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The Son of Man

J.M.Ross

So much has been written about the Son of Man problem in the last hundred years that anyone who took the trouble to read all the literature would have no time for anything else. The present article has been written in the conviction that much of this writing is based on assumptions that will not stand up to careful examination, and that what Jesus meant by calling himself the Son of Man can be simplified by eliminating a number of unprofitable lines of inquiry. Four theses will be propounded and defended in order to fix the lines within which any solution of the problem is to be found. In a fifth section some attempt will be made to discover what Jesus meant by the expression.

I. Jesus did call himself "the Son of Man".

It has been argued that Jesus could not have so described himself. The following grounds have been given for this contention:-

- (a) He did not regard himself as Messiah or having any special status.
- (b) In the earliest strata of the gospel tradition references to the Son of Man and the Kingdom of God are never found together on Jesus' lips; but he did proclaim the Kingdom of God; therefore he cannot have called himself the Son of Man.
- (c) The title Son of Man was not in current use; therefore Jesus would not have used it.
- (d) Some texts imply that the Son of Man is a different person from the speaker (especially Mark 8:38 = Luke 9:26, Mark 14:62 and parallels, Luke 12:8-9); these alone are authentic sayings of Jesus.
- (e) There is an observable tendency in Matthew and Luke to add "the Son of Man" to sayings which lack the expression in Mark; e.g. "Whom do people say that I am" in Mark 8:27 becomes in Matt. 16:13 "Whom do people say the Son of Man is?". If Mark applied the same method to his sources we get back to a time when none of the reports of Jesus' teaching contained the expression Son of Man.

These arguments will not bear the weight that has been put on them.

- (a) Jesus may not have publicly claimed to be the Messiah, but according to Matt 16:17 he accepted the title when given to him by Peter, and according to Mark 14:62 he did the like when challenged by the High Priest. In any case, unless the synoptic gospels are quite untrustworthy he did repeatedly claim a special status for himself, even though he did not define what that

status was. He claimed a greater authority than Moses - " But I say to you..." (Matt. 5:22, etc.). At Mark 2:25-28 he claimed authority over the Sabbath. His recorded words abound in such claims as, " A greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42), " Come to me and I will give you rest" (Matt.11:28), "If I by the finger of God cast out demons..." (Luke 11:20), "Whoever denies me before men I will deny before my Father in heaven" (Matt.10:38), "If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). There is no inherent reason why Jesus should not have given himself this special title.

(b) This is not a decisive argument. It is not certain what are "the earliest strata of the gospel tradition". It was not necessary for Jesus to allude to the Son of Man when talking about the Kingdom, or vice versa, but the two are found fairly close together at Mark 8:38 and 9:1, Luke 21:27 and 31, and Luke 17:20-23. There are signs that Jesus preferred to talk about the Kingdom to the crowds and The Son of Man to the disciples; for instance at Luke 17:20 Jesus said to the Pharisees that the Kingdom does not come with observation, and immediately added to the disciples that the time would come when they would desire one of the days of the Son of Man and not see it.

(c) Let it be granted, as will be maintained under Thesis III below, that the title "Son of Man" was not in current use . But that is no reason to deny that Jesus used it. On the contrary, as will be maintained in section V, he may well have used it for the very reason that it was not in current use.

(d) If some texts appear to distinguish Jesus from the Son of Man, others, such as Mark 10:33 and parallels ("We are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man is going to be delivered up to the high priests...") clearly identify them. How can we be sure which are authentic? But Mark 8:38 and Luke 12:8-9 do not necessarily imply that the Son of Man is different from Jesus. A headmaster can say on Friday "If anyone misbehaves at the party tomorrow the Headmaster will have something to say to him on Monday."

(e) It is by no means certain that the evangelists always tended to add "the Son of Man" to sources which did not contain it; the process is sometimes in the other direction. For instance Matthew at 10:32-33 has "I" in his version of a saying which in Q (as quoted in Luke 12:8-9) probably included "the Son of Man" as does Mark's version at 8:38. Even if there was a tendency to insert "the Son of Man" into traditional sayings of Jesus, this was because of a tradition that Jesus had called himself the Son of Man; it does not follow that that tradition had no foundation in fact.

Not only is there little substance in the arguments for supposing that Jesus did not call himself he Son of Man; there are weighty reasons against

the term having been invented in the church and inserted into the tradition of what Jesus said.

