

EXCURSUS 9

'The Son' as Jesus' Self-Designation in the Gospel of John

Jesus' designation of himself as 'the Son', when speaking of his relationship to God, is so striking, so typically Johannine, that it calls for closer scrutiny. 'The Son', used absolutely, occurs only three times in the synoptics (Mt 11:27 = Lk 10:22; Mk 13:32; Mt 24:36; Mt 28:19), once in Paul (1 Cor 15:28) and five times in Hebrews (1:2, 8; 3:6; 5:8; 7:28: no article, except in 2 John. But mere statistics do not suffice to give an accurate picture of the centrality and Christological significance of the expression. 'The Son' stands in such close relationship with 'the Father' that we have to include all those far more numerous passages in which the Johannine Jesus speaks of 'the Father' or 'my Father' or addresses the Father in prayer. There are more than fifty such passages, and while eight include the formal expression 'the Father who sent me', this does not detract from the power and impressiveness of the idea. There can be no doubt that we have here an essential theme of Johannine theology and Christology. The 'Father-son relationship' is the key to the understanding of Jesus as portrayed by the evangelist, and of his words and actions as interpreted by him. It is a deliberately chosen theological expression, and hence the question whether the historical Jesus spoke in this way misses the point of the evangelist's intention, which is to interpret the coming and work of Jesus in the light of faith. This does not mean that his interpretation does not have a sound foundation, not only in the Jesus event as a whole but even in individual words of Jesus, particularly in his prayer to the Father.¹

G. P. Welter took the Johannine expression 'Son of God' as his starting-point for an enquiry into the character and tendency of the gospel of John. If we look at his method and conclusions (the Johannine 'Son of God' is strong evidence for the Hellenization of Christianity and the Hellenistic origin of this gospel) and compare them with the most recent research, which has discarded the comparative religion approach and works chiefly with traditio-historical methods, we can see how great a change has taken place. Apart from that one monograph, scholarly literature of the last fifty years has concentrated less on this theme than

one might have expected.² Welter's thesis that the Christian υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ is connected with the Hellenistῆες ἀνθρώπων has had a long-lasting influence.³ Treating it traditio-historically, the idea is that the Jewish-Christian apocalyptic figure of the Son of man was reinterpreted with the help of Gnostic-Hellenist concepts: 'From the apocalyptic Son of man came the Hellenistic Son of God'.⁴ But why, in that case, has the evangelist not simply abandoned Son of man Christology, instead of giving it too a fresh interpretation (cf. Excursus 5, vol. I, pp. 529-542)? Nor did earlier works distinguish sufficiently between the use of the title 'Son of God' and the expressions 'the Son' and 'the Father' used absolutely. The Johannine Jesus does indeed speak of himself as the 'Son of God' (3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4), and with the same meaning as when he says 'the Son'; but it can be seen from the Gospel itself that the title 'the Son of God' has a different root and a different Sitz im Leben (confessional formula: 1:34; 1:49; 11:27; 20:31) from the absolute use of 'the Son', which is reserved to Jesus alone.⁵ Hence it seems requisite to consider this characteristic Christological expression separately: to survey the relevant texts, classify them according to criteria of form and, more importantly, content, and then enquire, traditio-historically, whether these sayings may not have had different roots and have come together for the first time in the Johannine Christology and there been given, as it were, an over-arching unity. Finally, we shall have to reconsider the religio-historical question, in order to arrive at the sense and significance of this central Johannine Christology.

1. The Expressions 'the Son' and 'the Father'

(a) Absolute ὁ υἱός

1:18 (ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός); 3:16, 17, 35, 36a, b; 5:19b, c, 20, 21, 22, 23a, b, 26; 6:40; 8:35, 36; 14:13; 17:1.

In respect of form, it will be proper to distinguish those passages in which ὁ υἱός is also named, so that the Father-Son relationship is given formal expression. This occurs particularly in the great discourse in Chapter 5, and also at 3:35 ('the Father loves the Son', cf. 5:20), 6:40 ('This is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son . . .') and 14:13 ('that the Father may be glorified in the Son'). We shall see later that the material drawn upon here belongs to a range or circle of sayings or motifs with an important significance for the Father-Son relationship and the Son-Christology.

Surprisingly, the subject in the passage about the sending of the (only) Son (3:16 ff) is not ὁ υἱός but ὁ θεός. For Jesus speaks often enough of 'the Father who sent me', though often, too, simply of 'him who sent me' (fifteen times with πέμπεν, thus not formally identical with passages with ἀποστείλλειν). For the evangelist, the God who sent the Son is of course

none other than the Father, so that this saying too is an important expression of the Father-Son relationship. If we find the evangelist fairly often using 'God' rather than 'the Father', this probably indicates that he is using a form of expression already present in his material and combining it with his Son-Christology. The absence of 'the Father' from 8:36 is easily explained by the link with the slave-son metaphor in v. 35, where there was no need to mention the father. It is clear that the evangelist is thinking here too of Jesus' unique Son-relationship when, two verses later, we find the affirmation 'I speak of what I have seen with my Father'. A further important formal consideration is that all these passages appear in the mouth of Jesus, apart from 1:18, where the reading is uncertain (v. commentary). I would not regard the passage in Chapter 3 as part of the discourse to Nicodemus, but as a redactional insertion of an originally separate commentary by the evangelist. But the evangelist himself would already have seen it as a programmatic revelatory speech of Jesus, justifying the use of the absolute 'the Son'.

