God the Father in Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity: Transformed Background or Common Ground?

30/09/2003 | Goshen-Gottstein, Alon

Rabbi Alon Goshen-Gottstein of the Elijah School for the Study of Wisdom in World Religions notes that despite their common background, the Christian understanding of divine fatherhood in relation to Jesus, rather than as a universal metaphor, is deeply at odds with the Jewish understanding.

God the Father in Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity:

Transformed Background or Common Ground?

Precis

God the Father is a central tenet of Christian theology as well as of the faith of the historical Jesus. Students of both have resorted to comparisons with Jewish, particularly rabbinic, use of the description of God as Father. Usually, the upshot of those comparisons has been the superiority of the Christian understanding of the fatherhood of God. The present study examines anew the rabbinic reference to God as Father. Methodological care is taken to keep apart different literary phenomena and to assess rabbinic material in light of its internal logic and its own literary patterns. The application of this methodology undermines earlier studies, such as those of Joachim Jeremias, and significantly limits our ability to make sweeping statements regarding the novelty of Jesus' teaching of God's fatherhood. Jesus' teaching emerges as very much of a kind with contemporary rabbinic teaching, rather than as a theological revolution. Nevertheless, some novelty is recognized in the teachings of Jesus, where, unlike in rabbinic literature, God the Father is also portrayed as active. The final part of the essay addresses the question of Christian and Jewish reference to God as Father. While a common theological ground is recognized, the Christian understanding of divine fatherhood in relation to Jesus, rather than as a universal metaphor, is deeply at odds with the Jewish understanding, expressed in the Hebrew Bible and in rabbinic literature.

Introduction

As with any subject of theological significance, viewed in the context of a Jewish-Christian discussion, two perspectives are relevant to our discussion. The first perspective from which the subject of God the Father can be addressed is that of the relationship between ancient Judaism and the teachings of Jesus and

of the New Testament in general. The obvious issue here is to what extent the teachings of Jesus are of a kind with contemporary Jewish teaching, what in the background of ancient Judaism is

relevant to a proper understanding of the words of Jesus, and to what degree a new teaching can be discerned in his words. Methodologically, such analysis belongs properly to the field of history of religions. A completely different angle on the issue emerges from the perspectives of theology and of interfaith dialogue. While Jews and Christians may not be able to agree upon the second and third persons of the Christian Trinity, the person of God the Father would seem to be the dimension of God that unites Jewish and Christian understanding and that could thus provide a common theological ground. From the perspective of these disciplines, one would therefore want to ask to what extent Judaism and Christianity share a common concept of "God the Father."

That both perspectives come to mind upon presentation of the topic is not accidental. There is a continual movement of interdependence between the philological and historical studies, on the one hand, and the theological articulation of faith, on the other. While in theory there are two different disciplines, asking two distinct sets of questions, in reality the two disciplines feed upon one another. Exegetical and historical insight feed theological positions. The other direction of the hermeneutical circle is that theological positions determine presentation of historical and textual data, thus reading ancient texts into later theological structures. Because of the multiple perspectives that are relevant to a discussion of God the Father, I shall address both perspectives in my discussion. The present discussion thus has the double nature of a historical study, relating to the Gospels in the context of ancient Judaism, and a theological interfaith exercise, attempting to grapple with perceived commonalities and differences between Judaism and Christianity. Of course, once Judaism and Christianity are discussed, we can no longer limit ourselves either to rabbinic literature or to the New Testament, and insights must be drawn from later developments of both traditions. Therefore, in discussing the wider theological and interfaith dimensions of the subject, I shall expand the scope of the discussion to include certain features of later Judaism and Christianity.

Methodological Problems

Having said this much we have already moved on to the next point on my agenda: spelling out the methodological obstacles on our path. The historical part of my discussion, namely, the relationship between Jesus' concept of God the Father and that of early Judaism, is fraught with methodological difficulties. The confusion of historical and theological method is a major obstacle in the present context. So much has been written concerning the novelty of Jesus' teaching of God the Father. This novelty can be presented either as the totally new proclamation of the previously unknown notion that God is Father,[1] or, in a more subtle version that highlights the new elements that characterize Jesus' understanding of the Father, in relation to earlier Judaism.[2] While such statements ought, methodologically, to be founded upon purely historical study, such study is hopelessly informed by a theological perspective that totally breaks down the kind of methodological rigor that would be necessary to establish the desired historical truths. Let me begin with a blatant example, and leave the more subtle case of the great Joachim Jeremias to a later point in our discussion.

The present example of methodological and disciplinary crossing of boundaries is found in Witold Marchel's 1971 *La Priere du Christ et des Chrétiens.* While Marchei devoted considerable effort to a historical study of the rabbinic sources, his presentation was entirely colored by a set of presuppositions that betray his Christian and dogmatic standpoint. Thus, he judged a certain notion of fatherhood to be religiously superior and sought to judge rabbinic sources from the certainty of his own theological understanding. That his understanding of the concept of fatherhood was dependent on participation with Christ in his relationship with the Father is anything but a neutral history-of-religions-type analysis. That rabbinic prayer does not address God as Father is viewed as a sign of a religious lack, one that is obviously made up for in the teachings of Christ.[3] Indeed, rabbinic literature and intertestamental literature are presented by Marchei, with most honorable intent, as stations along the way to the full revelation of the meaning of "Father," in the teaching of

his Son, Jesus Christ. Bad scholarship is often only an exaggeration of methodological errors committed by the finest of scholars. Christian scholarship of our present topic has been consistently plagued by this methodological pitfall.[4]

Perhaps the most obvious expression of the interjection of a theological perspective into what ought to be a history-of-religions question is that rabbinic sources are not only presented but are also evaluated. Thus, there is a higher, fuller, or more complete notion of God the Father, against which rabbinic sources are judged, obviously unfavorably. If we choose to lay aside the evaluative dimension, we must study each corpus in its own right and attempt to discern the distinguishing features of how God the Father is presented in each corpus. Attention to rabbinic literature as a unique body of literature means consideration of its literary norms of expression, stylized rhetorical forms, and specific theological concerns. These must be presented on their own ground, as must the evidence of the New Testament. After gathering our facts, we might wish to make observations of a comparative nature, in order to draw conclusions that would extend the meaning of our study from the realm of comparative religion to the field of comparative theology. Still, even when the theological dimension is introduced, one must avoid usage of such evaluative categories as "higher" or "fuller" as part of the comparison of the Jewish and Christian presentation of the image of God the Father.

Attention to rabbinic literature as a unique literary corpus leads to another series of methodological considerations. It is natural for New Testament scholars to look within rabbinic literature for the questions that are of interest to them, and thus to frame the question from within their own disciplinary perspectives, rather than from within rabbinic literature itself. Thus, for example, Christian scholars have combed rabbinic literature searching for instances of the heavenly Father's being spoken of in the singular or in the plural. This distinction was deemed significant, because thereby one could gauge the measure of personal intimacy and relationship that reference to God the Father had for the rabbinic authors. Unfortunately, such an exercise is a total waste of time. It is based on importing a question to the rabbinic sources from without, namely, the degree of intimacy in relation to the Father and the measure to which this can be discerned within our sources. The question is meaningless because it does not take into account the literary norms of the rabbinic sources, and their own stylized conventions of expression. One cannot treat the New Testament and rabbinic literature as though they were all part of one larger corpus of ancient writings that must be searched for relevant data. Rather, rabbinic sources must be appreciated in the uniqueness of their literary structures, methods of expression, and stylistic conventions.

The modern study of rabbinic literature is still young; hence, its methodology is still being worked out by scholars who specialize in the study of the literature. My own doctoral dissertation was devoted to the subject of "God and Israel as Father and Son in Tannaitic Literature,"[5] the earlier stratum of rabbinic literature, dating until the third century of the common era. One of the contributions of that work was its suggested methodology. Rather than taking all the rabbinic sources and creating a pastiche from which lessons might be drawn, I suggested the rabbinic sources must first be classified according to their literary types and genres. Each category of data must be studied in its own right, and only then can a larger synthetic presentation be attempted. I cannot fault scholarship for not following a methodology I myself developed long after most Christian scholars had had their say on the subject. However, in the present context I would like to apply this methodology to my presentation of God the Father in rabbinic literature. I believe it will allow us a much crisper presentation of the rabbinic material and help dispel many commonly found statements regarding God the Father in rabbinic literature.

Following my methodological guidelines, I will present the image of God the Father in four distinct categories that correspond to the different types of literary data found in rabbinic literature. The first category is constituted by the rabbinic uses of the epithet "Father in Heaven." The second are sayings that refer to God as Father. These sayings do not refer to God as Father in Heaven, but

simply as Father. This category is far smaller in scope than the former. A third, and larger category, is made up of rabbinic parables that present God in the role of Father. I chose to treat parables as a separate body of data, because parables resort to fixed literary structures and because they have their own literary logic that governs the formation of the parable. While a saying is a freer form by means of which to express an idea, a parable resorts to fixed literary types, within which it must give expression to ideas. Moreover, parables are exegetical devices. Hence, parables are often to be understood in the context of biblical hermeneutics, rather than as expressing an independent set of beliefs. The complicated methodology associated with analyzing parables leads me to analyze them apart from the analysis of sayings.

Finally, liturgical formulae constitute an independent group of sources. The liturgical situation is different from that of teaching and may call forth a different articulation of faith. In the case of Jewish prayer not only is the context different, but the language may also be different. Prayer gives expression to the voice of a community and is thus always spoken in the plural, while sayings express the views of the individual teacher. More significantly, it is an open methodological question to what degree we should read ancient Jewish liturgy and rabbinic literature as forming one continuous corpus. We must consider the possibility that the writers of ancient Jewish liturgy may have not been identical with the writers of rabbinic literature. The subject still deserves scholarly attention, and we cannot speak with any finality on this point. In any event, we barely possess liturgical texts that are contemporaneous with classical rabbinic documents, let alone with the New Testament. All our liturgical texts come from centuries later, and it is only by force of conjecture and retrojection that we make them speak for the first centuries of the common era. While we must make do with the evidence in our possession, we have no certainty that any of our liturgical data is as early as what might be needed to hold a meaningful discussion of the relationship between the address of God as Father in the words of Jesus and in ancient Jewish prayer. For all these reasons, Jewish liturgy must be dealt with as a category in its own right, not confused with sayings emerging from rabbinic literature.

I believe a certain amount of the misunderstanding of ancient Jewish sources is due to the fact that data of all four categories were selectively chosen to illustrate preconceived ideas that served a specific theological agenda. A more careful analysis of rabbinic sources, taking into account their complexity, will obviously complicate the facile picture drawn by certain Christian scholars. Indeed, it might deprive us of the certainty of several accepted truths. While it might leave us more uncertain in our knowledge, it may nonetheless bring us closer to the Truth.

Following these introductory remarks I will introduce the rabbinic sources, according to this fourfold division. After rabbinic sources have been presented in their own light, I will address the relationship between rabbinic sources and Jesus' own approach to God as Father. In this context I will also address earlier Christian scholarship, which has tended to theological lopsidedness. In the final section I will address the image of God the Father in Judaism and Christianity, going beyond the historical discussion of Jesus and his Jewish background.