(1) It is a striking fact that Jesus is never referred to as the Son of Man outside the Gospels. Acts 7:56 is no exception to this statement. Although most manuscripts say that Stephen claimed to see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, it is unlikely that a Hellenist such as Stephen would have used so Aramaic an expression as the Son of Man, and even less likely that Luke, who throughout his Gospel was careful never to use the expression except on the lips of Jesus himself, would have attributed it to Stephen. We may therefore confidently accept the variant reading "Son of Man" from p⁷⁴ and one or two other sources. If υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ was what Luke wrote, early copyists would have been strongly tempted to alter θεοῦ to ἀνθρώπου, both on stylistic grounds, to avoid the repetition of θεοῦ within the same sentence, and by attraction to Luke 22:69 ("from henceforth the Son of Man will be sitting at the right hand of the power of God"). If on the other hand ἀνθρώπου was original, there would be no motive for alteration to the awkward θεοῦ.

At first sight it might appear that the writer to the Hebrews in 2:5-9 understood the words υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου in Psalm 8:5 to refer to Jesus as the Son of Man, but a more careful exegesis makes this unlikely. The author is arguing that the world is made subject not to angels but to Christ; admittedly, he says, according to Psalm 8 the world is declared to be subject to humanity, whom God has crowned with glory and honour, subjecting all things under its feet; but at present we do not see all things subject to humanity: all we see is Jesus who (with a slight twist of the words of the Psalm) was made for a short while lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour. Here Jesus is not identified with the "Son of Man" in verse 5 of the Psalm but is only declared the recipient of the honour foretold in verse 7. Had the writer thought of Jesus as the Son of Man he could have made his point more effectively by inserting τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου after Ἰησοῦν in verse 9. But he did not do so; evidently he was not interested in Jesus as the Son of Man, if indeed he knew of this title at all.

At 1 Cor 15:27 Paul quotes Psalm 8 with reference not to humanity but to Christ, but seems uninterested in, or unacquainted with, the title Son of Man; otherwise he would have added τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου after πᾶσας in verse 25. The same is true of Eph.1:22. Jeremias (New Testament Theology I.265) thought that Paul knew of the title but deliberately avoided it; it is however equally likely that Paul was unaware of it. he seems to have known very little of the details of Jesus' life and teaching.

By the time the Pastoral Epistles were written the synoptic gospels were beginning to become known, and 1 Tim 2:5-6 ("the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself a ransom for all") seems to allude to Mark 10:45 or its parallel Matt 20:28, but in the quotation "the Son of Man" becomes "the man Christ Jesus". Even when "the Son of Man" is staring the writer in the face in the Gospel, he declines to use the expression because it is not part of the language of the Church.

Did the writer of the Apocalypse know of Jesus as the Son of Man? Apparently not. Rev 1:13 describes a vision of Christ as $\delta\mu\omicron\iota\omicron\nu$ $\upsilon\iota\delta\nu$ $\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi\omicron\upsilon$ ("like a human being") not as $\tau\omicron\nu$ $\upsilon\iota\delta\nu$ $\tau\omicron\upsilon$ $\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi\omicron\upsilon$ ("the Son of Man"). The phrase is not a direct quotation from anywhere; it is reminiscent of the heavenly personage $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ $\upsilon\iota\delta\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi\omicron\upsilon$ ("in human likeness") of Dan.7:13; the description of Christ, also borrowed from Daniel, does not relate to that personage but is taken partly from the description of the Ancient of days in 7:9 and partly from a different personage in 10:5-6. A subordinate angelic being $\delta\mu\omicron\iota\omicron\varsigma$ $\upsilon\iota\delta\nu$ $\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi\omicron\upsilon$ appears in Rev.14:14. It would seem that the author of the Apocalypse was unaware of Jesus' title The Son of Man, but took his description of him from the Book of Daniel. (Whether Jesus himself derived his title from Daniel will be discussed under Thesis IV below.)

From these cases it would seem that until the Gospels were known in the Church the title Son of Man was not only not used: it was not even known.

(2) Even in the Gospels, the expression "the Son of Man" never occurs except on the lips of Jesus. (John 12:34 is no real exception: the crowd who asked "Who is this Son of Man?" were only repeating Jesus' own words, recorded e.g. at verse 23.) There must therefore have been an early tradition that Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man, even if he was not called that either by his contemporaries or by the subsequent Church. This is no doubt the reason why Matthew and Luke sometimes inserted a reference to the Son of Man when reproducing a saying of Jesus from Mark. Examples can be found at Matt. 16:13 (compare Mark 8:27), Matt. 16:28 (compare Mark 9:1) and Luke 12:8 (compare Mark 10:32). Similarly in the sayings of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, even if these are not his *ipsissima verba*, he refers to himself as the Son of Man at important points.

