calif.: Wilshire Book Co., 1978), 94-106.

some ways, in response to the question "Who is Jesus of Nazareth?" one might best reply by saying: Jesus is someone who loved the Lord his God with all his heart, all his soul, and all his might - a man who lived the *Shema*. There are many references to Jesus also praying in solitude, often for extended periods. We have noted Mark 1:35 and could include Mark 6:46 (// Mt 14:23). Luke frequently adds the motif of prayer to Mark's text (Lk 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28).

With respect to Jesus' prayer, all five strata of the Gospels present him as addressing God as Father: Mark 13:36 (// Mt 26:39, Lk 22:42); Q, Matthew 6:9 (// Lk 11:2), Matthew 11:25, 26 (// Lk 10:21); special Luke, 22:34, 46; special Matthew, 26:42 (repetitions of 26:39); John 11:41, 12:27f, 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25. The only exception to this form of address on the part of Jesus is Mark 15:34 (// Mt 27:46), the cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," in which Jesus alludes to Psalm twenty-two. In addressing God in his personal prayer, Jesus used Aramaic rather than Hebrew, and thus addressed God as *Abba*. This is explicit in Mark 14:36 and is also reflected in the life of the early Church (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15).

Jeremias maintained that Jesus' use of *Abba* in addressing God was the most important linguistic innovation on the part of Jesus.<sup>33</sup> James D. G. Dunn indicates that Jeremias has overstated his case, yet agrees that *Abba* was a characteristic feature of Jesus' prayers and that it distinguished him to some degree from his contemporaries.<sup>34</sup> Ferdinand Hahn states, "the Aramaic form of address *Abba* can be regarded with certainty as a mark of Jesus' manner of

<sup>33</sup>*New Testament Theology*, 36. There is an important distinction here when referring to Old Testament and post-biblical sources. For example, although there is little evidence for someone *addressing* God as *Abba* prior to Jesus, there are instances in which God is spoken of as a father. The difference is between the one spoken to (in prayer) and the one spoken of (in the sacred traditions). James D. G. Dunn modifies Jeremias' overstatement. See *Christology in the Making*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 26-29; and *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 20-40.

<sup>34</sup>Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 26-29.

speech."<sup>35</sup> The significance of Jesus' use of *Abba* rises from the fact that the word is very familial and familiar. Jesus prayed to God as an adult child would talk to or colloquially address dad or mom.<sup>36</sup>

Another characteristic of the prayer of Jesus was its obediential quality reflecting a submission to the will of God (*Abba*). This quality is reflected in Luke's portrayal of Jesus' mother's life: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). It was the core of Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mk 14:36; // Lk 22:42; Mt 26:42). In the Synoptic Gospels we really have only two of the personal prayers of Jesus, Mark 14:36 quoted above, and the prayer of thanks in Matthew 11:25-30. Both mention the will of the Father (Mt 11:26), as does the prayer which he taught his disciples. Thus understandably and faithfully his disciples recalled this aspect in the life and prayer of the Teacher when they have him say: "I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me," (Jn 5:30) and "I have come to do thy will" (Heb 10:9).<sup>37</sup>

As we reflect upon the prayer Jesus taught, we can consider it both as a prayer and as a summary of his teaching. The prayer is not a prayer which Jesus taught publicly for everyone, but rather a prayer for his disciples in response to their request (Lk 11:1). Matthew places the prayer within his compilation of Jesus' teaching (the "sermon on the mount"). But Luke sees Jesus teaching the prayer in response to the request of his disciples. Although it is nowhere explicitly stated, one can assume that the prayer Jesus taught reflects

<sup>35</sup>Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology, Their History in Early Christianity*, trans. Harold Knight and George Ogg (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), 307.

<sup>36</sup>The use of *Abba* in the time of Jesus was not necessarily limited to babies or small children. See Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 67; *The Prayers of Jesus*, 58-63. Also Schillebeeckx, *Jesus, An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 159; 693, n. 210. Also T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1957), 168.

<sup>37</sup>See also John 4:34; 6:38. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 263; Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 18, 62; Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 15-21.

Jesus' own personal way of praying himself. Jesus' prayer (the one he taught) reflects Jesus' prayer (his own way of praying).

