

SHORT STUDIES

THE SON OF MAN AGAIN¹

I. THE BACKGROUND

In the Old Testament, 'son of man' means (1) man in general, (2) the prophet, (3) the eschatological Israel. (1) appears, for example in Ps. viii. 5, is referred to in Heb. ii. 6 and is still present in the background of I Cor. xv. 27 and Eph. i. 22. (2) reflects the usage of Ezechiel. One should never forget that the term occurs here about eighty-seven times: the prophet is addressed as the son of man, filled with God's Spirit (ii. 1 ff.; iii. 24 f.; xi. 4 f.), watchman of Israel (iii. 17; xxxiii. 7), sent to a rebellious nation (ii. 3). The word of God is his food (ii. 8), but he lives among those who have eyes to see and yet do not see, ears to hear and yet do not hear (xii. 2), who talk about him and run after him, and yet do not do what he says (xxxiii. 30-2), because they think that God's judgement is still far off (xii. 27), so that his message remains riddles and parables for them (xvii. 2, cf. xxi. 5). He must not only announce disaster (vi. 1 ff. etc.), but pronounce God's judgement over Israel (xx. 4; xxii. 2; xxxiii. 36), even to kill them (xi. 4, 13; xxi. 19 ff.). He must take difficulties, privation and suffering upon himself to be a sign for Israel (iv. 9 ff.; v. 1 ff.; xii. 6, 11, 17 ff.; xxi. 11, 17; xxiv. 16 ff., 27). He is allowed to announce the coming of the good shepherd (xxxiv. 23 ff.), the eschatological purification by God's Spirit (xxxvi. 17, 25 ff.), the 'resurrection' of Israel from the dead (xxxvii. 1 ff.) and the coming glory (xl. 4; xliii. 7, 10; xlvi. 6). He even sets resurrection and judgement into motion (xxxvii. 9 f.; cf. xxxvii. 15 ff.; xxxix. 17 ff.). John x, Revelation and Jewish speculations leading to gnostic views are to be seen in the wake of Ezechiel.² Quotations in the Qumran scrolls prove his influence there.³ (3) In Daniel, the son of man means (a) man in general (iii. 82 LXX, cf. ii. 38), (b) the prophet (viii. 17), (c) Israel, exalted to God and vindicated after persecution and suffering (vii. 13).⁴ Unfortunately it is impossible to decide whether this image is chosen *ad hoc* in contrast to the four beasts or because of a mytho-

¹ Thesis for discussion at the S.N.T.S. meeting in Münster on 30 August 1962. Formulated originally orally in German as a last-minute substitution for a paper which could not be read, it is published here in a slightly revised form. Cf. my articles in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, L (1959), 185 ff.; *J.B.L.* LXXXIX (1960), 119 ff., and particularly chapter 3 in *Erniedrigung und Erhöhung*, 2nd ed. (Zürich, 1962), also ch. 5 d-h.

² C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1953), pp. 358 ff.; K. Schubert, *Die Religion des nachbiblischen Judentums* (1955), pp. 87 f.; also E. M. Sidebottom, *Exp. Times*, LXVIII (1956/7), 233 f.; W. Grundmann, *T.L.Z.* LXXXVI (1961), 431.

³ J. A. Fitzmyer, *N.T.S.* VII (1960/1), 297 ff., nos. 18, 22, 33.

⁴ C. K. Barrett, in *New Testament Essays, Studies in Memory of T. W. Manson*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (1959), pp. 10-15.

logical concept in the background. Dan. vii. 13 is effective in Mark xiii. 26; xiv. 62, Revelation, Ethiopic Enoch and II (IV) Ezra.

Most important questions are still open. Has Palestinian, particularly Galilaean, Judaism known an individual, apocalyptic son of man? Has Dan. vii. 13 been interpreted in this sense in the time of Jesus, or did it still mean the people of the elect? If so, did this view include previous suffering and persecution? The book of similitudes (Eth. En. xxxvii–lxxi) seems to have been unknown in Qumran.¹ Does this mean that it was written after Jesus' time? Does the original reading of Eth. En. lxx. 1 assume that the earthly patriarch is the son of man,² who will be exalted to God and addressed by him as the (heavenly) son of man (lxxi. 14), or is the son of man of lxx. 1 originally the heavenly being as in the other chapters?