(3) The Son of man is a perfect case of the "principle of dissimilarity" under which sayings attributed to Jesus should not be regarded as authentic if they were in current use in pre-Christian Judaism or in the subsequent Church.

The Son of Man fulfils neither condition (see also under Thesis II below.)¹

The idea that the Church took up the title Son of Man from some other source than Jesus, inserted it into the primitive tradition in many different contexts, and then completely dropped it, is an improbability unsupported by evidence. The improbability is not lessened when it is supposed that the title was invented by the early Palestinian church but not used elsewhere. However plausible may be the argument in individual cases that the title was not used by Jesus himself, something has gone wrong when doubt extends to all cases, because of the difficulty of otherwise accounting for the extensive occurrence of the title in the gospel tradition.

II. Jesus used "the Son of Man" as a meaningful self-designation.

It has been contended by several recent writers² that though Jesus did sometimes call himself "son of man" this was in the Aramaic form bar-nasha or bar-enash, which could be no more than a polite and self-deprecatory circumlocution for the first personal pronoun - "this person, meaning "I". Or the expression could mean "a man" or "someone". Thus what Jesus originally said at Matt.8:20 (Luke 9:58) was "Foxes have holes... but a certain man has nowhere to lay his head." The saying recorded at Matt 11:19 (Luke 12:10) was "John came neither eating nor drinking... but someone else has come eating and drinking, and they say 'Behold a glutton'..." Luke 11:30 was

¹ Cf F.F. Bruce, The Time is Fulfilled (1978) 27. Just occasionally in the early church Jesus was referred to as the Son of Man. Hegesippus in his legendary account of the martyrdom of James (Eusebius, Hist Eccl. ii.23.9) makes James ask, "Why do you ask me about Jesus the Son of Man", and in the Gospel according to the Hebrews (as quoted by Jerome, De Vir. III.2) the risen Jesus broke bread and gave it to James the Just saying, "My brother, eat your bread, for the Son of Man has arisen from those who sleep." These passages show no more than that second-century Christian authors were acquainted with the Gospels.

² Principally G. Vermes in an appendix to M.Black, An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels, (Third Edition, 1967) and pp. 160-66 of his Jesus the Jew, (1973); Maurice Casey in chapter 9 of Son of Man (SPCK, 1979); and Barnabas Lindars in Jesus Son of Man (SPCK, 1983). Grave doubts had however already been cast on any such explanation by F.H.Borsch in The Son of Man in Myth and History (1967) 22-24, 315.

originally "As Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will a man (i.e. myself) be to this generation." Similarly Mark 9:31 was "A man will be delivered up..."; 14:21 was "A man goes according to his destiny"; 10:45 "A man has come to give his life for many." Only sayings that fit this hypothesis are authentic. But when the Aramaic was translated into Greek, the Greek-speaking Christians thought that ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου must have a deeper meaning, and especially by comparison with the similar expression in the Greek of Daniel 7:13, that it had an apocalyptic reference. Consequently they inserted "the Son of Man" into sayings (especially apocalyptic sayings) which did not originally contain it.

There are several considerations which cast serious doubt on this theory.

(1) Aramaic experts are not agreed on the precise meaning of bar-nasha. Did it mean "this person" or "a certain person" or "a man" or "someone"? Nor is it certain which of these meanings were current in the first century³.

(2) The theory is able to use only those sayings which can be made to fit it; the remainder are dismissed as inauthentic. The theory would be more convincing if the authenticity of the accepted sayings could first be decided on other grounds: otherwise the argument is circular.

(3) Whichever meaning of bar-nasha is selected, it does not correspond with the Greek. We have the Gospels only in Greek, not Aramaic. The Greek for the various interpretations put upon bar-nasha would be not ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου but ὁ ἀνθρώπος οὗτός (this person) or ἀνθρώπος (a man) or τις or ἀνθρώπος τις (someone). The addition of the definite article to "son of man" means that the people who translated bar-nasha into Greek had a different conception of its meaning. (The translation must have been made very early by word of mouth, probably in Jesus' life time on earth.)