Turning now to content, we discern certain groups of motifs:

- (1) The sending of the Son into the world (3:16 ff.).
 - (2) The love of the Father for the Son (3:35a; 5:20) shown in the revelatory power of the Son and in his participation in the Father's works (3:35b; 5:20b-23).
 - (3) The offer of salvation in the Son thrown open to believers (3:16c, 17, 36a; 6:40), and the corresponding threat of judgment upon those who do not believe (3:36b; 5:22; cf. 3:18, τ. μὴ πιστεύοντες υἱοῦ τ. θεοῦ, 5:27a, in which the personal pronoun refers to 'the Son').
 - (4) The glorifying of the Father in the Son (14:13) or by the Son (17:1). This last passage speaks also of the (previous) glorifying of the Son by the Father, except that since Jesus is praying to the Father (πάτερ) he says not 'the Son' but 'thy Son'.
- Surveying these passages, we see that all the essential aspects of Jesus' revealing and saving work come out in them: his mission into the world, his life-giving power, and finally his way into glory and his saving work as the glorified one. The uniqueness of Jesus' mission and the saving significance of his words and deeds are expressed through the uniqueness of his relation to God, that is his Son-relationship. Thus Jesus' designation of himself as 'the Son' is the evangelist's chosen tool for disclosing certain deeper dimensions of the earthly work of Jesus discernible to faith. The group of sayings about 'the Father', coordinately linked with this expression, confirm and extend the conclusion so far reached.

(b) Absolute ὁ πατήρ

It is not necessary to go through this extensive material item by item; for our purpose it may be grouped according to distinct forms of words and particular motifs.

- (1) 'The Father who sent me' (ὁ πέμψας με): 5:37; 6:44; 8:16, 18; 12:49; 14:24, 26; αὐτὸν with the same meaning, 5:23.⁶
- In other passages it is clear from the context that the Father is he who sends: 4:34; 5:24, 30; 6:38, 39; 7:16, 28, 33; 8:26, 29; 9:4; 12:44, 45; 13:20; 15:21; 16:5.

When the verb used is ἀποστέλλειν, we sometimes find ὁ θεός, explicitly (3:17, 34) or implied by the context (8:42; cf. 6:29); but πατήρ is also found: 5:36; 6:57; 10:36; 20:21; from the context: 5:38 (cf. 6:29; 7:29); in prayer to the Father: 11:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25.

These clearly belong with the same complex of ideas as we discerned above for ὁ υἱός.

- (2) The Father is frequently spoken of as 'giving' (δίδωμι).⁷ He has given Jesus his δύναμις (17:11, 12), his δόξα (17:22, 24), the words (17:8), the works (5:36), the work as a whole (17:4), 'all things into his hand' or 'hands' (3:35; 13:3), 'to have life in himself' (5:26), authority to execute judgment (5:22, 27a), power over all flesh (17:2). He has also given him those who believe in him: 6:37, 39; 10:29; 17:2, 6, 7 (πάντα). 9, 24; 18:9. Christology and soteriology reach their greatest concentration in the statement that the Father has 'given' Jesus himself to the world, that it may live: as the true bread from heaven (6:32). This is the key to the ὁ θεός sentence at 3:16: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son', where one would rather have expected παραδόνκεν (v. commentary). In John God is simply the Giver, giving out of sheer love; it is in giving that he reveals his will to save, and his greatest, all-embracing gift to a humanity in need of redemption is his Son, the μόνογενής (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; cf. 1 Jn 4:9).⁸ Finally, after Jesus' departure from the earth, the Father gives the disciples the Spirit, in place of Jesus and at his request (14:16).

There is a special formulation, ἐντολήν δίδωμι, used in John for the entire mission and task which the Son receives from the Father (12:49-50; 14:31; cf. 10:18; 15:10). This includes Jesus' passion and death (10:18), expressed in one case, taking up a synoptic saying, as 'the cup which the Father has given me' (18:11).