Jeremias has helped to provide us with a possibly original form of the prayer.<sup>38</sup> We have two versions of the prayer which vary slightly. It is generally considered that Luke's version (11:2-4) is the more original. His is the shorter and it is more probable that the prayer would have been expanded rather than that the disciples would have omitted something. Also, Matthew's version reflects a more liturgical setting. While Luke's version may be more original with respect to length, Jeremias maintains that Matthew's version (6:9-13) is more original with respect to wording, given its more difficult reading and its Aramaic flavor. Accepting these two principles, Luke's length and Matthew's wording, Jeremias has reconstructed a possible Aramaic original by translating the prayer as based on Luke's length and Matthew's words back into Aramaic. This may be the prayer as actually taught by Jesus. Translated into English, it would be something like:

Dear Father,  
 Hallowed be thy name;  
 Thy kingdom come;  
 Our bread for tomorrow, give us today;  
 And forgive us our debts, as we also here and now  
 forgive our debtors;  
 And let us not fall into temptation.<sup>39</sup>

This reconstruction, however, is only probable.<sup>40</sup> We can take hypotheses with respect to Jesus' prayer too defini-

<sup>38</sup>Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 85-94. Michael Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974), 296-301, suggests that the Lord's Prayer is composed by Matthew from Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane and teaching on prayer (Mk 11:25).

<sup>39</sup>John Reumann, *Jesus in the Church's Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 95. Also see T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 266.

<sup>40</sup>Even Jeremias speaks of probability, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 89, 91. Yet he does not always emphasize the probable aspect, *New Testament Theology*, 195-96. For

tively. For example, we suggested that the prayer was one taught to the disciples, as suggested by Luke. The evidence for this is the assimilation of the prayer into a sermon setting in Matthew, the restricted post-baptismal use of the prayer in the early Church,<sup>41</sup> and the probability that Jesus only taught the prayer once. All of this makes it probable that Jesus did teach the prayer to his disciples and the Church treasured this prayer and reserved it for the baptized. On the other hand, we cannot simply dismiss the real possibility that Jesus did teach the prayer twice - once earlier in his ministry to his disciples in response to their request and again later to a larger audience.

We note that Jesus tells his disciples, when they are praying, to address the God of Israel and Lord of the Universe with the familial *Abba*. The Lord is the Father of Jesus, and our Father as well. The prayer can be divided into the God-conscious reverence in the first part and the self-conscious needs or fears in the second. This division is similar to that within the New Testament's twofold summary of the Law, the first part of which concerns our love for God and the second part which concerns our love for neighbor and self. Although we could reserve an analysis of Jesus' prayer until we discuss the teaching of Jesus, it is also

excellent points which make one more skeptical of the effort to determine the original version, see Lohmeyer, *Our Father*, 131-33, 275, 291-95.

<sup>41</sup>In the *Didache*, which probably dates from the first century, there is the instruction to pray Jesus' prayer three times a day (8:3). The early Christians took over the Jewish custom of praying three times daily, but they used the prayer Jesus taught rather than the Jewish *Tephillah*. See *The Didache*, trans. James A. Kleist, *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 6 (New York: Neuman Press, 1948), 3-25. Also, *The Apostolic Fathers*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 1 (New York: Christian Heritage, Inc., 1947), 167-84. The fact that the prayer itself may have been reserved for those who had already been baptized is reflected in the catechesis of Cyril of Jerusalem (fourth century), the earliest witness to the fact that the prayer was used in the celebration of the Eucharist and in that portion of the liturgy reserved for the baptized, in contrast to catechumens. See Cyril's 24th catechetical lecture. Lectures 1-19 were prebaptismal instructions. Lectures 20-24 were given during Easter Week and were post-baptismal. See Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3 (Utrecht: Spectrum Publishers, 1966), 362-77. Also, and for a translation, *St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, ed. F. L. Cross, trans. R. W. Church (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977).

appropriate here as we reflect upon Jesus as a man of prayer and the *Shema*.