God the Father in Rabbinic Literature: General Observations

Before moving to a detailed presentation of the different types of rabbinic sources, I would like to make some preliminary general observations regarding God the Father in rabbinic literature. First, it is important to realize that rabbinic literature stands in continuity with biblical literature; hence, its reference to God the Father constitutes a continuation of biblical patterns. Most significant in this case is the realization that God is not presented as Father of the world, and that God's fatherhood is not a consequence of God's creative acts. God is presented as Father to Israel, and I am not aware of a single biblical text that applies the notion of father-son relations outside the scope of Israel. "Father" thus functions within the context of election. Hence, there is nothing literal about divine fatherhood in this context, and it is used in an extended sense. The description of God as

Father is part of a religious vocabulary that gives expression to Israel's feelings toward and appreciation of God. Consequently, there is nothing essential or fundamental about the description of God as Father, and there are many other descriptions, images, and metaphors that fill the spectrum of Israel's address to and feeling for God. There is nothing privileged about "Father" as a form of expression[6] and one might also add that "Father" is not a proper name for God. Rather, it is one of numerous metaphors by means of which Israel speaks of and speaks to God.

Rabbinic reference to God as Father is fundamentally faithful to biblical usage. Unlike Philo-for whom God the Father is also God the creator of the world-for the rabbis, divine fatherhood is referred to only in relation to Israel. This is not to say that we can find a rabbinic statement in which possibility of someone outside Israel's relating to God as Father is excluded. This means only that rabbinic sources take biblical usage for granted and thus continue to refer to God as Father only in the context of Israel's special relationship with God. As an extension of the collective use of fatherhood we also find individuals referring to God as their Father. This is found in biblical sources, and rabbinic linguistic patterns equally permit the individual to refer to God as one's Father. However, we do not find any source in which God is considered anyone's Father in a particular, specific, or special way. Fatherhood is fundamentally applied to Israel and, by extension, to individuals therein.

When viewing rabbinic sources in relation to biblical sources, one notices that rabbinic sources utilize the father-son relationship in a particular way. The image of the Father is used to a large extent, though not exclusively, in order to express filial responsibility to the Father. As the earthly son has obligations toward his father, so, too, Israel has obligations toward its heavenly Father. The obligations are expressed in its way of life, in faithfulness to the Torah. Hence, many of the uses of "Father" are to be understood in the context of Israel's faithfulness to God, expressed through the metaphor of God as Father. This does not exhaust the range of meanings of divine fatherhood in rabbinic literature. We also find descriptions of fatherly care and tenderness. However, the basic context from within which rabbinic reference to God as Father is to be understood is that of the religious worldview of Judaism and the sense of faithfulness and reverence that accompany the approach to the Father. As I will suggest shortly, reference to God in this context as Father is not accidental. It may be that approaching God as Father, rather than simply as King, is intended to introduce a more personal element into the relationship. However, "Father" in rabbinic literature is a metaphor for God, and we must account for the context in which this metaphor is used. The concerns of rabbinic literature and its strong concentration upon adherence to the Torah shape the uses of the metaphor. In this context, it is significant to note that there is little emotion that is directly expressed by reference to God as Father-neither emotion of the Father, nor emotion of the Son.

It would be useful to point to an asymmetry in rabbinic reference to father and to son. As a reciprocal relationship we might have expected more or less parallel reference to God as Father and to Israel as Son. Both should have appeared more or less to the same extent, and both should have conveyed related interests. In fact, rabbinic literature seems to give greater attention to the Son than to the Father. There is a clear relationship between the subject of reflection concerning the Father and that regarding the Son. If reflection concerning the Father relates to the approach toward him and to filial piety and duty, then reflection concerning the Son concerns the Son's status and to what extent it is or is not affected by appropriate behavior. A major thrust of the literature is to indicate that the Son's status is kept, even if he fails to keep his obligations toward his Father. Thus, a particular range of meaning gains prominence, even if not exclusivity, in rabbinic application of the metaphor. References both to the Father and to the Son are derived from a basic understanding of the relationship. Accordingly, rabbinic sources employ a very particular range of meanings of the father-son metaphor, according to their particular ideological needs.

That rabbinic literature serves ideological needs is a significant factor one must bear in mind when analyzing the uses of the father-son metaphor. Christian writers have asked how developed the notion of God as Father is in rabbinic literature. Once it is recognized that rabbinic literature fulfills ideological needs, such a question is rendered meaningless. The case is not that there is some notion of God as Father that can be defined in its fullness and against which different uses must be measured as more or less complete. Rather, the religious language of Father and Son is metaphorical language. A given literary corpus may bring out particular senses of what the metaphor might convey, according to its own ideological emphases. We must thus appreciate the particular emphasis and agenda of the rabbinic sources and see the references to God as Father in this context. Let us now turn our attention to the rabbinic uses of the epithet "Father in Heaven."

"Father in Heaven " in Rabbinic Literature[7]

One of the common epithets for God in rabbinic literature is "Father in Heaven."[8] This is a new name for God, which is found in neither the Bible nor the Apocrypha. In the entire corpus of rabbinic literature we find about 100 occurrences of the epithet, including sources that are brought in more than one context. The number of occurrences is significantly lower than the occurrences of other common epithets, such as the Holy One, blessed be He, *Mãkôm, Shamayim,* and others. We should note that this is the only rabbinic name for God that allows one to concentrate upon God's relationship with Israel.[9] It is worth noting that divine names in rabbinic literature often relate to God in God's capacity as creator and in God's relationship to the world. Thus, many names for God refer to God in some relation to the world.[10] Reference to God as the heavenly Father is, in this sense, different. This might account for the low number of occurrences of this epithet. However, the theory I am about to suggest regarding the development of the name may provide a still better explanation for the relatively infrequent use of the name.

An examination of the uses of "Father in Heaven" reveals that it is nearly always used in the context of fixed and stereotyped linguistic formulae. We find very few free and spontaneous uses that go beyond the fixed linguistic patterns of its use. In addition, little use is made of the epithet's potential to describe a unique relationship between God and Israel. It is interesting to note that nowhere do we find reference to God as *"The* Father in Heaven." In rabbinic sources reference is always personalized in some way-my father, your father, etc. which gives the impression of closeness. Reference to God as the father of the nation, or of individuals therein, creates the impression of a personal relationship between Israel and their heavenly Father.

One more fact captures the attention, when examining the uses of the epithet. When God is related to as heavenly Father, God is never portrayed as active. The Father in Heaven is the object of human religious action and intention, which is directed above. This passive use of the epithet must be accounted for. After all, the image of the Father opens far-reaching possibilities to describe God's action for God's people. The actual uses of the epithet thus seem unnaturally limited. Moreover, from some of the sources one actually senses that there is a distance in relation to the heavenly Father. Such distance strikes a different note than is struck by the personal reference to "Father."

I suggest that "Father in Heaven" is derived from an earlier name for God-"Heaven." It is only against the background of the uses of "Heaven" that we can account for how "Father in Heaven" is used. Unlike "Father in Heaven," which is found only in rabbinic literature and in the New Testament, "Heaven" is an older epithet, and is found in sources that antedate rabbinic literature.

The name "Heaven" was discussed by Urbach at great length.[11] He saw "Heaven" and "Place" as two complementary names for God that express two aspects of a complex religious understanding. God's closeness and presence are expressed by means of "Place." The sense of God's distance (not remoteness) finds expression by means of "Heaven." From Urbach we learn that both epithets

are to be understood as metonymies, for the one who dwells in Heaven, and for the One who dwells in a particular place, that is, the temple. The biblical struggle for the proper definition of God's dwelling place-the Heavens or the temple -finds a latter-day expression in this pair of names.

In order to appreciate the relationship between "Heaven" and "Father in Heaven" we must observe how "Heaven" is used in rabbinic literature. Urbach[12] has already noted that "Heaven" is used in stereotypical linguistic formulae. The expressions that employ "Heaven" emphasize the difference or the gap between God and humankind. "The Kingdom of Heaven" is a good example, being a contrast to the human kingdom.[13] Similarly, fear of Heaven is the opposite of fear of humans,[14] and the glory of Heaven is contrasted with human glory.[15] Uses of "Place" are more varied and far more frequent. By means of "Place" one can emphasize the continuity between human beings and God, and the participation of both in a common arena. One additional significant fact is that God's active action is not expressed by means of "Heaven." In addition to the kind of formulaic use already mentioned, we find the intention of the heart directed toward "Heaven."[16] In contrast, God's actions are expressed in diverse ways by means of "Place." Along with lack of activity in the uses of "Heaven," we also note the lack of feeling. "Heaven" is not used when one wishes to express divine feeling and passion, while "Place" regularly expresses divine feeling.[17]

Against the background of this brief survey of the uses of "Heaven," one must ask what the function of "Father in Heaven" is. Urbach[18] has suggested that "Father in Heaven," like other formulae that contain "Heaven," is designed to contrast with the earthly father.[19] The difficulty with this suggestion is that there is only one source in rabbinic literature that actually contrasts the two;[20] hence, I would like to suggest that "Father in Heaven" developed in relation to "Heaven." "Father in Heaven" adds a personal dimension to "Heaven." "Heaven" connotes the distance between us and God, who dwells in the heavens. Addressing the Father in Heaven allows a personal appeal to heaven and even a bridging of the distance between humans and Heaven. This suggestion will help account for many of the characteristics of "Father in Heaven." The type of formulae that characterize its use, the fact that the heavenly Father is not described as acting, and the qualitative and quantitative limitations of the use of the epithet are all accounted for in light of this suggestion. Thus, "Father in Heaven" retains the linguistic habits of "Heaven." The personal note that is sounded from "Father in Heaven" does not come from "Heaven" but from the fact that "Father" is related to with the possessive form-my father, your father, etc.

Against this background we understand why so many of the uses of "Father in Heaven" describe the quest and the movement toward the heavenly Father and the turning of the heart toward the heavenly Father.[21] The sense of distance should not be limited to the geographical distance between earth and heaven. Human awareness of God includes an awareness of the enormous gap and distance between God and humankind. Turning the heart is one way of bridging this gap, as are other expressions that indicate Israel's movement toward their heavenly Father.

While the heavenly Father is not the subject of action attributed to him, the range of attitudes exceeds that of the quest for the distant Father. One dimension of the attitude toward the heavenly Father is trust. Thus, in an addition to Mishna Sotah, we read: "Upon whom can we rely? Upon our Father in Heaven."[22]

Such trust is obviously a consequence of the fact that in Heaven we have a "Father."

The personal approach toward the Father finds expression in another formula, common in tannaitic sources, "The will of [my] Father in Heaven."[23] The formula indicates that religious action is related in a personal way to the image of the heavenly Father. This awareness is expressed in a formulaic way, which indicates how ingrained this recognition is.[24]

Thus far, all that has been said addresses tannaitic sources. In all of them we note that there is no description of feeling associated with the heavenly Father.[25] The range of phenomena that are placed between Israel and their heavenly Father is limited to actions and to intention. Even faith is never found in conjunction with the epithet. It seems that this limitation, too, is a consequence of the limitation that characterizes the use of "Heaven."