- (3) The Father's love for the Son, which we have seen already in the list of 'the Son' sayings (3:35; 5:20), also appears in connection with the task which Jesus, in accordance with his Father's will, carries out even unto death (10:17; 15:9 ff.). This focuses attention on the closeness and unity of the Son with the Father, a theme developed under many aspects and with different forms of expression. We can list only the most important here:⁹ there is cooperation in the earthly activity of Jesus, a real working together (5:17, 19, 20), such that the Son can do nothing of himself (5:19, 30) but only speaks and does what he has seen, heard, learnt from the Father (cf. 8:28, 38, 40; 12:50; 15:15), while the Father 'shows all' to the Son (5:20), entrusts to him his greatest works, judgment and the giving of life (cf. 5:21-27), and 'gives all things into his hands' (13:3). Thus the Son submits totally to the Father's will (8:29; 14:31; cf. 4:34; 10:18; 12:49-50) and seeks only the Father's glory (8:50; cf. 7:18), while the Father does not leave him

alone in the face of men's hostility but is 'with him' (8:29; 16:32), honours and glorifies him (8:54; 13:31-32; 17:1-5). This leads up to statements of a fuller unity with the Father: mutual 'knowing' (10:15), being one (10:30; 17:11,22), so that the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son (10:38; 14:10,11,20; 17:21,23). Hence the Father can be known and 'seen' in the Son (8:19; 12:45; 14:7,9).

(4) It is the Father who guarantees and endorses Jesus' revealing and saving activity on earth, simply because it is he who has 'given' the Son the words and works (cf. (1) above), is there behind them, giving the mandate for them (12:49), indeed is even present in them himself (cf. 14:10-11). The idea that the Father supports and furthers Jesus' efforts to win men's belief is further expressed in another important group of sayings, about the Father's 'testimony'. We need do no more than list these passages, leaving further analysis to the commentary: 5:32,36,37; 8:18; 10:25; and the same thing in indirect form, the testimony of John the Baptist (cf. 1:32-34; 5:33), of the holy scriptures (5:39) and of Moses (5:46-47); and finally, the testimony of the Paraclete sent by the Father (15:26). The Father has approved Jesus as his ambassador ('set his seal on him', 6:27, cf. v. 29), and it is his will that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life (6:40). But he also works in a hidden way within the believer himself, 'drawing' him (6:44) and granting him the grace of faith (cf. 6:65). For Jesus' sake the Father receives the believers into his love (14:21,23; 16:26-27) and hears the prayers that they make in the name of Jesus (14:13; 15:16; 16:23-27).

(5) Jesus came forth from the Father, and he returns again to the Father, by the road of 'exaltation' and 'glorification'. This is a consistent application of Son-Christology to the idea of mission (v. (1) above). Here too 'God' may be used instead of 'the Father' (v. especially 13:3; cf. 8:42); but it is predominantly 'the Father' which is used to denote the starting-point and the goal of the way that Jesus follows: 13:1; 14:12,28; 16:10,27,28; 17:11,13; 20:17. Various verbs (*ἐξέρχεται*, *πορεύεται*, *ὑπάγει*, *μεταβαίνει*, *ἀνοβαίνει*) are used to describe the way traversed by the Son, who becomes the redeemer of those who are his. For the Son wills to lead those who believe in him thither where he himself is going (14:3; 17:24; cf. 12:26; 13:36). In his Father's house are many rooms, and he is going on to prepare a place for the disciples (14:2). After the resurrection he ascends to his Father and their Father, his God and their God (20:17). Here we see particularly clearly the soteriological relevance of Son-Christology (cf. also 14:28).

This perspective also gives prominence to the idea of pre-existence. In the incarnate Logos the believers have seen the *δὸς* of the *μονογενὴς παρὸς* (1:14), and the glorified Son attains once more to the *δὸς* which he had with the Father before the foundation of the world (17:5). But in this *δὸς* with the Father, the Son will be acting for the salvation of men (17:2) and making fruitful the activity of the disciples (14:12 ff.), while the Paraclete sent by him and the Father (14:26; 15:26;

16:7) continues his work on earth (cf. 16:8-11,13-15).

(6) Finally, there is one more thematic complex connected with 'the Father' which needs to be noticed: the polemic against unbelieving Jewry. Since Jesus declares the one true God of Judaism to be his Father, he is bound to deny knowledge of the Father to those who do not recognise him as 'the Son', cf. 5:37 ff; 7:28-29; 8:18-19,26 ff, 42,54-55; 15:21 ff. This is connected with the debate between the Christian community and contemporary Judaism. But it also has the positive effect of emphasizing the Christian community's worship of the Father in spirit and truth (4:21-23).

If we pass these groups of sayings and themes in review and compare them with the passages which speak of 'the Son', what emerges is not only the external connection between the two expressions but the interior coherence of thought between them. All the theological aspects which we discerned in (a) reappear in (b), with, in several cases, a further clarification and filling-out of the thought. This applies particularly to the loving unity of Father and Son, their common work, their communion in all things, their complete oneness of being. We become even more strongly aware of the dialectic in which the Son submits totally to the Father and is concerned only to carry out his commission, and yet in origin and essence is equal to the Father (cf. the reaction of the Jews in 5:18; 8:53,59; 10:31,33; 19:7).