1. "Hallowed be thy name" (Lk 11:2; Mt 6:9). Reverence is shown - may your name, Father, be hallowed, praised, respected, revered, rightly feared, made holy, sanctified, glorified. The prayer begins by acknowledging respect for the name of God. Raymond Brown suggests that the prayer concerns an action on the part of God: may God "make manifest the sanctity of His own name," akin to Jesus' cry in John's Gospel, "Father, glorify your name" (12:28).<sup>42</sup> This petition is not original with Jesus. It is the first petition of the *Kaddish*, one of the prayers of Judaism: "Exalted and hallowed be his great name in the world which he created according to his will."<sup>43</sup> The *Kaddish* was a prayer which immediately followed the sermon which was given in Aramaic in the synagogue. Jesus would have been familiar with the *Kaddish* and would have prayed it from his childhood on.

2. "Thy Kingdom come" (Lk 11:2; Mt 6:10a). "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10b). In this second petition, Matthew's text includes two petitions for Luke's one. The two in Matthew, however, are practically synonymous and reinforce each other. They express two aspects of the God-consciousness of Jesus in relationship with *Abba* – God's reign and will. They express the same heartfelt desire. We see here the reverent, obediential, hopeful posture of Jesus. Although only the first may reflect the prayer as originally taught by Jesus, both reflect accurately aspects from the life of Jesus. "May your reign begin and your kingdom come" reflects something he is asking of God. Come quickly, Father - a *maranatha* (Rv 22:20) addressed to the Father.

<sup>42</sup>Raymond Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," *New Testament Essays* (New York: Paulist Press, 1965), 229. Also see Lohmeyer, *Our Father*, 63-87.

<sup>43</sup>Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 198. Lohmeyer, *Our Father*, 66-67. *The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy*, ed. Jakob J. Petuchowski and Michael Brocke (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), esp. 59-72.

Just as in Jesus' own personal prayer he learned "but not as I will" (Mt 26:42), so here he teaches "thy will be done." The God-consciousness in the first half of the prayer reflects both our hope - may thy kingdom come - and also our response - may thy will be done. This expression, "Thy will be done on earth," is also an act of resignation. As "May your kingdom come" reflects something that we are asking of God, so "May your will be done" is something we are asking of ourselves. Whether our Father's will is or is not done on earth will depend on us.

The first half of the prayer is an expression of hope, and an eschatological awareness. Both "May your reign begin" and "May your will be done" express hope, and one can say that these expressions of hope are the core of prayer. The "God-consciousness" is an "eschatological consciousness" as well. The resigned and committed aspects of this petition are rooted in the hope: may your kingdom come; may your will be done.

3. The second half of the prayer involves three petitions. The first is, "Give us each day our daily bread" (Lk 11:3); or "Give us this day our daily bread" (Mt 6:11). One notices a variation between the Matthean and Lucan versions.

The petition is eminently practical: Feed us. Grant us today the bread we need to live. Help us to get through today. We pray this prayer daily, and our prayer today is for bread today (at least in Matthew). There is also a tone of hope and expectation here. There is no hint that our Father will not see that sufficient bread for today is provided. This is an expression of trust. The simplicity and practicality of the petition point to it as an expression on behalf of those whose daily food was not secure. It was a petition that reflected the socio-economic reality of the petitioners, as well as dependency upon God. It was not a prayer taught the rich; it would too readily smack of irony or arrogance. Nothing would suggest that Jesus himself did not pray in this way. He often could not be sure where his next meal would come from; he was certainly conscious that this was true of many who gathered to hear him preach; it must have

been the condition of his disciples who had left much behind to follow him. They all had this in common - their only hope was in the Lord.

The "us" here ought not be defined individualistically or narrowly. Given the multitudes who came to Jesus, it is likely that the "us" included all those in need, himself, his disciples, the poor of whom he was so conscious. "Give us, all of us, enough to eat. Give especially those most in need sufficient bread for this day."

If we, his disciples today, reflect upon the number of times we pray this prayer in one week or one month, it cannot help but have an air of insincerity or triviality about it unless we have that consciousness in us which was in Jesus, namely a more social religious awareness. Given the reality of the overwhelming number of poor and starving in our world, and given the reality that so many of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus in fact need not worry about where our next meal may come from, if we pray as Jesus taught and in a heartfelt way, it must involve a global consciousness: Give us the food we need for this day. Give especially those most in need sufficient bread for this day. We too pray the "us" not only for ourselves but for all who have been entrusted to our care, for ourselves and our families, for all disciples of Jesus and our brothers and sisters in the faith, for the hungry and needy, our neighbors wherever they may be.