II. JESUS

Out of about eighty occurrences of the term, Acts vii. 56 alone stands outside of the sayings of Jesus (or attributed to him). Inversely 'Christ' is to be found very frequently in words about Jesus, extremely seldom in words of Jesus. 'Servant of God', a title which, like 'son of man', has been dropped later, appears exclusively outside of the words of Jesus. This proves, I think, that Jesus himself used the term.³ The problem, however, is raised by two facts: the title is, in the older tradition, neither connected with death and resurrection of Jesus nor with the kingdom of God.⁴ Both must be explained.

If Jesus used the term, two ways of explanation are open.

(1) Jesus announced the coming son of man, not identifying him with himself.⁵ This leads to several problems. It would explain the first difficulty, but not the second one. Furthermore, is it credible that Jesus, who certainly avoided apocalyptic speculations about the time of the coming events, descriptions of the catastrophe or the future glory, etc., used, in such a central position and without further introduction, a term unknown to the Judaism of the Pharisees and the Qumran group, known at the best in small apocalyptic circles? That the Romans crucified Jesus, could have been a misunder-

¹ Fragments of every chapter of Eth. En. have been found in Qumran, except of chapters 37–71 (contribution of M. Black to the discussion in Münster).

² M. Black, *J.T.S.* n.s. III (1952), 1 ff. It is, compared with the rest of the Similitudes, *lectio difficilior* and appears in the older manuscripts.

³ H. Conzelmann, *Z.T.K.* LIV (1957), 282 f. thinks that the term was not part of the creed, but of the eschatological hope (and therefore used by prophets speaking in the name of Jesus: H. E. Tödt, *Der Menschensohn in der synoptischen Überlieferung* [1959], p. 209). This is not convincing. Why should the church have been so careful to introduce the title only into the sayings of Jesus, and so inventive to create words like Luke xii. 8, although, for the church, there was no more distinction between Jesus and the son of man?

⁴ W. Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (1913), p. 219, and Ph. Vielhauer, in *Festschrift für G. Dehn* (1957), pp. 51 ff.; cf. A. J. B. Higgins, in *N.T. Essays* (cf. n. 4, p. 256 above), p. 130.

⁵ R. Bultmann's thesis has been developed again in a revised form by Tödt (cf. n. 3 above), particularly pp. 204 ff.

standing; but is the preaching of Jesus¹ really consistent with such a role of a mere prophet announcing only the coming one? Luke xii. 8 may buttress such a view; Mark xiv. 62, however, could not be genuine, since Jesus declares himself there to be the Messiah. Was the church so careful to imitate the pattern of Luke xii. 8 without however distinguishing between Jesus and the 'son of man'? Why should the death of a mere messenger have shaken his disciples so thoroughly? It should, on the contrary, have led them to considering him the more a mere prophet who, like most of his predecessors, had to pay with his life for his fidelity to the coming son of man. Why should they have formed a passion story without, for quite a time, being able to explain this stumbling-block? Why should the appearances of the risen Jesus have changed, instead of confirmed, their view that Jesus was the forerunner whose testimony was trustworthy, all the more because God had sealed it by raising his prophet from the dead (cf. Mark vi. 14-16)?

(2) Jesus identified himself with the son of man. I cannot repeat the analysis of the texts which I tried to give in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* (1959), pp. 185 ff. I can only give some of its results. Out of the three groups of sayings about the son of man: (a) the words about the earthly son of man seem to me to be the most certain ones, especially Matt. viii. 20 (Q, 'The son of man has not where to lay his head...') and xi. 19 (Q, 'The son of man has come eating and drinking...', in a context which is not consistent with the church's view of John as either the forerunner or the competitor of Jesus). Luke xi. 30 seems to belong to the same group, since the Aramaic version did, in all probability, contain no verb indicating a future tense. Even 'the days [plural!] of the son of man' in Luke xvii. 26 must originally have been the days of the earthly ministry which are compared with the days of the righteous Noah before the coming of the flood.² (b) The predictions of suffering, death and resurrection of the son of man are certainly late; but the connexion of the word 'son of man' and the verb 'to hand over' are so frequent, that a general allusion to the rejection of the son of man is probably genuine. Mark viii. 33 cannot have been invented by the church. It presupposes a rebellion against a way into humiliation so that something like viii. 31 has probably been said by Jesus in contrast to Peter's view in viii. 29a.³ (c) There is also an eschatological role of the son of man in the genuine sayings of Jesus. According to Luke xii. 8, however, it is the role of the decisive witness who brings about the judgement of God. The son of

¹ Jesus never uses the 'Thus says the Lord' of the Old or New Testament prophets (Amos i. 3, etc.; Rev. ii. 1 ff.; Matt. vii. 22); cf. contrariwise Matt. v. 21 ff.; xi. 12; Luke xi. 20, Jesus' call to discipleship from which heaven or hell will depend, etc.