There is furthermore a heightened emphasis on the Father, whom Jesus the Son reveals through his word and work: on his saving activity, his love, his giving—ultimately, the gift of the only Son himself. The theme of mission takes on a new shape when we see the Father as the starting-point and goal of Jesus' journey. At the same time the soteriological meaning of Jesus' mission becomes clearer: only his death, his return to the Father, his glorification by the Father and the sending of the Spirit can release to the world the salvation and life which are the purpose of the Father's sending of the Son. The polemic against unbelieving Jewry takes on a new aspect. In comparison with the central utterances of Son-Christology this can be seen to be only an historically-conditioned nuance; yet for this very reason it lends a further emphasis to the principle that lies at the heart of that Christology: no one comes to the Father except through the Son, that is to say through Jesus Christ (14:6; cf. 17:3).

2. *Separate Roots in the Tradition*

What was said in Excursus 5 of the title 'Son of man' and the ideas surrounding it applies also to the Johannine Son-Christology: its immediate source can be taken to lie in the primitive Christian tradition as it reached the evangelist and continued alongside him. We have however been able to distinguish various themes or particular aspects of the Johannine conception, which have come together to form a unity in the evangelist's theological synthesis. So we shall now seek for individual roots of the

Johannine Son-Christology which may perhaps be discernible in the pre-Johannine tradition or in the developing Christology of the primitive Church.

(a) The idea of mission was connected with the figure of Jesus Christ at an early stage, and with it there appears very quickly the idea of the Son of God.¹⁰ The earliest witness is Paul: he speaks in two passages, Gal 4:4 and Rom 8:3, of the sending of the Son of God. The first passage states that when the time had fully come God ἐξαπέστειλεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, the second, using the participle, speaks of ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ πέμψας. For purposes of comparison with John the following points are important: (1) In both cases the subject is ὁ θεός, so the Father-Son relationship is not formally stated; (2) nevertheless the close relation of the Son of God to God can be seen in both, in Gal 4:4-7 from the idea of υἱοθεσία (the Son of God has made us sons of God), in Rom 8:3 from the use of the reflexive pronoun (ἑαυτοῦ). The close relationship to God is also affirmed in Rom 8:32 referring to Jesus' death, when, in an allusion to the sacrifice of Isaac, it is said that God did not spare his own (ἰδίον) Son. (3) The idea of mission can be expressed by either Greek verb, (ἐξαποστείλλειν or πέμπτειν). (4) The pre-existence of the Son is not definitely stated, but it suggests itself, since Paul shows himself familiar with the idea elsewhere (1 Cor 8:6; 10:4; 2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:6; cf. Col 1:15-17). (5) The sending of the Son is for the purpose of salvation: cf. the ἵνα-clause in Gal 4:5 with Jn 3:16, 17; 1 Jn 4:9.¹¹

Another important traditio-historical datum is the reference to the 'beloved son' in the parable of the wicked vine-dressers (Mk 12:6 and parallels), which the primitive Church certainly applied to Jesus. Here the idea of pre-existence is lacking, and the passage seems simpler and more primitive. But we cannot posit a line of development in which the primitive Church, starting from this parable (and/or other words of Jesus) went on to deepen the idea of the sending of the Son of God and enrich it with the concept of pre-existence. For the probable point of departure for Paul seems rather to be wisdom-speculation (cf. Gal 4:4 with Wis 9:10), and the identification by the early Church of the son in the parable with Jesus will have been retrospective,¹² after its Son of God Christology had taken shape. But be that as it may, the Johannine statements about the sending of the Son by God (not, as yet, ὁ πατήρ) could be linked to the Christology we see in Paul.

(b) The whole group of statements about the intimate unity of the Son with the Father—the characteristic expression of the Father-Son relationship by the absolute use of 'the Father' and 'the Son'—has a different root. As we have seen, there is an inseparable connection between the 'Son' passages and the 'Father' passages: once this has been recognized, we cannot limit ourselves in the synoptic material of those few passages in which Jesus is called ὁ υἱός, but also take account of his use of Abba, Father, with its pre-eminent claim to originality.¹³ There is a reliable indication that the fourth evangelist knew of this synoptic tradition, and

that is Jesus' prayer to the Father. Three times he has Jesus praying: before the tomb of Lazarus (11:41-42), at the 'Johannine Gethsemane' (12:27-28) and in the farewell discourse (the 'high-priestly' prayer of Chapter 17), and each time he uses the unqualified form of address πάτερ. In the case of the 'Gethsemane' passage, the connection with the synoptic tradition is indisputable, which is all the more significant since Mk 14:36 gives Jesus' form of address as ὁ πατήρ.¹⁴ The case becomes even stronger when we see that Jesus' prayer involves certain difficulties for the fourth evangelist because of his fully developed Son-Christology: since the Son is in perfect unity with the Father he does not need to pray at all. When he does nevertheless pray before Lazarus' tomb, this is done, the evangelist explains, for the sake of the people standing by (11:42). The 'Gethsemane' passage raises similar difficulties for the evangelist, and the same theme appears again: the confirmation given by the divine voice is not for his sake but for the sake of the people (12:30). This is a good example of how John remains bound to the tradition and of how even in his high Christological speculation the historical basis—Jesus' use of Abba for God—shines through, though the understanding of Jesus' relationship to God only came to maturity in the faith of the primitive church, to be perfected in John.