In view of the dependence of "Father in Heaven" upon the linguistic patterns that govern the use of "Heaven," it becomes very difficult to make a statement concerning the nature of the father-son relationship based upon the uses of the epithet in tannaitic literature. What can we then say concerning the image of the Father in this early stage of the literature, as it is expressed in the uses of the epithet? We have already suggested that turning to the heavenly Father introduces a personal note. Even if no emotion is expressed in this context, trust and personal relationship are made possible thereby. Beyond this, the image of God as Father, as expressed in tannaitic uses of "Father in Heaven," seems related to the fulfillment of religious obligations. Proper religious action affects the relationship of Israel and its heavenly Father, and proper intent accompanies these actions. The approach to the Father indicates that there are obligations that are to be met in relation to him. The fulfillment of these obligations bridges the gap between Israel and their heavenly Father.

The tannaitic sources establish the basic patterns of the use of the epithet. In amoraic sources we note two interesting developments. We find various instances of midrashim on biblical names that make use of "Father in Heaven." Thus, Hizkiyau's name is interpreted as "the one who fortified Israel's heart toward their Father in Heaven.[26] The meaning in this case seems to be that this person influenced other people's knowledge of God and their religious life and, thereby, brought them close to God. One may suggest that the mitzvot in tannaitic sources had the power of mediation and of bringing Israel close to their fatherly heaven.[27] Some amoraic midrashic passages seem to place specific biblical personages in the same role. Thus, what brings Israel closer to their heavenly Father is not only an action or intention but also a person.

A second, though less well documented, development, may be found in the following source:

> How is it with the lily? When she is placed among the thorns a north wind goes forth and bends her towards the south and a thorn pricks her, and a south wind goes forth and bends her towards the north and a thorn pricks her; yet, for all that, her core is directed upwards. It is the same with Israel. Although *annonae* and *angariae* are collected from them, their hearts are directed towards their Father who is in Heaven.[28]

There are multiple meanings to *kavanah,* intention, or direction of heart. We saw already that intention is the active means by which one gets close to the heavenly Father. This source may suggest an additional meaning to *kavanah.* Intention in this source does not describe the process of turning the heart toward God, but a constant state of Israel's directing themselves toward God. The people of Israel are always like the lily among the thorns, always directing their hearts to God. This usage, as well as other instances of amoraic application of the term, deviates slightly from the earlier uses of "Father in Heaven." Such deviation is best accounted for as loss of sight of "Heaven" as constitutive of the development of "Father in Heaven." Later sources relate to earlier uses of "Father in Heaven" rather than directly to "Heaven."

I would like to conclude my presentation of the uses of "Father in Heaven" by reference to its uses in Tanna Devei Eliyahu. This is a late midrashic work that is composed by an original and highly individual anonymous author. While it belongs to rabbinic literature and is consistent with its overall concerns, it also occupies a unique position by virtue of the fact that it is the work of an original thinker, expressed in original and unique ways. This work contains the largest number of uses of

"Father in Heaven" in all of rabbinic literature. What characterized earlier uses was the limited use of the epithet, which prevented it from becoming a common synonym for God.[29] In Tanna Devei Eliyahu, by contrast, the epithet is so common that it functions as a synonym for God. The epithet is also used to describe God in an active sense. The frequency of usage leads to the creation of new linguistic formulae. In addition, numerous prayers are addressed to the "Father in Heaven." This is the only corpus in rabbinic literature in which we find prayer addressed to the heavenly Father.[30] How are we to account for the uses of "Father in Heaven" in Tanna Devei Eliyahu?

Shmuel Safrai has considered Tanna Devei Eliyahu a work coming from the circle of the Hassidim, providing him[31] with a Jewish context in light of which to appreciate the teaching of Jesus. Jesus' special sense of filial relationship, according to Safrai, was of a kind with the religious understanding that was current in Hassidic circles, as expressed in Tanna Devei Eliyahu.[32] There are two reasons for not following Safrai's proposal for relating Tanna Devei Eliyahu and the teachings of Jesus. The first is chronological. Safrai has followed a very early dating of the work, as a consequence of which he could make the connection between Tanna Devei Eliyahu and Jesus. Most scholars, however, have dated the work toward the end of the midrashic period, thereby making its testimony irrelevant to a study of the context of Jesus.[33] Second, Safrai's line of reasoning followed conventional Christian analysis, attempting to locate reference to "my Father in Heaven," finding in this expression a greater degree of religious intimacy. Following my analysis of the uses of the epithet, presented above, I reject this method of inquiry as a means of measuring a more or less developed sense of relationship to the Father.[34] Once we recognize the stereotypical nature of the usage of "Father in Heaven," this type of examination loses all significançe.

An alternative possibility for relating Tanna Devei Eliyahu and Christian literature, following the more conventional later dating of the work, might be that the book shows Christian influence. However, an examination of the uses of the epithet and a comparison of the usage to that found in the New Testament makes this suggestion unlikely. While the actual points of contact are minimal,[35] there are significant differences between them. The use of the epithet in the Gospels retains the sense of distance that is typical of earlier use. Therefore, nowhere in the Gospels is the love of the heavenly Father referred to. The Father is allpowerful, yet also severe. In Tanna Devei Eliyahu we find an awareness of great closeness and love between the Father and the Son.[36] Ideas that are central to the Gospels, such as pardon from the heavenly Father, do not appear in this work.

As no direct relationship with Christian writing can be proved, one is forced to the conclusion that the frequent usage of the epithet by both corpora attests to the fact that under the influence of individual personalities or individual writers older formulae can be transformed, and new meanings can be attached to them. Thus, both Jesus and the author of Tanna Devei Eliyahu in their own ways have stretched and expanded the range of usage of "Father in Heaven" in relation to more conventional usage. It is worth noting that Tanna Devei Eliyahu does not seem to make any significant use of the fact that the Father is "in Heaven." "Heaven" designates where the Father is. However, "Heaven" no longer carries the charge it did in earlier sources. It seems that here the heavenly Father is simply contrasted with the earthly father.[37] The element that is really operative for this author is "Father." Thus, when "Father" is operative, without the restraints of the earlier uses of "Heaven," a much wider range of meaning is unleashed. This range of meaning allows for expression of emotion, for description of activity of the Father, and for liturgical expression. In this sense, we can see in Tanna Devei Eliyahu the test case to support our thesis. This is how "Father" would have looked had it not been encumbered by the constraints of the earlier name, upon which it commented, and which it softened in the first instance. We may thus conclude this part of our presentation with the suggestion that within "Father in Heaven" is found a tension between the "Heaven" component and the "Father" component. The earlier sources were more under the constraints of "Heaven," while later sources have gradually moved away from the influence of "Heaven" and have come to address more and more the component of "Father." New and wider

meanings have been unleashed along the course of what may be described as the movement from "Heaven" to "Father."

God the Father in Tannaitic Sayings

Let me move on to the second category of rabbinic sources. My discussion of rabbinic sayings will be significantly shorter. I have already pointed to the lack of reciprocity in the reference to the Father and to the Son. There are significantly more sayings concerned with the status of the Son than those reflecting upon the meaning of God as Father. I do not wish to offer here sayings that simply corroborate the picture painted thus far.[38] I shall present here two sources based upon the picture portrayed thus far, which also help to offset it. Both are taken from the tannaitic commentaries to Exodus, the Mekhiltas: "And God goes before them during the day, said R. Yosse the Galilean: Were it not written in scripture one could not say it-like a father carrying a lantern before his son, and like a master carrying a lantern before his servant."[39]

What is the radical teaching that could be said only because scripture makes it explicit? There seems to be a normative pattern of behavior. According to this pattern, it is a son's duty to serve his father, and a servant's duty to serve the master. The verse teaches us that this order is reversed and broken. That a father serves his son is a radical change from accepted norms. The pattern of relations that we saw with regard to "Father in Heaven" is here reversed. This source does not account for this reversal. A parallel passage in the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael brings a parable that helps us account for this change in order. The same verse is quoted, and consternation is expressed concerning God, who fills heaven and earth, carrying a lantern before his children. To make sense of it, the Mekhilta brings the following passage:

> Said Rabbi: Antoninus would sometimes continue his court sessions, sitting on the platform, till after dark, and his sons would stay with him there. When leaving the platform, he himself would take a torch and light the way for his sons. The great men of the empire would approach him saying: "we will take the torch and light the way for your sons." But he would say to them: "It is not that I have no one to take the torch and light the way for my sons. It is merely to show you how dear my sons are to me, so that you should treat them with respect.[40]

This is the first time we have encountered the love of the Father for the Son. The Hebrew *hiba* of this text means love. Divine fatherly love justifies the reversal of accepted norms of behavior.[41] This exchange indicates that the basic dimension in father-son relations concerns the son's obligations toward his father, and it confirms the impression we received from the uses of "Father in Heaven." The one force that can justify deviation from the norm is love. God's love for God's children leads God to reverse common patterns of behavior and, instead of being served, to serve God's children.

God the Father in Tannaitic Parables

Analyzing the rabbinic father-son parables is a complicated task. One ought to avoid a pick-and-choose method by which one chooses certain parables that illustrate a theological point one wishes to make, while ignoring other parables. In order to be true to tannaitic evidence, one must examine the ensemble of parables and assess the overall picture of father-son relations that emerges from them. I have devoted an extensive analysis to tannaitic father-son parables,[42] but in the present context I can only offer the most general observations of this corpus within rabbinic literature. I have grouped tannaitic parables according to diverse models. The following list describes the range of father-son parables in tannaitic literature:

1. Parables of anger and appeasement
2. The brothers' competition
3. Parables of education and guidance
4. The king's decree
5. The king, the son, and the pedagogue
6. The king's gift
7. The son and the servant
8. Parables of protection and saving

I realize that simply listing the categories I found useful for analyzing rabbinic parables does not really provide a suitable presentation of these categories. The point I wish to make is that one sees in these parables a range that is similar to the range of concerns that found expression in the sayings. Thus, the evidence of rabbinic parables corresponds to the image of father-son relations that we encounter in the sayings. The two foci of the sayings-namely, the appropriate service of the father and the status of the son-are both expressed within the range of tannaitic parables. Parables of anger and appeasement and parables involving a third party, such as the pedagogue, give expression, in parable form, to the notion that one can bridge a gap or come closer to the Father by means of an intermediary. This intermediary may be either religious action or a special religious personality. We encountered both possibilities in our analysis above of the epithet "Father in Heaven." The Father is also an educator. All these parables are concerned with the behavior of the Son. Other parables place an emphasis upon the positive, caring dimension of the Father. Thus, gift-giving and protection are both activities that are characteristic of the Father's attitude toward his Son. Finally, parables like those contrasting the Son and the servant, as well as parables in the other categories, present the Son's unconditional status, in accordance with the concern of this literature.

While the range of concerns is similar to that of the sayings, there is one dimension of father-son relations that finds better expression through the parables than through the sayings: fatherly care and protection. As we noted, the uses of "Father in Heaven" do not allow for the presentation of the Father as active, due to the history and development of the name. This is where the parables, as an independent literary genre, can give expression to something that is not expressed in other literary forms. Thus, the parables complement the sayings and allow us to view the relationship in a fuller perspective. I would like to offer an example of one parable that presents this dimension. The parable is found as a comment upon the same biblical passage of Exodus, where we already encountered the Father's love. There is little to say about this parable; the image of the caring divine Father speaks for itself:

> And the angel of God . . . removed etc. R. Judah says: this is a verse rich in content, being echoed in many places. To give a parable, to what is this like? To a man who is walking on the road, with his son walking in front of him. If robbers who might seek to capture the son come from in front, he takes him from before himself and puts him behind himself. If a wolf comes from behind, he takes his son from behind and puts him in front. If robbers come from in front and wolves from behind, he takes the son up in his arms. When the son begins to suffer from the sun, his father spreads his cloak over him. When he is hungry he feeds him, when he is thirsty, he gives him to drink.[43]

God the Father in Early Jewish Prayer

Much has been made in Christian scholarship of the lack of direct reference to God as Father in early Jewish prayer.[44] This has been taken as a sign of a less direct and less complete sense of fatherhood.[45] A comparison of the form of prayer taught and used by Jesus to Jewish forms of prayer has resulted in an unfavorable view of Jewish prayer and of the Jewish conception of the

fatherhood of God.