² Cf. the crisis-parables in J. Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 6th ed. (1962), pp. 163 f.: Luke xvii. 26 ff. etc.

³ 'To suffer' usually includes the whole passion. Its position in Mark viii. 31 before Jesus' rejection and death is unnatural. Both facts point to an original wording similar to that in ix. 12; Luke xvii. 25. Cf. W. Michaelis, *T.W.N.T.* v, pp. 911 f. viii. 33 is considered as originally immediately following xiii. 29 by F. Hahn (cf. p. 259, n. 3) ch. III, 2.

man will be both counsel for the defence and for the prosecution in one person. His role is that of the exalted Elijah or the exalted righteous in contemporaneous Jewish writings (Jub. iv. 23; x. 17; Syr. Apoc. of Baruch xiii. 3; especially Wisdom ii. 16–20 and v. 1–5). Mark xiv. 62 may, in the original version, have meant Jesus' exaltation to God's throne.¹ In the image of Matt. xxiv. 44, the son of man replaces probably the 'day of judgement' in an earlier form (I Thess. v. 2, 4; II Pet. iii. 10). It may be that similar development accounts for Matt. xvii. 24 which would otherwise be a most convincing argument for a prediction of the parousia of the son of man by Jesus.

If we grant that this is more or less what Jesus preached, the two problems mentioned above are solved. Jesus proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God and the last judgement in a near future.² The kingdom, however, is brought exclusively by God's act. While the son of man will play a most important role in the judgement, he is not directly connected with the final appearance of the kingdom of God. Because the parousia, in the narrower sense of the word, of the son of man is a later development, it is, of course, not combined with the predictions of death and resurrection in the Synoptic tradition.

III. CONCLUSIONS

My hypothesis, which is to be discussed, supposes that Jesus took up the term 'son of man' just because it was not yet a definite title. It was a term stimulating the hearer to reflect and to answer the question, put by its usage, who Jesus really was. It described, first of all, the earthly 'man' in his humiliation and coming suffering. It depicted the messenger of God suffering for his people and calling it to repentance.³ It declared that this very 'man' would confront his hearers in the last judgement, so that their yes or no to the earthly Jesus would then decide their vindication or condemnation. It so contained the mystery of the one who like the poorest slave serves at table, and yet invites those on whom he is waiting to his heavenly meal (Luke xxii. 27–30), in the fulfilment of the time, when the insignificant grain of mustard seed will unexpectedly prove the greatest of all shrubs (Mark iv. 32).

Only in the course of a 're-apocalyptization' of the eschatology of Jesus, in

¹ In the sequence of Mark, the coming on the clouds refers to the parousia (*pace* J. A. T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming* [1957], pp. 43 ff.), but Mark may have changed an originally subordinate clause pointing to the exaltation as the cause of Jesus' heavenly power (with J. A. T. Robinson, *ibid.*) into a co-ordinate clause.

² This future aspect belongs certainly *also* to Jesus' preaching, whatever its relation to the presence of the kingdom in Jesus' words and deeds be.

³ Thus the usage in Ezechiel is probably decisive. That 'son of man' is used exclusively in the address by God forms no difficulty. The address 'Thou art my beloved son' (Mark i. 11) becomes the statement 'This is my beloved son' (ix. 7). The address 'kyrie, Lord', becomes an honoured title in Matthew (G. Bornkamm, in G. Bornkamm–G. Barth–H. J. Held, *Ueberlieferung und Auslegung im Matthäusevangelium* [1960], p. 38). F. Hahn, *Anfänge christologischer Traditionen* (1963), ch. II, 2, thinks that the address to Jesus 'mari, Sir' was the root of the title 'maran, our Lord' in the early church.