(c) There is a specially bridge-like character, in traditio-historical terms, in the saying, from the *logia*-source, about the mutual knowledge of Father and Son (Mt 11:27, Lk 10:22), often called the 'Johannine' *logion* because of its obvious closeness to Johannine utterances about the relationship of the Son to the Father (cf. esp. Jn 10:15). Direct synoptic influence on John here, or vice versa, can indeed be ruled out, since it is scarcely possible to find a single other link between John and the Q-tradition; moreover a closer look at the synoptic saying reveals its special character over against the Johannine Son-Christology. The mutual knowledge is not so much, as in Jn 10:15, an expression of the intimacy and unity of the Son with the Father, but forms part of the idea of the fullness of power conferred on the Son by the Father (πάντα μοι παρέδοῦν κτλ.). The Father's 'knowing' the Son is in the Old Testament and Judaic tradition of election, while knowing on the Son's part means acknowledgment: the Son accepts the Father's revelation and his will, which enables him to communicate this revelation to others (ὃ ἐὰν βούληται κτλ.).¹⁵ But this conferring of power on the Son to be the bearer and mediator of revelation is also a central theme of the Johannine Son-Christology (cf. 3:34-35; 8:26, 28; 12:49-50 et al.). There is however a difference of vocabulary: instead of the passive παραδοῖσθαι we have δίδωμι ἐν τῇ χάριτι (3:35; cf. 13:3) or δίδωμι ἐξουσίαν (17:2; cf. 5:27a), instead of γινώσκειν we have, in this context, phrases expressing the idea of mission. Thus what we have in John represents an independent development; but Mt 11:27 par. is evidence for the existence of an ὁ υἱός-Christology of this kind at a relatively early stage, and we may surmise that the completed structure of the Johannine Son-Christology rests on an earlier foundation, wherever this should be located—presumably, in the light of the above, on

Palestinian soil.¹⁶

(d) S. Schulz and E. Schweizer argue in favour of a pre-existing apocalyptic tradition, in which the 'Son' usage was already established, as of a 'Son-theme tradition' and sees it in 3:35-36; 5:19-23, 25-26, with a second stream operative in 3:16.¹⁷ Schweizer agrees with him at least as regards the first two passages.¹⁸ Since there is no evidence for 'the Son' as a designation of the agent of salvation in apocalyptic literature, this leaves only Mt 11:27 on which to build a theory of a pre-Johannine fusion of the Son of man theme with the title of 'the Son'. Whether this is a sufficient basis on which to postulate, for these passages of the gospel, a 'Son-theme tradition' available to the evangelist seems highly questionable.¹⁹ Given the evangelist's line in eschatology, with his transformation of other 'apocalyptic' concepts (rather, concepts related to the end-time) and his transposition of the eschatological event into the present (the *Christus praesens*), it would seem preferable to credit the evangelist himself with the transfer of eschatological functions to 'the Son'.

In sum, what the tradition supplied to the evangelist would be the idea of mission and the Father-Son relationship; on this basis he was able to construct and elaborate his unified Son-Christology. There would seem to be a similar phenomenon, of an early Christian theologian developing his own *viós*-Christology on the basis of traditional Christological themes, in the letter to the Hebrews; but we shall have to forgo comparison of this with the Son-Christology of John.

3. *Non-Christian Influences*

The question arises whether, apart from the roots in the primitive Christian tradition so far considered, there may not have been other factors which contributed to John's unified and highly individual conception of Son-Christology. What about comparable expressions outside primitive Christianity?

The suggestion that within Judaism the Messiah was already thought of as 'Son of God', on the basis of 2 Sam 7:14 and Ps 2:7 has now received a certain amount of confirmation from some of the Qumran texts. In a fragment of an eschatological midrash 2 Sam 7:14 is explicitly referred to as the Messiah, and in 1 QSa 2:11 it is said (in allusion to Ps 2:7?) that the begotten the Messiah applies to the time when 'God will have amongst them?'.²⁰ But this tells us nothing about Johannine Christology, for the God-Messiah relationship as a Father-Son relationship in Qumran does not go beyond adoption, and in the Qumran texts the title Son of God is 'never used except in quotations from the Old Testament'.²¹

But the assertion of the comparative religion school, that John was influenced by the Hellenistic idea of the 'divine man', is equally untenable,

since θεῖος ἀνὴρ was 'not a definitely established concept, at least in pre-Christian times', nor were such men usually reckoned as sons of gods.²² Once more, it would be a very long road indeed from this to the exclusive usage of 'the Son' standing in inseparable and most intimate relationship with 'the Father'. Neither the 'Son of God' title, originally messianic but understood in a deeper sense by John as part of his Son-Christology, nor still less the absolute use of 'the Son' suggests any connection with charismatic wonder-workers. The great miracle-stories in John, the *σημεῖα* as he very emphatically calls them, are not depicted or interpreted as the deeds of a 'divine man', but as part of a revelatory event. They manifest the meaning of Jesus for men as revealer and the saving gifts he brings, and at the same time they point to him himself as God's true emissary—that is, precisely, as 'the Son'. The category of 'divine man' or Hellenistic son of god is about as irrelevant here as it is possible to be.