The careful reader may notice that, whereas previous sections were given titles that related to specific chronological periods, the present part of our discussion simply refers to early Jewish prayer, without suggesting a more specific time period, because we are unable to offer a clear picture of the textual state of Jewish prayer in the tannaitic period. All our texts come from a later period, and one is always retrojecting later evidence back in time in order to reconstruct the state of earlier Jewish prayer. When one is considering liturgy from a wide perspective, it is likely that the evidence at hand can nonetheless offer us a reasonable sense of how things looked at an earlier point in time. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that our texts give us a reasonable indication as to the content of the eighteen benedictions instituted at Jabneh, even if our texts are centuries later. However, when it comes to the possibility of identifying a particular word, such as the appellation "Father," we are on far more precarious ground. We are in a situation in which it is nearly impossible to get at the historical state of the text of Jewish liturgy at the time of Jesus. Hence, it is impossible to draw any comparisons of a contrastive and evaluative nature that are based on the ostensible difference between the practice of Jesus and that of contemporaneous Judaism.

The point is further complicated when we consider recent developments in Jewish liturgical studies. The theory current at the time at which Jeremias and others conducted their studies was that by the end of the second temple period there was fixed Jewish prayer. Hence, the liturgical texts of later periods stand in direct continuity with earlier liturgical practices that go back to the time of Jesus. Even if the actual liturgical texts at our disposal could not be traced to the time of Jesus, the prayers of the synagogue stand in essential continuity with prayer practices at that time. This continuity allowed scholars to draw a contrast between the form of prayer espoused by Jesus and that practiced by official Judaism in his day.

The above-mentioned theory of the evolution of Jewish prayer was the common view for most of the twentieth century, and great scholars of liturgy such as Elbogen, Heinemann, and others subscribed to it.

In recent years an alternative theory was advanced by the Jerusalem scholar, Ezra Fleischer.[46] According to Fleischer, there is a sharp divide between pre-70 C.E. and post-70 C.E. Judaism, regarding routinized public prayer. According to this suggestion, there was no fixed obligatory public prayer prior to the destruction of the temple. The establishment of fixed daily prayers was a reaction to the destruction and was part of Judaism's attempt to rebuild itself following the destruction. While the linguistic materials out of which Jewish prayer was constructed were taken from biblical as well as apocryphal works, the liturgy itself was completely new and does not stand in continuity with prayer practices of the late-second-temple period. The implication of Fleischer's theory, a theory that has gained much support since it was first articulated, is that there is simply no sense in contrasting the prayer of Jesus to any of the forms of Jewish prayer known from the established liturgy of the synagogue. All these liturgical forms are, by definition, later and of a different nature than the prayer of Jesus. Thus, beyond the difficulty of establishing the relevant text of prayer, the very enterprise of contrasting the prayer of Jesus with contemporary Jewish prayer is deemed an irrelevant task.

Let us, nonetheless, consider the facts from the perspective of the older theory of the evolution of Jewish liturgy. Joseph Heinemann, one of its key speakers, addressed the subject of Jesus' form of prayer. He found a place for it within his presentation of ancient Jewish prayer patterns. According to Heinemann, one must distinguish between public collective prayer and the prayer of individuals. Public prayer resorts to specific language and specific patterns. Individual prayer is more free in its linguistic patterns. The Lord's Prayer is a prime example of the prayer of an individual who chooses his own prayer formula to introduce his prayer.[47] Once Jesus is appreciated within the proper liturgical rubric, his prayer is no longer novel but emerges as

perfectly typical and perfectly Jewish.

Speaking of different groups from which prayer emerges, Géza Vermès made the point that Jesus is to be contrasted with charismatic first-century religious figures such as Hanina ben Dosa. If we wish to understand his prayer against the background of Judaism, we must contrast it not with conventional public prayer but with the prayer of charismatic figures. Alas, no such prayers have been preserved; therefore, we can not engage in this exercise.[48]

Thus far, two arguments have been employed in response to the charge that Jewish prayer lacks direct address to the Father and is consequently inferior. The first was that historically we cannot make a meaningful comparison of Jewish liturgy and the prayer of Jesus. The second is that, sociologically, we are dealing with different circles that defy comparison. Another strategy could have been taken by scholars, in theory. In view of the fact that "Father" serves as an appellation for God in Ben Sira and in other apocryphal works,[49] yet is lacking in formal Jewish prayer, one could have considered the possibility that lack of reference to God as Father is itself a post-Christian reaction to a Christian emphasis of God as Father.[50] However, this strategy has not been suggested, and I am personally not inclined toward such an explanation.[51]

One additional strategy has been employed by scholars, and I, too, would like to make a contribution along similar lines, though with a significantly different emphasis. An examination of the actual contents of Jewish liturgy is an important element in dealing with claims concerning the inferiority of the Jewish concept of fatherhood, as expressed in prayer. One way in which this has been done is by finding mention of the Father in Jewish liturgical texts, thereby refuting the claims of Jeremias. This direction has been taken by Vermès and Dieter Zeller.[52] I would like to make a different point, through appeal to the contents of Jewish liturgy, once again calling to our awareness the importance of recognizing the uniqueness of each literary corpus and its emphases. In viewing Jewish liturgy we must not measure it against some theological yardstick that we import to it. Rather, we must seek to recognize its own major foci and concerns. Once we recognize these foci the question of comparison may simply fall away, inasmuch as we come to recognize that different liturgical traditions simply offer different emphases, which should be appreciated alongside one another, rather than be contrasted and evaluated against each other.

An examination of Jewish liturgy makes us immediately aware of the predominant manner in which God is approached. God is approached above all as a universal King. This finds expression first and foremost in the benediction formula out of which virtually all Jewish prayer is composed: Blessed art thou, Lord, our God, King of the Universe.[53] The theme of divine kingship is expressed time and again in the liturgy. It is the governing principle of the ritual of the recitation of the Shema,[54] and it is also the key theme of the liturgy of the high holy days. The benediction formula contains within it a significant tension. God is approached simultaneously as "our God" and as universal King. The metaphor of kingship can at one and the same time designate divine universal power and the particular relationship Israel has with God as their King. As King, God is both universal source of life and power and the one with whom the people have entered into a covenantal relationship.[55] The choice of kingship as the basic metaphor by means of which collective prayer should be organized makes perfect sense. God can be both praised and turned to in supplication. Both the historical memory of the community and its need for redemption rely on the people's relationship with their King.

If kingship is so apt for the needs of the praying community, we cannot ask why its liturgical language is this, rather than that. Once we recognize that public liturgy highlights the image of God the King, comparisons with other modes of prayer become almost irrelevant. I say "almost," because Jewish liturgy does also make reference to God as Father. What is striking, however, is that God is recognized as Father alongside God's being King. Hence, where God is addressed in prayer as Father, it is actually as King and Father.[56] The only liturgical formula referring to God as

Father for which we have any basis for a tannaitic dating is the one recorded in the Talmud, according to which R. Akiva addresses God as: "Our Father, our King."[57] The present text of our liturgy records several other instances of God's being approached simultaneously as Father and King.[58]

Two points strike us when considering the occurrences of this address to God as Father and King. The first is that the approach to God as King is common, while the approach as Father is relatively rare. The second is that God is approached as Father almost exclusively when also approached as King. Both observations lead to the possibility that "Father" is introduced as a second layer, intended to soften the approach toward the King. As I suggested with regard to the epithet "Father in Heaven," the introduction of "Father" introduces a personal, relational element and draws with it the various associations of the image of the Father. Indeed, the reference to "Father" is found in contexts that feature the personal dimension of the spiritual life: wisdom, understanding, repentance, and forgiveness.[59] The double address of God indicates both what "Father" might mean and how the fundamental approach of public prayer is directed to God's majesty and power.[60]

God the Father in Post-Rabbinic Judaism

To what extent has the image of God as Father developed in post-rabbinic Judaism? The following answer is based on a learned impression, rather than upon extensive research. It seems to me that, on the whole, very little development in the notion of God the Father occurs in post-rabbinic Judaism. This is not surprising. To speak of God as Father is to employ a metaphor. In Christian thought one speaks of development in the understanding of God as Father precisely because Christian reflection goes beyond a metaphorical understanding. In the Jewish context, the basic understanding is metaphorical. Hence, only limited development is possible. The range of development would be primarily one in which new meanings and new applications are given to the metaphor. This would not constitute a development in the understanding of God as Father, but a novel application of the old metaphor.

A striking example can be found in the writings of Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezritch (eighteenth century), the leading disciple of the founder of the Hassidic movement, R. Israel Baal Shem Tov. An examination of his work *Maggid Devarav Le'Yaakov* reveals that there are numerous parables used in the book, and amidst them father-son parables occupy a place of importance. When we examine the range of these parables, we note that their concerns are completely different from what we found in tannaitic father-son parables. The parables allowed the maggid to speak of the pleasure, the love, the will, the union in thought, and so forth, as these are expressed between father and son. There is nothing about duty, obligation, and status. The parables are applied to a description of the internal life of mind and spirit, and the greatest intimacies between God and humankind are expressed by means of this parable. Now, I do not consider this a case of theological or reflective advancement. As already stated, different literary corpora and different thought systems use metaphors and apply religious language in a manner that suits their needs and ideologies. Each ideological system draws forth from the metaphor those aspects it finds useful for its thought structure and for its ideological message. That the maggid could thus apply the father-son metaphor indicates that earlier uses far from exhausted its range of meanings.

The maggid could find new meaning in the father-son metaphor, because his writing takes place through a medium that is in many ways similar to the older rabbinic manner of writing. He wrote in short teachings, in a nonsystematic manner, and illustrated his points by means of parables. This form of teaching stands in continuity with rabbinic patterns of teaching. However, alongside this tradition of writing and reflection, Judaism also experienced a great move away from traditional rabbinic forms of expression. This is especially true of the two great movements of the Jewish

middle ages-the Jewish philosophical movement and the Kabbalah. Jewish philosophy developed a new discourse about God that was informed by the Greek and Muslim philosophical traditions. This discourse stood at odds with traditional Jewish metaphorical and anthropomorphic language. The task of the philosophers of the middle ages was to interpret biblical and rabbinic language in a way that would not be offensive to philosophical sensibilities. Within this matrix one should not expect development of the idea of God's fatherhood. The Kabbalah, by contrast, relied heavily upon the earlier anthropomorphic and mythic language, which it systematized into its theosophical language.[61] We do not find in kabbalistic thought a specific interest in the image of God the Father. However, within the context of systematization of earlier religious language, the question of the meaning of the epithet "Father" does occur. R. Moses Kordovero's encyclopedic treatment of kabbalistic traditions lists "Father" as a designation for either the first of the ten divine emanations, the crown, or the second, wisdom. Kordovero suggested that "Father" was a designation of both, pointing to the fact that the word *"ab" is* composed of the first two letters of the alphabet.[62]

The implication of the application of "Father" to the theosophical structure is interesting for our discussion. In one sense this designation is a technical application of the name and does not reveal anything new about the nature of God as Father. This is so from the perspective of theology and the psychology of religion. However, the meaning of this application is that, in speaking of God as Father, one refers not only to *our* Father, speaking as Israel, or even as creation, but one has in mind the Godhead, within which one comes to designate a particular aspect as "Father." Thus, *Keter* and *Hochma* are understood as "Father," because the inner divine emanation proceeds from them. Needless to say, this understanding of intradivine fatherhood rings familiar to Christian ears. To the extent that one is willing to speak of an intradivine structure, be it trinitarian or following the sephirotic understanding of the Kabbalah, one finds a common understanding in the possibility of appealing to an aspect of this structure as "Father."