One will notice in my interpretation a very present and existential character. A tendency in recent years, however, has been to interpret this petition in an eschatological sense. We have already seen hopefulness and eschatology in the first half of the prayer. The eschatology in the second half of the prayer, while present, is balanced with other concerns. Let us look at the texts more closely to see the basis for an eschatological interpretation. Matthew writes, "Give us *this* day," and Luke writes, "Give us *each* day." In Luke the petition appears broadened or generalized. Matthew's version, according to Jeremias, reflects the original petition. Also, in Mathew, an aorist imperative is used, in Luke a present imperative. Elsewhere in the prayer the aorist is used, hence Matthew appears to be more consistent. The

orist implies a single action: today, this day, once. Luke's expansion to every day, each day, would require the present imperative for repeated actions. Hence it appears that Luke made an adaptation. Matthew's version, with the one time request, is open to an eschatological interpretation.

But the crucial factor with respect to an eschatological interpretation is the meaning of the word *epiousion*. The Greek word is rare. It is also a later tradition. The Aramaic original can only be hypothetical. Thus one cannot be sure of the exact meaning of *epiousios*.<sup>44</sup> Etymologically, does the word derive from *epi* and *einai* or *ousia* (to be) or from *epi* and *ienai* (to go, come)? The first two imply bread for existence of some sort; the latter bread to come, or for the coming day, or for tomorrow. The first interpretation appears more existential; the latter more eschatological.

Jeremias takes his clue for the latter interpretation from a gloss in Jerome which speaks of the word *mahar* in a lost Aramaic Gospel of the Nazarenes, which word means tomorrow. Jeremias therefore translates *artos epiousios* as "bread for tomorrow."<sup>45</sup> I grant the validity of this translation, but there is a further step taken when one goes from "bread for tomorrow" to "bread for *the* tomorrow, the end times." What is the basis for the eschatological leap?

Jeremias points out that *mahar* literally denotes the next day. Certainly it could mean bread for the future. But to move from "tomorrow's future bread" to "the bread of the end times" is a major leap. Granted an early eschatological interpretation of this bread as bread of the age of salvation, or heavenly manna, these post-resurrection and liturgical settings cannot necessarily be read back into Jesus. Raymond Brown sees a biblical background in Exo-

<sup>44</sup>Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," 239-43; Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 199. A good discussion of the *epiousios* problem is that of Lohmeyer, *Our Father*, 141-46. Also see W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1957), 296-97.

<sup>45</sup>Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 100; *New Testament Theology*, 200. Also see Lohmeyer, *Our Father*, 155.

us 16:4 ("I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day").<sup>46</sup> The manna would come on the morrow. Granted such background, this does not necessitate or even favor an eschatological or a Eucharistic interpretation. The manna in the desert was a very existential, life-giving, needed, daily bread. Brown gives an eschatological importance to the aorist tense in all the petitions, but this one-time request can reflect existential as well as eschatological urgency. The interest of the petition in each case is now, even if prayed daily.

There is no need to deny the eschatological sense to this petition completely. Lohmeyer maintains a balance between both meanings, physical hunger and eschatological hunger, physical bread and eschatological bread. He writes, "The bread, then, is earthly bread, the bread of the poor and needy, and at the same time, because of the eschatological hour in which it is prayed for and eaten, it is the future bread in this today, the bread of the elect and the blessed."<sup>47</sup>

I myself see more evidence for the existential character of the petition: "Give us today tomorrow's bread," or "Give us today bread for the future." "As you fed our ancestors in the desert, and thus prevented them from starving, give us this heavenly, physical bread that will prevent us from starving." John Reumann accepts the sense of "for tomorrow," and yet writes, "The most likely answer is that it means 'bread for tomorrow, give us today' - i.e., give us enough to see us through the next step on the way."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Raymond Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," 242.

<sup>47</sup>Lohmeyer, *Our Father*, 157; also see 150-59.