For serious research, all that remains is the possibility that John is dependent on a Gnostic concept and usage. Here, the material has been considerably enriched by the newly-discovered Coptic manuscripts of Nag-Hammadi.²³ The absolute use of 'Son' and 'Father' in the Odes of Solomon, on the other hand, has been known for some time. Here are some representative passages:

- 3: 7: Because I should love him, the Son, that I might be a Son
- 7: 7: The Father of knowledge is the word of knowledge.
- 12: He has given himself, to be seen by those who are his.
- 15: For he has been served by him, and he was well pleased with the Son
- 19: 2: The Son is the cup, and he who was milked, the Father, and he who milked him, the holy Spirit
- 23:18: And at its (the letter's) head was seen the head which revealed itself, and the true Son of the most high Father
- 22: And the name of the Father stood thereon, and that of the Son, and of the holy Spirit
- 31: 4: And he lifted up his voice to the Most High and led to him as sons those who were in his hands
- 41:13: The Son of the Most High has appeared in the perfection of his Father.

It is certainly possible that the *Odes of Solomon* were influenced by the Johannine writings (cf. vol. I, pp. 144-5), and as regards the Father-Son relationship the Christian influence on the 'trinitarian' passages (reminiscent of the baptismal confession) is obvious (19:2; 23:22). But on the other hand parts of the songs show a knowledge of the Gnostic myth which, because of the peculiar imagery used, cannot have been transmitted through John's gospel. This applies particularly to Ode 23, with its image of the letter, where the Father-Son relationship is formally present in v. 18. The 'Father' has certain characteristic attributes: 'the Father of knowledge' (7:7), 'the highest Father, (23:18; cf. 41:13), 'the Father of truth'

(41:9). The 'Son' appears principally as revealer, and as mediating salvation in this revelation; his 'way', described in Ode 7 (cf. also 18:5-8; 22:1, 11; 29:4-7; 39:13 *et al.*), is the way of redemption for those who are his, who receive his name and are his free 'sons' (31:4; 42:20). In this relationship of the 'Son' to the 'sons' (not present in this form in John) the Gnostic element shows through.²⁴

The conclusion that the 'Father-Son' designation and relationship is not simply borrowed from John's gospel receives further support from the *Gospel of Truth*, which is close in many respects to the *Odes of Solomon*. Here there is constant mention of 'the Father': right at the beginning, the 'Father of truth' (16:33), then the 'incomprehensible, inconceivable, perfect Father' (18:32 f.); 'Father of all things' (20:19); the 'good Father' (36:35; 42:29; 43:19); and again 'the Father' used absolutely (about seventy times). The most detailed treatment of the relationship of the Son to the Father comes in the section 38:4-40:29, with its peculiar lore of name-speculation.²⁵ We will give a few passages:

38: 6 ff.: Now the name of the Father is the Son. He it is who in the beginning gave the name to him who went forth from him, and who he himself was, and whom he begot as Son.

39:19 ff.: The Son is his (the Father's) name. He therefore did not hide him in secret, but was the Son, he alone gave (him) the name. Thus the name is that of the Father, as the name of the Father is the Son.

40:16 ff.: He (the name) was unknowable, unutterable, until the moment when he, who is perfect, spoke him alone . . . When it was then well-pleasing to him that his beloved Son should be his name, and (when) he had given him the name . . . Therefore also did he send him, so that he should speak about the *topos* and his place of rest, from which he went forth.

The views woven together here indicate an underlying stratum of Gnostic thought, in which the theme of the Father-Son relationship is inextricably embedded. Cf.:

24: 9 ff.: The Father unveils his bosom—but his bosom is the Holy Spirit—, he reveals his secret—his secret is his Son—so that through the mercies of the Father the aeons may know him and cease to weary themselves with searching for the Father. . . .

The redemption of men is described thus:

30:24 ff.: The *gnosis* of the Father and the revelation of his Son he gave to them to know: for as they had seen and heard him, he granted them to taste and smell of himself and to touch the beloved Son. He appeared, teaching them of the Father, the Incomprehensible.

From the latest to be published, the more strongly Christian-influenced *Epistle of James*, we will give a few passages, which once again reveal the Gnostic background.²⁶ Before Jesus rises up to the place from whence he came (2:24), he says to the disciples through James:

9: 9 ff.: Therefore obey me, o my brothers! Understand what the great light is! The Father has no need of me. For no father has need of his sons, but the sons have need of the father. I am hastening to him, for the Father of the Son has no need of you.