While this correspondence is interesting, several cautionary notes should be sounded, before one rushes to a quick identification of kabbalistic theosophy and trinitarian thought. One point concerns the fact that for the Christian "Father" is the proper and appropriate way of addressing the first principle of the Trinity, while for the Kabbalist "Father" is only one of multiple names and attributes. Its function is more as an exegetical key to the correct interpretation of earlier sources, understood from a kabbalistic perspective than as the proper understanding of this aspect of the divine. A second point concerns the fact that for trinitarian reflection "Father" is the source from which the other persons of the Trinity proceed, whereas the Kabbalist recognizes a reality that transcends the entire tenfold structure of the *sefirot,* which is its proper cause. This cause is not named by any of the names, nor is it known as "Father." According to some, perhaps most, kabbalistic systems, the kabbalistic referent of "Father" is not even the first of the ten emanations. Thus, while "Father" may function within an intradivine structure and address a generating principle, the context and function of this principle in Kabbalah and in Christian thought may be radically different. Notwithstanding these differences, the Kabbalah points to a significant transformation in the use of "Father." Here, "Father" ceases to be a metaphor in the relations between God and humankind. Fatherhood describes a real, substantive relationship that takes place within the divine life. This corresponds to the development that has taken place within Christian reflection upon God the "Father." This is a good point to move from a presentation of the Jewish understanding of God the Father to the Christian sources referring to God as Father.

God the Father in the Teaching of Jesus

As stated in my introductory remarks, the primary purpose of this essay is to present the Jewish understanding of God the Father. However, as this presentation is being made in the context of a Jewish-Christian conversation, I also wish to draw its dialogical implications. A Jewish reaction to Christian reference to God the Father must be divided between an examination of the teachings of Jesus, on the one hand, and a look at the teachings of the church, on the other. Let me begin by

making some points concerning Jesus' use of the Father metaphor.

Much of the preceding discussion was colored by Christian scholarly contrast of the teaching of Jesus with that of the ancient rabbis, highlighting the uniqueness and religious breakthrough characteristic of the teachings of Jesus. I hope my presentation of the rabbinic materials has helped clear up common misperceptions. In what follows I would like to point to the work of other scholars, as they have dealt with the work of Christian scholars, primarily that of Jeremias, though he was not the first to suggest that there is something new in the teaching of Jesus in relation to ancient Judaism. George Foot Moore, in his classic article on Christian writers on Judaism[63] described the different stages of Wilhelm Bousset's description of God the Father in Judaism.[64] Bousset moved from total denial of the recognition of God as Father in Judaism to a statement that the idea was rare to his final position that it was found only in the faith of individuals. This kind of "historical" description is obviously highly colored theologically, and Bousset's need to redefine his position can only be understood as theological squirms in the face of contrary evidence.

Probably the most influential scholar on this subject has been Jeremias. While he did not argue that Jesus introduced a new idea, he certainly argued that he introduced a new dimension to the idea. According to Jeremias, Jesus discovered a new sense of intimacy in the presence of the Father, one previously unknown in Judaism. Jeremias's argument can be seen as proceeding from his analysis of Jesus' "Abba" prayer. The crux of his argument is that this appellation echoes the language of children, thus expressing the familiarity and intimacy of a child trusting in his or her father. This direct approach is contrasted with rabbinic references to "The Father in Heaven" and with Jewish liturgical formulae. The uses of "Father in Heaven" lack the kind of intimacy that we find in Jesus' use of the term, and the liturgy is found lacking in a direct approach to God as Father.

I have already dealt with the Jewish evidence. I believe my presentation undermines our ability to make the kind of comparisons that Jeremias made. His construction of the meaning of the prayer of Jesus has also come under serious criticism. The most devastating critique has been offered by James Barr.[65]

Other critics of Jeremias include Vermès[66] and Zeller.[67] The common refutal is that "Abba" is not only a child's way of addressing one's father but also the way an adult would turn to one's father. Thus, nothing conclusive can be learned from the fact that Jesus turns to his heavenly Father as "Abba." Though this does not detract from the centrality of the image of the Father in the teaching and the prayer of Jesus,[68] it does undermine the idea that Jesus discovered a dimension of heretofore-unknown intimacy with the Father.[69]

To this should be added that an examination of Jesus' presentation of the Father is in many respects of a kind with rabbinic presentations and is best understood as part of this background, rather than in opposition to it. We have already referred to the fact that Jewish prayer couples reference to God as Father with reference to God's kingship. Heinemann[70] has pointed out that in this sense the Lord's Prayer is not dissimilar from other known Jewish prayers. While the prayer opens with an address to the Father, it is clear that the Father is approached as King as well. Only thus can we understand the following request "Thy Kingdom come."[71]

Also, Jesus' use of "Father in Heaven" is not dissimilar from some of the features outlined above. It is significant that, despite the much wider range of uses found in the Gospel of Matthew,[72] we never find the "Father in Heaven" expressing emotion. Particularly noteworthy is the lack of any exchange of love between the Son and his heavenly Father. This lack of feeling is very much in keeping with the rabbinic patterns of using "Father of Heaven." In fact, it is uncertain to what extent we should even consider Jesus' approach to be close and personal. Barr[73] has suggested that

"Abba" may best be translated as "The Father," rather than as an address to a personal father. Thus, Jesus may be referring to a larger awareness of the presence of God as *the* Father, rather than to a personal relationship with *his* father. This would then account for the ability to speak of "my father" and "your father," as these would all be expressions of "the" father.[74] Such use raises references to the father to the level of a wider, allencompassing presence, recognizing its general relevance and the manner in which it transcends specific personality and specific personal relations. If this is how reference to "the Father" is to be understood, we indeed have a very different notion than that suggested by Jeremias.

It is significant that "Father in Heaven" is ultimately used within the same context as found in tannaitic sources--to refer to proper behavior, in relation to the heavenly Father. The uses of "Father in Heaven" in Matthew can accordingly be classified according to the measure to which they accord with tannaitic uses. What emerges is that there is a common stratum of usage. Such, for example, is the use of "the will of the Father in Heaven[75] and looking on the face of the heavenly Father.[76] Other instances of "Father in Heaven" retain the passive usage.[77] On top of this stratum we find an expanded use of "Father in Heaven." It is significant that, where we find this expanded use, we also encounter ideas that are crucial to the teaching of Jesus. This includes reference to the relationship between interpersonal behavior and its relation to the heavenly Father.[78] These uses are unparalleled in tannaitic literature, where "Father in Heaven" does not figure in relation to proper interpersonal behavior, nor is it associated with the forgiving of sins. Similarly, the Father's care and provision and the appropriate trust in God are expressed in relation to "Father in Heaven."[79] Here the "Father in Heaven" is active, and God's knowledge and activity are the basis for the proper attitude of trust and prayer. Here, too, ideas that were not associated with the term "Father in Heaven" are related to it and ascribed to Jesus.

It seems that, upon a common linguistic substratum, the unique and particular teachings of Jesus introduce new uses to the epithet. These uses not only introduce new contexts but also stretch the uses of the epithet from passive to active uses. At this juncture we may encounter the original teachings of Jesus. These are not in opposition to earlier teachings, nor do they revolutionize theological understanding. Still, against a common background that would have been understood by the listeners,[80] new religious concepts are introduced, as new linguistic patterns are employed with regard to the common epithet "Father in Heaven." While this suggestion is far less dramatic than that made by Jeremias, I believe an analysis of the uses of common features in the different literatures allows us to point to novelty in teaching and to the unique religious message of Jesus.

Do Judaism and Christianity Speak of the Same Father?

For all the significance attached to the historical discussion of the relation of Jesus' understanding of God as Father to that of contemporary Judaism, it seems to me the truly significant issue that our topic raises is how the image of God the Father serves as a common point-or as a source of division-between Christians and Jews. Can the two traditions speak in a meaningful way about the common image of God the Father, and can religious reflection of one tradition serve as inspiration to members of the other tradition?[81]

I would like to begin exploring this issue by suggesting a threefold distinction of Father-talk. The first level relates to religious language. Religious language contains manifold ways of speaking of God, and part of religious language is the use of metaphors. In speaking of God, various human metaphors and analogies are employed. Religious language may not describe things as they truly are, metaphysically. It gives expression to human perception and aspiration, by drawing analogies from human life and transposing them onto the divine. It is in this sense that Maimonides understood the rabbinic saying that the Torah has spoken using human language.[82] Accordingly, when speaking of God as Father this would be taken as a metaphor. The point of the metaphor

may change from one thinker to another. However, according to this first level of understanding, God is only Father by analogy. Of course, analogies have their own power in that they condition our behavior and shape our attitudes. The work of the metaphor cannot be limited to expressing ideas; it also shapes religious attitudes.

The second sense refers to religious experience. If God is referred to as "Father," this may not only be a form of religious language, but may convey a real experience and thus give expression to the consciousness of the person relating to God as Father. It is likely that divine presence may register in human consciousness in a manner that impinges paternal awareness upon the human mind in a direct manner that is quite distinct from intellectual lessons drawn by analogies based upon human language. There may be an obvious relation between the first and second levels. Religious language may play a role in the shaping of religious consciousness and experience. Any aspect of religious language-any metaphor that is commonly employed-may become actualized in the consciousness of a believer and take on a direct immediacy that it lacks for other members of the religious community that employs the particular religious language. The advancement from the first to the second level is not necessarily a conceptual advancement. It is not that something new is known about God. Rather, it is the move from the more external dimension of religious language to the more direct impact of immediate cognition.

There is yet a third sense in which God-Father language could be employed: through metaphysical speculation. On this third level, an attempt is made to articulate divine reality "as it is." Human language is not viewed as relative and subjective, belonging primarily to the realm of the human. Granting the appropriate qualifications, proper thought and articulate expression can provide a view of divine reality in and of itself. Human language is thus metaphysically endowed and serves as a vehicle for revealing higher truths.

If the second level of meaning proceeded naturally from the first, the third may well proceed from the former two, but it need not do so. I do not believe there is an innate impulse to offer absolute status to human language or to arrive at ultimate metaphysical declarations. While all three levels may be culturally contingent, the third level seems to be even more so than others, inasmuch as it is only within the confines of particular cultures that metaphysical absolutes are sought.

The first and third levels receive articulation in literary works. Through verbal and written human communication, religious language functions both in the relative contingent sense, the first level, and in the absolute metaphysical sense, the third level. The second level is harder to trace within a literary expression. When it comes to the consciousness of the individual, this may or may not find expression in literary works. Works tend to be the products of ideology. Works are shaped by ideological concerns as well as by diverse literary principles. While a literary work may give expression to the consciousness of an individual, it may also preclude our ability to access individual consciousness. It may provide us with only the first and third levels of meaning, which are more readily accessed by means of language and of literary creation.