<sup>48</sup>Reumann, *Jesus in the Church's Gospels* 104; cf., 351. Perrin prefers the eschatological interpretation of the petition; see *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1963), 191-98, and *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 47-48. T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 167-71, 265-66, interprets it as referring to the necessities of life, which I prefer, not to the exclusion of the other. Also see *The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy*, 98-104, where Vogtle suggests that the eschatological interpretation is an over interpretation.

4. "Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive every one who is indebted to us" (Lk 11:5); "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Mt 6:12).

From the perspective of a balance which takes into consideration both the physical and spiritual or social and religious needs of a human being, one could not formulate two requests more to the point: Give us today and tomorrow sufficient bread. Forgive us our sins. Just as Jewish men or women would have been aware of their material needs, so they would have been aware of their condition before God. They were a religious people, and religious reality was as real as economic reality. There was no reason to separate the two or isolate one over against the other or exalt one above the other. Both were very real and felt needs.

This petition links our own need to be forgiven with our need to forgive, our relation with God and with our brothers and sisters. Matthew 6:14-15, which immediately follows the prayer, makes this point as well. Jesus again and again declared that you cannot ask God for forgiveness if you are not prepared to forgive. It is not a question of bargaining with God. It is a question of restoring proper relationships with our heavenly Father, and with our brothers and sisters - another very existential and felt religious request.

5. "Lead us not into temptation" (Lk 11:4); "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Mt 6:13). Again, as in the second petition, Matthew's version is expanded. This is another very existential request: Do not let us be put to the test.

Although the two previous petitions can be universalized, this third is best seen as a petition on the part of the committed disciples. The background involves Jesus' own struggle, test, and ordeal through which he was put in the wilderness. Please, *Abba*, never let us be put to the test like that. Never try our faith and fidelity to see how sincere and deep it really is. We have already acknowledged our sinfulness. Up against the command of the *Shema* we are found wanting.

Jesus was quite aware that the struggle which began with him in the wilderness was not finished once and for all. It

remained with him in his life and up to his death. This is one of his own reasons for prayer - his continued need to rely on his heavenly Father and surrender over and over again. The same surrender was still needed in Gethsemane, and it seemed no easier: *Abba*, if only this cup could pass me by. Jesus learned experientially what it meant to live by faith alone. The disciples were called to this same life, that of faith and trust in God. But this life of faith is often accompanied by fear. This last request arises out of reverence and out of fear. Spare me, O Lord.

We are not talking about flimsy temptations here. We are talking about the temptation from Satan, the father of lies, the temptation to do our own selfish will. Jesus taught his disciples to pray to be spared. Jesus prayed the same prayer. There is no question but that the prayer is a prayer of the heart of all disciples. No one welcomes a prophetic call without fear. Do not put us to the test. It is not a question here of God's tempting us, but of God's allowing us to be put to the test by the Evil One. The word, *peirasmōs*, does not mean minor temptation or struggle, but the test or ordeal through which Jesus was put in the wilderness, the testing of the depth of faith. The Matthean expansion recognizes this need to be delivered from the power of the evil one.<sup>49</sup> This *peirasmōs* (test, ordeal) is found in Mark 14:38 - Jesus tells his disciples, "Pray that you may not enter into trial, be put to the test."

The concluding doxology with which we are familiar reflects the prayer as it is already found in the *Didache* (8:2). The *Didache* has generally followed the more liturgical and expanded Matthean text. The doxology, "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, for ever and ever," is lacking, however, both in Luke and in the oldest manuscripts of Matthew.

Let us return to the one to whom the whole prayer is addressed: "Father" (Lk 11:20), "Our Father who art in

<sup>49</sup>Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," 251-53; Reumann, 96. For a discussion of why to translate evil as the evil one, see Lohmeyer, *Our Father*, 213-17.

heaven" (Mt 6:9). Again we see a longer Matthean form which may reflect Jewish prayer customs or formulae. The Aramaic which Jesus used could simply have been *Abba*. Jeremias writes, "It is possible to conclude that the giving of the Lord's Prayer to the disciples authorized them to say 'Abba,' just as Jesus did." SO The privilege of being able to pray in this fashion and the boldness it implies is reflected in the liturgy. The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom introduces the Lord's Prayer with, "Grant that we may dare to call on thee as Father and say ..... The present Roman Liturgy begins, "We are bold to say...."