10: 9 ff.: But now, you, who are outside the inheritance of the Father, weep at the right place and mourn and preach the good, since the Son ascends well (*καλῶς*).

11: 4 ff.: I intercede for you with the Father, and he will forgive you much.

14:30 f.: For it is necessary for me today to take my place at my Father's right side.

14:37-15:5: Blessed are they who preached the Gospel of the Son before he descended, so that I, when I come, may ascend. But thrice blessed are they who were made known by the Son before they came to be, so that you may have a portion with them.

From the *Apocryphon of John* we should consider one passage at least:

Codex III, p. 9:13 ff: (The *barbelon*) bore a spark of light which was like the blessed light, but not equal by birth to it in greatness. This is the Only-begotten (*μονογενής*), who appeared in the Father; the divine *αὐτογενής*, the first-born Son of all the Father's (children) (Krause and Labib, p. 61).

Then once again we meet the expression 'Father of the All', II, p. 2:28 f.; 14:21 f. par. IV, p. 3:26; 22:27). Other writings from Nag-Hammadi (e.g. the apocalypses in Codex V) also furnish rich material for comparison; but this may suffice to show that the use of 'the Father' to mean the Highest, the One who is, the First Principle and Goal of the Gnostics, and of 'the Son' for the Gnostic redeemer was established independently of Christian usage.

In the context of this new evidence about Gnosticism, Hermetic texts that have long been known acquire a fresh importance. In the *Poimandres* (*Corp. Herm.* I) the Logos coming forth from the Nous is called 'Son of God' (6) and God is called *ὁ πατήρ τῶν ὁλῶν* (21 and 27), *ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ* (21), *πατήρ θεός* (30). In *Tractate xiii* (which is about rebirth) the Gnostic is to become, through the revelation of Hermes, a son or child of God (cf. 2), and at the end the revealer asks him 'Do you not know that you have become God and a son (*παῖς*) of the One, as I am myself?' (14). Behind this is the idea of God, the Father of the All, and of the revealer and redeemer as his 'Son', who through his revelation makes

those men who are able to receive it into sons of God likewise, and leads them back to the Father from whom they sprang. Thus the Gnostic mediator of revelation could certainly be called 'the Son (of God)' independently of Christianity. Indeed, this 'Son of God' in non-Christian texts is then sometimes given a Christian re-interpretation, as in the remarkable testimony of a member of an Hermetic community, the alchemist Zosimos (third-fourth century):

Thou shalt see the Son of God, who becomes all things for the sake of the holy souls, in order to draw it (the soul, sing.) out of the realm of tyrannical fate into the incorporeal (realm). For since he can do all things, he becomes what he will, [and obeys the Father,] going hence through that body; while illuminating each man's Nous, he impelled him towards that blessed realm where he too was before his bodily becoming. He (the Gnostic) follows him (the Son of God), and is drawn and led by him to that light'.²⁷

This text makes clear the very considerable gap between the Gnostic doctrine of the 'Son of God' as illuminator and guide of souls (themselves pre-existent) and the Johannine Son-Christology. Nevertheless there are points of contact which cannot be ignored: (1) The use of the terms 'Father' and 'Son'; (2) the path followed by the Son: from the Father into the lower realm of this world and back to the Father; (3) the Son's revelatory function towards men; (4) the home-coming to the Father of those who are apt for Gnosis (or those who believe); (5) all this being the expression of the process of redemption. The essential differences lie in the doctrine of redemption and the historical character of the Christian redeemer: we do not need to go over that again. But the formal and structural similarities (as in the case of the Gnostic Redeemer-myth as a whole, cf. Excursus 6, vol. I, pp. 543-557) are enough to make it seem possible that in the construction of his Son-Christology, the fourth evangelist, while primarily dependent on primitive Christian tradition, also had in mind the Gnostic usage of 'the Son (of God)' and the associated redemption-myth. He wished, then, to give the Christian answer to the Gnostic question (cf. the Commentary on 7:28,33-34; 8:14), and over against the mythical figure of the Gnostic redeemer to set the one true 'Son' who, as man upon earth, truly reveals 'the Father' and leads the way to him.

4. *The Meaning and Importance of Johannine Son-Christology*

If we bear in mind that 'the Son' in the mouth of the Johannine Jesus is a theological term with its own particular roots in history, we shall not try to treat even this Christology as an absolute, as though it were the one and only possible, final and unalterable formulation of what Jesus Christ means

for humanity. John himself retained other Christological expressions along with it, in particular the title 'Son of man' with its associated themes of descent and ascent, exaltation and glorification. The Son of man theme is in fact often closely associated with 'Son' sayings, namely in the account of the way followed by the redeemer, the idea of pre-existence, and the sayings about 'glorification' (cf. 13:31-32 with 17:1 ff.). Again, Jesus' proclamation of himself with *ἐγὼ εἰμι* represents a separate category stemming from a different root, but it nevertheless merges with the 'Son' usage as part of Jesus' absolute claim to be God's representative and revealer in the world (cf. Excursus 8).