I would like to apply this threefold distinction among different senses in which God-Father talk is employed to different perceptions of God the Father. I wish to draw a distinction between the significance of God the Father in Judaism, in the teachings of Jesus, and in Christianity. Briefly, Judaism understands Father language according to the first level of meaning. Jesus seems to have known his heavenly Father in a manner that conforms to the second level. Christianity has transformed this relationship into something that should be classified as the third level of meaning.

For Judaism, both ancient and later, "Father" never ceases to be a metaphor. It thus belongs to the arena of religious language, as do all expressions that describe God. It teaches us about God and about the suitable approach to God, yet it does not truly describe God. Because there is no absolute status to this description, it is complemented by a host of other descriptions, such as that of God as King, which we have seen complements God's presentation as Father. There is no

absolute sense in which God is spoken of as Father, nor does the description of God as Father carry any absolute value. When one is pressed as to why God is Father rather than Mother, one can simply point to cultural habits, without needing to justify in some essential sense God's paternity. Human language and concepts are relative and do not convey absolute truths. Since religious language does not carry any absolute normative value, nothing precludes non-Jews from divine paternity, even though the rabbis employed the metaphor only with regard to Israel. This is a cultural choice rather than a theological necessity. From the perspective of Judaism's application of religious language, the rabbis who limit the uses of God the Father to Israel and Philo, who speaks of the Father as creator, are equally valid in their usage of religious language.

If we are able to draw a true picture of the historical Jesus, seen through the complex web of New Testament portraits and linguistic usages, it seems likely that he enjoyed a particular relationship with God, experienced by him as "The Father." More than anything else, what Jesus lived was a powerful immediate experience. As Vermès has stated, Jesus was not a theologian, concerned with the precise articulation of truth, but a religious personality, living and experiencing God in a direct manner.[83] Thus, when Jesus spoke of God as Father, when he turned to God in prayer, and when he made God's presence a center point of his teaching, it is likely that we have here a product of his personal consciousness, as it encountered God and experienced God in the form of Father. There is perhaps nothing new content-wise in this understanding of God.[84] As Zeller has pointed out,[85] those around Jesus understood him perfectly well, because he spoke in their religious language and delivered a teaching they could understand. However, there may have been a new dimension of experiential reality attached to the teaching of Jesus. What is unique and special about Jesus is the measure in which what for others is simply a stock part of religious language was lived as a vivid, personal experience of God. I think this is no minor statement. The essence of the religious life is to be found in the internalization of experience and in accessing spiritual reality directly. If God was experienced by Jesus as "Father," this is a significant factor in understanding his life, teaching, and spirituality. However, one cannot speak of a new teaching or new recognition of God as Father, simply because we have no way of intelligently contrasting the experiences of different individuals as these are mediated through ideologically colored literary works. It is quite sufficient to suggest that what for others was metaphorical was experienced by him as fully real and immediate.[86]

The teachings of the Christian church seem to me to belong to the third level in which Father language is applied. Indeed, here we encounter a new teaching concerning the nature of the Father. What in the teachings of Jesus was a living experience finds expression both in a sustained body of reflection and in doctrinal formulation that give precise expression to the sense in which God is Father.[87] Within the context of the church's teaching, a completely new understanding of divine fatherhood emerges. While this understanding is closely linked to Jesus' personal experience of God the Father, it also constitutes a radical transformation of the understanding of God the Father. Let me quote from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church:*

Jesus revealed that God is Father in an unheard of sense: he is Father not only in being Creator; he is eternally Father by his relationship to his only Son who, reciprocally, is Son only in relation to his Father: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" [quoting Mt. 11:27].[88]

Thus, according to Christian understanding, in speaking of God as Father what is intended is primarily not God *our* father but God as Father of Jesus Christ. It is only by extension and by virtue of one's participation in the life of Christ, that one shares in the paternal relationship. The primary meaning of divine fatherhood thus addresses a unique relationship and is to be understood within the structure of trinitarian thinking. Thus, "Father" ceases to be metaphorical and is to be understood as revealing something substantive about God. God's paternity is essential to a proper understanding of God and, in fact, is a constitutive feature of the uniquely Christian teaching of

God. In fact, one can say that "Father" becomes part of the very definition of God.[89] Unless one has the proper understanding of father-son relations within the Godhead, one does not know God. Put differently, one cannot think of God without considering his paternity. To talk of God the Father is no longer an *option* available to human religious discourse; it is an essential component of the proper definition and understanding of what is meant when we say "God."

From another angle the point may be made that "Father" has become a proper name for God. A Jew listening to the following quote from Tertullian would certainly not easily identify with the image of the Father that it develops, precisely because the passage itself sets this notion of the Father over and against the Jewish understanding of God:

"The expression God the Father had never been revealed to anyone. When Moses himself asked God who he was, he heard another name. The Father's name has been revealed to us in the Son, for the name 'Son' implies the new name 'Father.'[90] I do not quote Tertullian either as a sign of great erudition or as one who digs in the recesses of another's yard in order to find problematic evidence. The above quote is taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church.*[91] It thus has a semi-canonical or catechetic status. Thomas Aquinas,[92] too, defended "Father" as a proper name for God: "This name Father, whereby paternity is signified, is the proper name of the person of the father.[93] That contemporary theologians, facing feminist critique, have such a hard time relinquishing Father-language is testimony to the fact that "Father" is not a metaphor, but a name, and part of a definition.[94]

It is at this point that a great divide exists between a Jewish understanding and a Christian understanding of the meaning of "Father" as applied to God. The ultimate question is whether one can equally well contemplate God as being or as not being Father. Clearly, ascription of fatherhood to God may enrich our concept of and our approach toward God. Still, fundamentally, this form of religious language is optional and, hence, not essential to a Jewish understanding of God. In this, Judaism is closer to Islam, which does not refer to God as Father at all, even within elaborate naming schemes that count ninety-nine divine names.[95] From a Christian perspective, God's paternity is anything but optional.

In one sense, the Christian understanding is simply a case of taking religious language more seriously. This is occasioned by the heavy use of this form of language by Jesus himself. Jesus' form of expression is taken so seriously that it is understood to be literal and substantive. No longer is fatherhood understood simply metaphorically. God is *really* Father. The only way of making sense of such a statement is by focusing it on the person of Christ, rather than leaving its application general and somewhat vague, as in earlier uses of the metaphor in Judaism.[96] Nor are religious understanding and language the only areas in which a gain is made through this understanding. Taking divine paternity seriously has serious repercussions on religious psychology as well. Once "Father" is a primary designation, essential to a definition and understanding of God, and once it is acknowledged that believers share in the paternity of God, then the believer can-indeed, *must*-take divine paternity most seriously. This opens the way for religious psychology to delve into the depths of this understanding and to help instill in the believer the full sense of what it means that God is Father. Filial trust and love become major elements in the Christian religious consciousness. Arguably, this religious consciousness is more cultivated in the Christian context than in Jewish tradition and can provide an enviable example of the personal meaning of God's paternity.[97]

However, even as Christian spirituality draws forth the full meaning of approaching God as "Father," it must also be pointed out that the Christian theological construction is not without a price, even in the experiential dimension. That "Father" is taken as seriously as it is is due precisely to the fact that God is "Father" in the full and real sense, not simply of the believer, but primarily of Jesus-and, only as a consequence of that, of the believer. While something is gained,

something is also lost. If I am correct in understanding the historical message of Jesus as the recognition of the immediacy and presence of God, experienced and known as "Father," for later Christian tradition God the Father is no longer so immediate or present. In fact, God may be said to be unreachable. The only way to know the Father is through God's Son. The incarnation is necessary precisely because otherwise there is no access to the Father.

Echoes of the distant "Father in Heaven" appear in this restatement in a roundabout way. Yet, whereas for the rabbis the heavenly Father may have been distant, yet accessible through human aspiration, for later Christian reflection access to the Father is only by means of the Son. The path of the Son both invites and excludes. It invites, for now there is a means of coming to know the Father. It excludes, because sonship and a filial relationship are reserved for those who share in the sonship of Jesus. The rabbinic understanding cannot be presented as inclusive, and it limits the scope of sonship to Israel. However, I would argue that this exclusion is a cultural tendency, where one simply does not think of others as sons. It reveals a cultural bias, but is not based on ontological necessity, nor is it ever explicitly articulated. That Christian reflection is so carefully thought out, that it takes fatherhood in such a literal and substantive sense, and that it is so explicit about the need for the Son as a means of accessing the Father all indicate that, to the same degree that metaphorical language became metaphysically charged, so a cultural tendency for exclusion became metaphysically grounded.

That the Father cannot be known except through the Son takes on a philosophical nuance that makes the Father still more inaccessible. I do not know at what point in Christian reflection divine fatherhood is identified with divine transcendence. However, it has certainly become a common element of the Christian understanding of God the Father to conflate divine paternity with transcendence. The following formulation, taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* illustrates the point: “By calling God ‘Father,’ the language of faith indicates . . . that God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority . . . God's parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood, which emphasizes God's immanence.”[98] Immanence and transcendence are here contrasted as Mother and Father.

I am not sure the rabbis would have fathomed what later generations refer to as "transcendence." Divine presence was so real and natural that I believe they did not conceive of God as transcendent. An anthropomorphic presentation cannot apply to a transcendent God. Certainly, where human language and earthly metaphors are applied to God, one does not intend to describe God as transcendent. Hence, in speaking of God as Father the rabbis never intended to describe God as transcendent. God may be distant and in the heavens, but then the heavens are a far off place, not a realm that is totally beyond. Later uses of "Father" in Judaism, including the kabbalistic use, also do not lend this understanding to the image of the Father. Thus, when Christian thought refers to the Father as God transcendent, it is both applying a language that is foreign to the Jewish uses of "Father" and creating the necessity for the revelation of the Son, who is the only means of accessing the transcendent Father. Identifying the Father with the transcendent God seems to conflict with the emphasis, found in the teaching of Jesus, upon the presence, immediacy, and availability of the Father.

The issue is not only how "Father" is translated philosophically. With due caution and tentativeness, I would also like to put forth for consideration the possibility that, from the perspective of religious experience and the direct approach to the "Father," a price is paid once God is not simply *our* "Father" but primarily the "Father" of Jesus Christ. The following remarks are inspired by an interesting study of a contemporary Franciscan, Thaddée Matura, who has studied divine names in the writings of St. Francis of Assisi.[99] While Francis is one of numerous Christian personalities, he is particularly interesting in this case, inasmuch as his spirituality is so much an imitation of the life of Christ. There are few personalities in Christian history that have strived for such a profound identification with Jesus. Against this background it is interesting to examine the

way in which St. Francis spoke of God and his choice of names for God.

Matura has provided the reader with a roster of divine names used by Francis, according to their numerical frequency and context. The most frequently used name is "Lord" (410), followed by "brother" (306).[100] While "Father" appears as the third most cited name, many of its occurrences are in standardized trinitarian liturgical formulae.