Addressing God as Father, although not common within Palestinian Judaism, did have Near Eastern precedents in Sumerian prayers long before the time of Moses. The deity was seen as both powerful and merciful. Jeremias writes, "For Orientals, the word 'father,' as applied to God, thus encompasses, from earliest time, something of what the word 'mother' signifies among us."<sup>51</sup> The richness and uniqueness of the word *abba* makes it difficult to translate. Following Jeremias' suggestion about its setting in an Oriental world, *imma* (mother) as readily captures the felt sense: *abba, imma*, our heavenly father and mother, our darling God.

We often think of the way Jesus prayed, or the prayer he taught. Yet it is also helpful to ask why Jesus prayed. What prompted it? There is no question here of psychoanalysis, nor of historiographical data either, but of allowing the biblical portrait to present itself. The prayer of Jesus involved thanks and praise (Jn 11:41; Mt 11:25) as well as petition (Mk 14:36). Thomas Clarke mentions five reasons or occasions for prayer within the life of Jesus.<sup>52</sup> The first was that of his search for self-understanding or self-identification (e.g., the wilderness experience). Prayer was a heightening of Jesus' consciousness of who he was. Jesus'

<sup>50</sup>Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 63.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>52</sup>Notes from an unpublished series of lectures by Thomas Clarke, Monroe, New York, June, 1974. I build upon the five reasons he suggested.

self-understanding cannot be separated from the prayer of Jesus. In prayer he wrestled with all aspects of his identity and especially his religious identity, his relationship to God. Prayer was thus a means by which he achieved personal identity.

Second, prayer helped him to sustain his relationship to the Father, that filial and obediencial posture that he had become aware of. It enabled him not only to be conscious of his sonship but to persevere as son, and thus discover and do the Father's will.

Third, prayer also helped him to maintain a fraternal posture toward fellow men and women. He achieved a greater understanding of the people who were part of his life and the people whom his Father loved. In prayer he came to love and to sustain love for his brothers and sisters, and to transcend the anger and hurt and pain he would feel because of them. He was able to forgive them. He prayed for them (Jn 17:15, 20; Lk 22:31f, 23, 34).

Fourth, Jesus prayed in order to make decisions, especially the difficult and significant decisions in his life. He prayed before choosing disciples (Lk 6:12); he brought this choice to the Father. He prayed over his own mission in the wilderness as he struggled with the temptation to be the Messiah.

Fifth, there is an element of passing over into life with the Father and returning to share what he received (Lk 9:29). In his union with the Father in prayer, he became aware of the Father and gained knowledge of the Father. This is akin to what we may have called infused knowledge, but not a special knowledge granted to Jesus; rather a knowledge granted to him in the midst of deep prayer, a revelatory effect of prayer. A man or woman in prayer is the one to whom God discloses God's own self. Thus, in his life of prayer, Jesus more and more became aware of his relationship to God, strove towards union with the Father, and became a more effective messenger and minister of the Father. He became more and more God's son and servant, more and more one with God.

In our discussion concerning the prayer of Jesus, one prominent note is that of Jesus' addressing God in prayer as *Abba* and of Jesus' teaching his disciples to pray by addressing God as *Abba* as well. Thus already we have some sense of Jesus as son. The notion of sonship ought first be seen in a Semitic, Hebrew, Jewish context. In the Scriptures the Hebrew *ben* (Aramaic *bar*) is primarily an expression of subordination, in contrast to the Greek *huios* which denotes physical descent. The biblical concept of sonship could also express "belonging to God."<sup>53</sup> God's people, Israel, were seen as children of God. The Davidic king as well as expected Davidic Messiah were sons of God. In the wisdom tradition, the wise ones were sons of God, as well as the righteous ones (Sirach 4:10; Wisdom of Solomon 2:18). The son of God is a servant of God. In Jesus' prayer, as in the baptism and wilderness experience, Jesus manifests himself as God's son, a man of faith and the *Shema*.

<sup>53</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Son Of God*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 21-23, 41-45.