a Jewish-apocalyptic group of the early church, did the decisive witness in the last judgement become the judge himself.¹ This could even be the root of the concept of an apocalyptic son of man in general. For, the alternative between a Jewish or a Christian origin of the similitudes of Eth. En. and II (IV) Ezra xiii is a wrong one. It goes for us without saying that the Christian writers took up current ideas of their time, that of a Christ-Logos, of pre-existence, of a *kosmokrator*, etc. Very often this does not even imply a discussion with pre-Christian concepts or a clear contradiction, but is simply a more or less unconscious usage of the language of the time. The 'apocalyptization' of the son of man, by which the witness became the judge, must have taken place in a Jewish-Christian group which considered itself as part of Judaism and was living within Jewish apocalyptic circles. When, after A.D. 50 or 70, Jewish apocalyptic groups and Jewish-Christian apocalyptic groups had parted, it was almost inevitable that the non-Christian groups still used some of the concepts of that, in their view, rather successful heretical group. The interpretation of Dan. vii. 13 as a prediction of the eschatological role of a heavenly son of man was for many of them convincing, since the political Messiah of the Pharisees was by far not 'supernatural' enough. Thus, they continued to proclaim the apocalyptic son of man, who, for them, was of course an entirely Jewish figure. In a similar way Paul uses the concept of a Wisdom-Christology or of a *kosmokrator* without being directly dependent on these speculations, neither accepting nor rejecting them explicitly, but using a term which was in the air, without reflecting about its origin. A similar development might explain some 'Christian' affinities of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, etc.²

IV. CORROBORATION

(1) The idea of a parousia from heaven is non-existent in Judaism.³ The pattern of the exaltation of the suffering righteous to heaven after his death and his role in the last judgement is an undoubtedly pre-Christian Jewish concept. It is true that it is combined with the son of man only in Eth. En. lxx f., where the original reading of lxx. 1 is not quite sure. We should, however, not exclude the possibility that Jesus used such a term in a new and original way, the more so because this would be true at any rate, even if there had been a pre-Christian concept of an apocalyptic son of man.

(2) The development from Dan. vii. 13 to Mark xiii. 26 and the similitudes of Eth. En. could be explained by our hypothesis, whereas the gap between the image of the eschatological Israel in Dan. vii. 13 and a heavenly individual son of man coming from heaven is not bridged by the usual explanation.

¹ Cf. Rom. ii. 16; iii. 6 with II Cor. v. 10 or even I Cor. iv. 5 with iv. 4.

² J. Daniélou, *Théologie du Judeo-Christianisme* (1958) shows that there was a large reach in which it was difficult to draw the border-line between Jews and Christians.

³ T. F. Glasson, *The Second Advent* (1945), pp. 13 ff.

(3) The only passage outside of Jesus' words, that is, Acts vii. 56, shows the son of man as the exalted 'defender' acknowledging before the angels of God the martyr who acknowledged Jesus before men.

(4) The oldest view of Easter was that of an exaltation to heaven. According to I Cor. xv. 5-8 the heavenly appearance of Jesus to Paul was on exactly the same level as all former ones. Matt. xxviii. 18*b* presupposes the same view.

(5) The Johannine son of man is the earthly Jesus to be exalted and glorified. This is the concept of a pre-Johannine group.¹

(6) Luke xii. 10 shows that the early church distinguished between the time of the son of man and that of the Spirit. This proves that the former was for them, first of all, the earthly Jesus, not an apocalyptic figure.

(7) The expression 'this generation' which is typical for Jesus' preaching is constantly connected with the term son of man.² Hence both expressions seem to belong to the genuine sayings of Jesus.

(8) For any Jew it was impossible to conceive of an eschatological role of any man living on earth without presupposing his exaltation to heaven.³ Thus, the sequence, earthly life-exaltation-eschatological role was the only pattern available for Jesus as for Wisdom ii-v and any contemporaneous Jew.

(9) This pattern, attributed to the suffering righteous (cf. Wisdom ii-v) was so widespread that it would be very surprising if it had not been the form in which Jesus' suffering, death, exaltation to God and eschatological role was understood. Proof is given by the passion story in which allusions to the Psalms of the suffering righteous are numerous (without being explicit scriptural testimonies), whereas Isa. liii is almost lacking. These psalms have obviously been the book in which the early church found the description of the passion of Jesus.

(10) The problems mentioned at the beginning of section II are solved.

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¹ S. Schulz, *Untersuchungen zur Menschensohnchristologie im Johannes-Evangelium* (1957), pp. 96 ff.

² J. A. T. Robinson (cf. n. 1, p. 259), pp. 84 f.; Matt. xi. 16-19; Luke xi. 29-32; xvii. 24 f.; Mark viii. 38.

³ G. Haufe, *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, xiii (1961), 105 ff.