The number of direct addresses of God as Father is extremely low, only nine. By contrast, Jesus was much more frequently presented as turning to God as "Father," twenty-two times. Even in those instances in which Francis turned to God as "Father," what was emphasized, according to Matura, was the transcendence of God rather than God's immediacy. It is not surprising that in these contexts God is referred to frequently as both Father and King, just as we find in Jewish liturgy.[101] It is regrettable that Jeremias did not spend more time in the company of St. Francis before proposing his contrast of Jesus' teaching with that of rabbinic Judaism.

Matura suggested that the kind of distance that characterizes Francis's use of "Father" points to the transcendence of the first person of the Trinity, who can only be known by means of the second person.[102] Indeed, but it also points to the price that Christian piety pays once "Father" is no longer a direct expression addressed to God but is mediated via the Father-Son relationship within the Trinity. Francis's identification with Jesus went as far as bearing the imprint of the crucifixion in his body. It did not, however, extend to adapting the personal language of Jesus toward God. "Father" is primarily the address of Jesus to his heavenly Father and an appeal to the revered and transcendent first person of the Trinity. When Francis sought a religious mode that would convey the kind of immediacy and personal feeling that Jewish religious language, of which Jesus was a part, expressed by means of calling God "Father," he did so by calling God "Brother." Once "Father" has been assimilated into a coherent religious structure and is deemed to belong primarily to Jesus Christ personally, religious immediacy is forced to other channels.

To return to the question of whether "Father" is common ground or dividing point between Christianity and Judaism, it is obvious that both elements emerge from the above presentation. From the perspective of the first level, Judaism and Christianity share a common language, grounded in common scriptures. The very use of common religious language lends a commonality to the two religions. Moving to the second level, if Jesus had a realization of God to share with his Jewish audience, this was an experiential deepening of their own traditional understanding and obviously did not stand in conflict with it. One is forced to reflect upon the fact that perhaps the Jewish Jesus' direct experience of God the Father might have had a deeper impact on Jewish teaching had it not been grafted into the systematic metaphysical dimension of the third level. Both first and second levels of meaning remain alive within Christian tradition, thus forming an ongoing link and basis of common understanding between Judaism and Christianity.

However, the hallmark of Christian faith is precisely the third level of meaning, whereby God the Father is understood initially and primarily as the Father of Jesus Christ. Here one must recognize a fundamental divide between the Jewish and Christian understanding of divine fatherhood. It seems to me that the only way in which, despite theological differences, Judaism can continue its dialogue with Christianity on this fundamentally Christian ground is by shifting the emphasis from the theological and metaphysical dimension to the psychological dimension and the fruits of Christian belief in the domain of spirituality. If a deeper psychological understanding and a more conscious and nuanced appreciation of divine paternity are found within a Christian context, this may serve as inspiration to Jewish religious experience. Christianity may have had to move to a particular construction of theological meaning, in this third level of meaning, in order to make sense of its story and traditions, as these were carried into new environments. In so doing, certain fruits have become available. These fruits carry forth the potential of the first level and mediate the reality of the second level. For this reason they continue to be relevant to Jews, despite their

inability to assent to the theological formulations of the third level.

Judaism may be able not only to relate but also to be inspired by the lived spirituality of the paternal presence, regardless of its theological underpinnings. The theological definition of the nature of God the Father certainly seems to be a dividing point between Christians and Jews. I would like to believe, however, that the experience of life in the presence of the Father can transcend these differences.

Notes

1. Cf. Dieter Zeller, "God as Father in the Proclamation and in the Prayer of Jesus," in Asher Finkel and Lawrence Frizzell, eds., *Standing before God: Studies on Prayer in Scriptures and in Tradition with Essays in Honor of John M. Oesterreicher* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1981), p. 118; George Foot Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *Harvard Theological Review,* vol. 14, no. 3 (1921), pp. 242ff.
2. See Joachim Jeremias, "Abba," chap. 1, in his *The Prayers of Jesus,* Studies in Biblical Theology, 2nd series, 6 (London: SCM Press; Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1967 [chap. l, tr. John Bowden, from *Abba: Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), pp. 15-67]), pp. 11-65; and Witold Marchei, *La Priere du Christ et des Chrétiens* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971).
3. Marchel, *La Priere, p. 96.*
4. Indeed, Marchel offered in cruder form what Jeremias offered with far greater finesse.
5. Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "God and Israel as Father and Son in Tannaitic Literature," Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986.
6. Many writers have emphasized that it is not really a central image in biblical writing. See Theodorus Christiaan Vriezen, *Theologie des Alten Testaments in Grundzeugen* (Wageningen: H. Veenman; Neukirchen: K. Moers, 1957), pp. 120ff.; Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament,* tr. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), pp. 67ff.
7. A fuller presentation of what follows is to be found in Alon Goshen-Gottstein, *Hakinui "Av Bashamayim" Besifrut Hazal, Iyunei Mikra Uprashanut 3* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, *1993) pp; 79-103.*
8. See also George Foot Moore, *Judaism: In the First Centuries of the Christian Era-The Age of the Tannaim* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, *1944* [orig., *1927]), pp. 2204ff.;* Arthur Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God* (New York: Ktav Publishing Co., repr., *1968* [orig., 1927]), pp. 56-61; and Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs,* tr. Israel Abrahams (in *2* vols., with the notes comprising *vol. 2)* (Jerusalem: At the Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, *1975), p. 71.*
9. The name "God of Israel" is barely used in rabbinic literature. See Marmorstein, *Old Rabbinic Doctrine, p. 72.*
10. See the list of names in ibid., and note the exceedingly high frequency of names presenting God as *Shel Olam* of the world.
11. See chap. 4 of Urbach's *Sages:* "Nearness and Distance-Omnipresent and Heaven," pp. 6679. An examination of New Testament sources suggests that "Father in Heaven" came into vogue only in the first century. See Jeremias, "Abba," pp. 16fí.
12. Urbach, *Sages, pp.* 60-61.
13. For an alternative explanation, see Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the NewTestament,* tr. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1964), vol. 1, pp. 571ff. (hereafter, *TDNT).*
14. See, e.g., Avot 1,3.
15. Tosefta Yoma 2,8.
16. See, e.g., Mishna MenahDaDot 13,11.
17. E.g., Mishna Sanhedrin 6,5.
18. Urbach, *Sages, p. 61.*

19. See also Moore, *Judaism,* vol. 2, p. 205; *TDNT,* vol. 5 (1967), p. 986. That "Father in Heaven" originated as an expansion of "Heaven" and not of "Father" also accounts for the fact that there is no corresponding formula to designate the son or the children in relation to the heavenly Father.
20. See Sifrei Deut. 48, p. 113. One should not conclude too much from this source, inasmuch as the *derasha* on Prov. 23:15 carries within it the impetus for the contrast. The contrast may thus have more to do with the particular *derasha* than with the meaning of "Father in Heaven."
21. See Mishna Rosh Hashana 3,8; Mekhilta, Amalek 1, 179-180; cf. Goshen-Gottstein, "God and Israel as Father and Son," pp. 17-18; see further Mishna Berachot 5,1 and numerous other sources.
22. Sotah 9,15. The rhetorical question that forms the text is part of what enables an expansionof the linguistic usage with regard to the heavenly Father. Cf. Mishna Yoma 8,9. This text might be compared to Mt. 6:14. The two texts deliver an opposite message concerning the recipient of forgiveness. However, both texts juxtapose the same motifs and offer a related image of the heavenly Father. By means of the rhetorical question this text delivers a message that is close to the uses of "Father in Heaven" in the New Testament. The similarity of motifs in both texts raises the possibility of some common source.
23. See Urbach, *The Sages, p.* 72, and p. 714, n. 25.
24. However, beyond the formulaic use, not much is made of this association. The formula functions almost automatically in exegetical contexts, without much reflection attached to it. See, e.g., Sifrei Deut. 306, p. 341. In this context, attention should also be called to the unique expression, "My Father in Heaven commanded me," in Sifra, Kedoshim, chap. 11, 93d. The active dimension is best accounted for by the merging of the images of heavenly Father and the Kingdom of Heaven in this text. See Goshen-Gottstein, "God and Israel as Father and Son," p. 25.
25. The only exceptions are found in cases of paraphrases of biblical texts that express emotion. See Goshen-Gottstein, *Hakinui, p. 90.*
26. Bavli Sanhedrin 99a. Other instances are cited in ibid, p. 93.
27. The pattern of mediation, whereby a third party recommends the son to his father, usually an angry father, is amply documented in tannaitic parables. See Goshen-Gottstein, *Hakinui, p.* 87, and idem, "God and Israel as Father and Son," pp. 88-110. This notion of mediation and of appeasement of the father, by means of a third party, may also be significant for understanding Pauline theology. See Rom. 5:10-11 and 11:15; cf. 1 Cor. 11:7; 2 Cor. 18:5; Col. 1:20; and Eph. 2:16. See GoshenGottstein, *Hakinui, p.* 87, n. 47.
28. Leviticus Rabba 23,5.
29. Cí Moore, *Judaism, vol.* 2, p. 204; Jeremias, "Abba," p. 17.
30. See, e.g., Tanna Devei Eliyahu, chap. 7, p. 33; chap. 10, p. 51; and many more.
31. As well as others, primarily Géza Vermés, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (London: Collins. 1973; New York: Macmillan, 1974).
32. Shmuel Safrai, "Jesus and the Hasidic Movement," in Isaiah Gafni et al., eds., *The Jews in the Hellenistic-Roman World: Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Press, 1996), pp. 417-420.
33. For a summary of the discussion regarding the date of this work, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House;. New York: Macmillan Co., 1971), vol. 15, pp. 803-804.
34. Safrai, "Jesus and the Hasidic Movement," p. 418, n. 26, cites Goshen-Gottstein, "God and Israel as Father and Son." His analysis, however, is not in any way influenced by my own discussion. Safrai is also unaware of my later article in which Tanna Devei Eliyahu is discussed.
35. See Goshen-Gottstein, *Hakinui, p. 101,* n. 121.
36. See Tanna Devei Eliyahu, chap. 17, p. 84, and chap. 26, p. 141.
37. Indeed, here we have the first conscious articulation of the distinction between the two. See ibid., chap. 24, p. 134.