The Johannine Son-Christology can indeed claim to be one of the most mature and important achievements in New Testament theology. If the view we have taken is correct, it retains a connection with the earthly Jesus, namely his attitude towards 'the Father'. It makes explicit the fullness of his authority upon earth, concerning which the primitive Church could reach final certainty only with his resurrection (in Johannine terms, 'glorification'), and which indeed only then becomes universal in scope (cf. 17:2). It conceives of his earthly activity as the revelation of eschatological salvation, and of himself as the one who reveals God's saving will to men and accomplishes it for them. This is fully expressed with utter clarity and consistency in such passages as 1:18; 8:19b; 12:44-45; 14:6,7,9b; Jesus is the revelation, the image, the word in this world of the invisible God to whom men cannot attain. Everything that he spoke and made known upon earth was done as part of God's commission to mediate salvation, eternal life to men (cf. 12:49-50). Thus his words are spirit and life (6:63); but also his deeds and his whole career, right through to the surrender of his life (10:18), are all part of the 'work' which the Father set him to complete upon earth (17:4).

The Johannine Son-Christology is essentially the doctrine of salvation for believers, i.e. not a doctrine about Jesus Christ in isolation but taking in the human race, with Jesus as God's emissary revealing and mediating salvation. If we see this as its centre and real meaning, we shall not think of this Christology as being chiefly concerned with statements about the metaphysical being of the Son, his relationship to the Father within the Trinity, his pre-existence and the union of the divine and human natures in the incarnate Son, important as these were for the early Church, and necessary for the combating of inadequate concepts. Without in the least undervaluing the doctrine of the two natures which, in the perspective of their own time, was such an important theme for the great patristic commentators (Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, John Chrysostom) and the basis for interpretation of numerous passages in John's gospel, we may with full justification and in accordance with the evangelist's own intentions place in the foreground the 'functional' character of the Johannine Son-Christology, the theme of revelation and salvation which it articulates, and its anthropological and existential point of departure. If John himself, without being unfaithful to primitive Christian tradition,

addressed himself to his contemporaries' yearning for salvation and even took account of the Gnostic redeemer-myth, we cannot be barred from raising the question of the meaning of human existence and human history in the perspective of our own time, and understanding and interpreting John's Son-Christology as the answer to it. Jesus Christ, who is our access to the Father, the revelation in this world of the remote, invisible God; the disclosure of God's love for the world, which otherwise remains hidden and incomprehensible to us; the light which makes sense of our existence and the way along which we can attain to its goal: these are the matters with which the Johannean Son-Christology is concerned: indeed, they are the very heart of it.

SECTION V

Further Words of Revelation and Disputes. The Rift Between Jesus and the Unbelieving Jews Widens (Chapter 8:12-59)

Section 8:12-59 is loosely connected, without any new context, to Chapter 7. There is no mention of a new feast, and, indeed, no room for one in the sequence of feasts (10:22, Dedication). Tabernacles has been left behind with the last, great day (7:37), and it is unlikely that the evangelist has in mind the eighth day, the 'feast of decision'. These discourses and disputes of Jesus with the Pharisees (v. 13) and 'the Jews' (vv. 22, 31, etc.) can be thought of as taking place in the period after Tabernacles. Jesus has stayed in Jerusalem and continues to teach in the Temple (v. 20; cf. 39). The evangelist is not dependent on the historical situation and its details. Jesus' revelation and his dispute with the unbelieving Jews continue and are meant to emphasize for the later community the claim of Jesus and the contradiction of unbelief. As previously in Chapter 7, the scene is made relevant to the external and internal situation of the community.

On the other hand, the section is still connected with the themes of the feast of Tabernacles. At the beginning we hear Jesus' revelation of himself as the 'Light of the World', a saying which probably has a symbolic connection with the festive illuminations of Tabernacles. There are other clear links with Chapter 7 and, less closely, with Chapter 5.² Internally, Chapter 8 presupposes the state of affairs described in Chapter 7. Among the people there are groups inclined to believe in Jesus; they are opposed by others, who raise objections to Jesus' Messiahship. In the end the unbelief of the ruling groups proved dominant. It is with this that the following disputes are conducted. In accordance with the scene depicted by the gospel as a whole, this unbelief hardens in the capital, Jerusalem, and reveals its essential hostility to God. The themes of descent from Abraham (vv. 37-47) and Jesus' relation to Father Abraham (vv. 48-58) show that the evangelist is concerned with a theological confrontation with Judaism, an official and intensely theological discussion, which was taking place in his day. The interest in the 'Jews who had believed in him' in v. 31 is probably also connected with this. This polemic is continued in the disputes in Chapter 9.