38. See an example of such a saying in Sifrei Deut. 309. See further the introduction to Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, p. 3.
39. Mekhilta of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai to Ex. 13,21, p. 47.
40. Mekhilta, tr. *Y.* Lauterbach, *vol. 2, pp. 185-186.*
41. See *my* "Love as a Hermeneutic Principle in Rabbinic Literature," *Journal of Literature and Theology, vol. 8, no. 3 (1994), pp. 247-267.*
42. See part *two of* Goshen-Gottstein, "God and Israel as Father and Son."
43. Mekhilta, pp. 224-225.
44. One should note that, of the wider range of divine names, only a select few appear in Jewish liturgy. That a name or an epithet does not appear in liturgy may thus not be as significant as one might imagine. *Lex orandi* does not seem to be identical to *lex credendi.*
45. Marchel, *La Priere, p.* 96; and Jeremias, "Abba," pp. 29, 57.
46. See Ruth Langer, "Revisiting Early Rabbinic Liturgy: The Recent Contributions of Ezra Fleischer," *Prooftexts,* vol. 19, no. 2 (1999), pp. 179-194.
47. See Joseph Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud: Forms and Patterns* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1977), pp. 190-191. See, however, Géza Vermès, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (London: SCM Press, 1993), p. 164.
48. Géza Vermès, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 42.
49. See Zeller, "God as Father," pp. 118-119, 124; Vermès, *Jesus and the World of Judaism,* p.40
50. Jeremias accounted for the transition from the Marcan formula of the Lord's Prayer, "Father," to the Matthean formula, "our Father who art in Heaven," in light of "pious Jewish-Palestinian custom" (Jeremias, *Prayers of Jesus, p.* 91). James Barr, "Abba Isn't `Daddy,'" *Jewish Theological Studies, N.S.* vol. 39, no. 1 (1988), p. 44, correctly understood this to refer to JewishPalestinian liturgical style. If, indeed, liturgical habit led to opening the prayer with "our Father," how is it that not a single prayer has survived with such an opening? The anti-Christian response would come in handy at this point.
51. Various religious phenomena that have disappeared from Judaism have been accounted for as a reaction to Christian adoption of these phenomena. One example is found in W. D. Davies' explanation for the decline in covenantal language in rabbinic Judaism. See William David Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), p. 187. 1 am personally wary of such explanations, as we have no clear methodological guidelines to help us decide when the polemical reaction should be one of letting go of a central idea and when, on the contrary, the Jewish idea is emphasized as a reaction to its adaptation in a Christian context. I find it hard to believe that the fact that Christians adopt certain ideas would lead to the abandonment of key theological concepts from a Jewish milieu.
52. See Zeller, "God as Father," p. 119. Vermès, *Jesus and the World of Judaism, p.* 40, points to the first benedictions of supplication in the Amida that address God as father in the Palestinian rite. In the common text we have mention of God as Father in the second and third supplications, though this mention is coupled with reference to God as King. The first benedictions seem to form an independent cluster, whose liturgical history antedates the composition of the Amida, regardless of which liturgical development theory we subscribe to. Moshe Weinfeld, "The Prayers for Knowledge, Repentance, and Forgiveness in the `Eighteen Benedictions': Qumran Parallels, Biblical Antecedents, and Basic Characteristics," *Tarbiz, vol.* 48, no. 3 (1979), pp. 186-200 (in Hebrew), has suggested that these benedictions can be traced to Qumran and that they have various features that set them apart. They are more individualistic and more spiritual in nature. Hence, the appeal to the Father in these benedictions may be especially apt (Weinfeld, "Prayers," p. 187)
53. See Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud, p. 93* ff. Interestingly, the Amida does not contain this formula (Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud, p.* 94). However, the Amida, too, contains several addresses to God as King.
54. See Reuven R. Kimelman, "The Shema and Its Rhetoric: The Case for the Shema's Being More than Creation, Revelation, and Redemption," *Journal of Jewish Thought and*

Philosophy, vol. 2, no. 1 (1992), pp. 111-156.

55. Cf. Mekhilta Bahodesh, chap. 5, vol. 3, pp. 229-230.
56. Might this reflect the double emotional approach of love and fear or awe, *Ahavah v'Yirah,* that are appropriate to God? Pushing the suggestion one stage further, to the extent that later Christian approaches prefer "Father" to "King," does this reflect the privileging of love over fear within Christian religious psychology?
57. Bavli Ta'anit 25b. Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud, p.* 190, sees this formula, too, as an expression of individual prayer. Thus, both Jesus and R. Akiva opened their individual prayers by addressing God as Father.
58. See the Ahava Rabba benediction, preceding the morning recitation of the Shema. Actually, this benediction also has one address to God as Father alone, probably because of its emphasis upon fatherly compassion. In our version of the Amida, the fifth and sixth benedictions also have such a double address. However, other versions of the Amida have only Father, and this in the fourth and fifth benedictions. See Solomon Schechter, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 10 (1898), pp. 656-657. The text is translated in Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ,* new English version, rev. and ed. Géza Vermés and Fergus Millar (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973, 87 (orig.: *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu))*, vol. 2, p. 460. It is impossible to recover an "original" version of any of these prayers, and we can only look back, through the prism of the changes of the generations, and point to possibilities of ideas and their combinations.
59. Cf. n. *52,* above.
60. The above discussion dealt with the problem of the use of Father language in Jewish prayer against the background of an understanding of the special place of "Father" in the prayers of Jesus. This understanding has recently come under criticism. If Mary Rose D'Angelo is correct, then the earliest Christian uses of Abba (not necessarily going back to Jesus personally) are to be understood in the context of Roman imperial theology (Mary Rose D'Angelo, *"Abba* and `Father': Imperial Theology and the Jesus Traditions," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 [Winter, 1992]: 611-630). Viewing "Abba" in this context would lead to viewing this Christian usage as completely contextual with contemporary Jewish usage.
61. See Yehuda Liebes, *"De Natura Dei:* On the Development of the Jewish Myth," chap. I in his *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism,* tr. Batya Stein, SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 1-64, and notes to chap. I on pp. 151-169*.*
62. *Pardes Rimonim, Sha'ar* 23, chap. 1.
63. Moore, "Christian Writers," pp. 197-254.
64. Ibid., p. 247.
65. Barr, "Abba Isn't 'Daddy,'" pp. 28-47.
66. Vermès, *Jesus and the World of Judaism,* pp. 41-42; and idem, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew*, pp. 180-183.
67. Zeller, "God as Father," pp. 123-124. Additional discussions of this theme are referenced in B. T. Viviano, "Hillel and Jesus on Prayer," in James H. Charlesworth and Loren L. Johns, eds., *Hillel and Jesus: Comparative Studies of Two Major Religious Leaders* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 451, n. 41; p. 453, n. 48.
68. Barr, "Abba Isn't `Daddy,'" p. 39.
69. I cannot avoid mention of a common yiddish way of referring to God as Tate'le or Tatinyu, expressing precisely what Jeremias hoped to find in "Abba." It took much additional Jewish living and suffering to bring popular Jewish culture to this form of expression.
70. Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud,* p. 191.
71. See also *TDNT,* vol. 5, pp. 995fí., 1009-1011.
72. I am avoiding the question of the relationship between the original words of Jesus and how these were developed within the tradition. Jeremias has pointed out that reference to God as Father increases between the different Gospels and that "Father in Heaven" is largely specific to Matthew. I believe it is for this reason that Jeremias made so much of the prayer

formula "Abba," which allowed him to get at the original voice of Jesus himself (Jeremias, "Abba," p. 31). Also see Gottlob Schrenk, in *TDNT,* vol. 5, pp. 985-986.

73. Barr, "Abba Isn't `Daddy,'" pp. 39ff.
74. I am reminded of the twentieth-century holy woman, Marthe Robin, and her reference to the Virgin Mary as "The Mother."
75. Mt. 7:21, 12:50,18:14.
76. Mt. 18:10. Cf. Sifrei Num. 89, and Bavli Sanhedrin 42a, paralleling Mekhilta Pisha 1, p. 7 (Horowitz).
77. See Mt. 5:16, 10:32. 78Mt. 6:14, 18:35, 5:46-48.
78. Mt. 6:14, 18:35, 5:46-48.
79. Mt. 6:26, 32; 7:9.
80. See Zeller, "God as Father," p. 120.
81. Perhaps it is not superfluous to state, at this point, that, in referring to Christian understanding and its relationship to Judaism in the discussion that follows, I am naturally speaking as an outsider, formed by impressions, and always lacking the kind of nuance that an insider's thorough knowledge provides. I welcome corrections.
82. Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed,* tr. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1,26.
83. Vermès, *Jesus and the World of Judaism*, p. 43*.*
84. The claim that a new teaching regarding divine paternity has been introduced by Jesus relies, to a certain extent, on the Christian understanding that, in addressing God as Father, Jesus did so as a special and unique Son, in the Christian sense. This understanding takes *us* once again beyond the pale *of* the historical inquiry into the area *of* faith and dogmatics, unless it can be unequivocally proved that Jesus had *full* self-awareness *of* all that Christianity ascribes to him. *If* Jesus was not talking about *his* Father, but about *the* Father (and, hence, my father, your father, etc.), then Jesus was not offering a new understanding as much as calling for the deeper realization *of* an existing shared understanding.
85. Zeller, "God as Father," p. 120.
86. 0ne cannot preclude that even this much access to the religious experience of a personality of the past is unattainable, in light of ideological and rhetorical practices that control the literature that records these experiences. If we take the author of Tanna Devei Eliyahu, we have a case of a writer who uses Father language extensively, in a manner that is incommensurate with common rabbinic practices. Does this indicate a personal awareness of the author of God as Father? Perhaps, but perhaps it is merely a literary and stylistic feature of a particular author and we cannot access the consciousness of the writer through the work that records his thoughts. At one extreme one can consider the author of Tanna Devei Eliyahu to have enjoyed a personal relationship with God as Father, just as Jesus did. At the other extreme we may be unable to access the religious experience *of* either.
87. If the move from spontaneous religious expression to organized, systematic thought structure does not stem from an inherent human need to formulate, understand, and thereby control, then this shift to the third level might be one more indication *of* the Hellenic spirit that gave Christianity *so* many *of* its features. See Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity,* repr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), especially chap. 11.
88. *"Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, *1994),* section 240 (pp. 63-64).
89. Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 1.
90. Tertullian, *De oral.* 3; PL 1, 1155.
91. *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* section 2779 (p. 666).
92. *Summa Theologica,* Pt. 1, Question *33.*
93. It is important to contrast this with the Kabbalists' understanding of the function of "Father." Even though *"ab"* describes an intradivine relationship, it is not part of the definition of God, nor is it considered a proper name. The religious structure would be intact even if this designation were avoided. This would not be the case for the tetragram, which is, indeed, a

proper name, which Tertullian in the above quote consigned to a lower rung of names.

94. See Johannes-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx, eds., *God as Father?* Concilium: Religion in the Eighties *143* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; New York: Seabury Press, 1981).
95. See Sheikh Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi al-Halveti, *The Most Beautiful Names* (Putney, VT: Threshold Books, 1985).
96. The consequence of such an understanding is that, when Jesus taught others to pray by saying "Father," he was sharing his status, even his messiahship, with his disciples. See Jeremias, "Abba," p. 63; *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* section 2782 (p. 667). What enables such a charged reading of Jesus' instruction in prayer is the substantive meaning of divine fatherhood. Cf. Zeller, "God as Father," p. 124.
97. This is one of several factors leading to what seems to me to be greater sensitivity to religious psychology, personal interiority, and psycho-religious self-awareness in the Christian context. While I suggest this particular factor is based on a fundamentally Christian theological stance, I believe the common linguistic, metaphorical, and scriptural ground that unites Christianity and Judaism allows for the incorporation of dimensions of Christian spirituality in common Jewish awareness, thus bringing to life a potential contained within the Jewish tradition.
98. *"Catechism of the Catholic Church,* section 239 (p. 63).
99. Thaddée Matura, *Dieu le Père Très Saint: Contemplè par François d Assise* (Paris, 1990).
100. Cf., however, his report in ibid., p. 13.
101. It seems to me that Francis is somewhat unique in the frequent coupling of Father and King. My impression is that because of the centrality of "Father" in Christian speculation, the awareness of God as King is often diminished. To put the matter more radically, perhaps, the emphasis upon the person of the Father and the Father's relationship to the Son allows for a detraction of the problematic message of the coming Kingdom.
102. See the discussion in Matura, *Dieu le Père*, p. 54.

This article first appeared in Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 38:4, Spring 2001.
http://ecumene.org/jes/>