Either Jesus did call himself bar-nasha and its earliest interpreters mistook its meaning, or the Greek is an accurate translation of what Jesus meant by whatever was the Aramaic original. Is it likely that in the bilingual land of first-century Palestine the earliest interpreters of Jesus were so seriously

³ J.Jeremias in his New Testament Theology I.261, note 1, gives reasons for denying that bar-nasha was ever used, as has often been supposed, as a periphrasis for "I".

mistaken?⁴

(4) This last point can be taken further. It is almost certain that Jesus had some knowledge of Greek. For centuries Greek had been invading Palestine and by the first century A.D. it was the normal language of commerce and government. Jesus did not come from the lowest stratum of society but was well read in the scriptures and was brought up as a skilled craftsman. According to Mark 2:15 he had the use of a house in Capernaum in which he was able to entertain a sizable company. His parables show that he was familiar with the business of trade and government. Several of his disciples (Andrew, Simon, Philip, Thomas) had Greek names; the fishermen must have used Greek to sell their fish and Matthew to collect his taxes. According to Mark (7:24-37) Jesus was able to converse with people in the Greek-speaking area of Tyre, Sidon and Decapolis. His trial before Pilate must have been conducted in Greek, and the accounts of it do not reveal any difficulty of communication. It can therefore be safely concluded that while Jesus' public teaching was normally in Aramaic his inner circle of disciples was a bilingual community in which Greek was spoken as well as Aramaic. It is therefore probable that the Greek expression $\delta \text{ υ} \iota \delta \varsigma \text{ το} \upsilon \text{ ἀνθρ} \omega \pi \omicron \upsilon$ ("the Son of Man") had Jesus' approval as a translation of whatever was the Aramaic original, if he did not actually coin the Greek expression himself.

(5) The expression is not ordinary Greek. Literally it means not "this person" or "someone" but "the son of the man" or "the son of humanity". It was termed by G. Dupont (Le Fils de l'Homme, Paris, 1924, p.36) as a "monstruosité littéraire". The clumsy literalism must have been designed to convey a meaning out of the ordinary. When the Greek NT was translated into Syriac the Greek was not turned back into bar-nasha but into a more complex expression.

(6) In the NT, with one exception, "son of man" is always preceded by the definite article. It is never so preceded in the LXX (see under Thesis IV below). The one exception is John 5:27 ("He has given the Son authority to deliver judgement, because he is Son of Man"). John seems here to have omitted the article in order to assimilate Jesus' words to Daniel 7: 10, 14 and 22, where "one like a son of man" is the agent of God's judgment.

For all these reasons it seems unlikely that after Jesus had sometimes

⁴ The same objection holds against G. Gerleman's contention that the meaning of Son depends on the meaning of bar in bar-nasha. We have to deal with the Greek, not its hypothetical Aramaic source.

referred to himself in an Aramaic expression which meant no more than "I" or "someone", the expression was quickly turned into unusual Greek which (whatever it meant) could not bear that meaning and (although obscure) was inserted into many other of the reported sayings of the Lord belonging to quite different contexts⁵.

III. The title Son of Man, signifying the Messiah or some other expected deliverer, was not in current use.

It has been asserted that such a title "must have been" in current use, otherwise Jesus would not have claimed it: but there is no solid evidence for this. If there had been a current expectation of a coming Son of Man, surely somewhere in the New Testament there would have been a claim that Jesus fulfilled that expectation. It would have been a powerful argument in debate with Jews to claim that Jesus was the Son of Man whom they were expecting, but nowhere in early Christian literature is this argument to be found. On the contrary, there is evidence in John 9:35-6 and 12:34 that Jesus' claim to be the Son of Man would be likely to seem unintelligible to his contemporaries, or at least that the author of the Fourth Gospel thought so. Moreover it is not necessary to suppose that the title Son of Man was in current use, for Jesus may well have adopted it for the very reason that it was not in current use, so that he could give his own meaning to it.

It is true that a coming Son of Man features in 4 Esdras, but that book is unlikely to have been written before the second century A.D. It is also true that there is much about a future Son of Man in that section of 1 Enoch known as the Similitudes or Parables, but the date of composition of that work is quite uncertain: as likely as not it was written towards the end of the first century A.D.; there are no traces of it in the Qumran library, which preserves or refers to other parts of Enoch.

Nor is it safe to suppose that the references to the Son of Man in 4 Esdras and Enoch derive from pre-Christian Jewish ideas: these writings may equally have borrowed the title from Jesus' use of it.

Another late reference is in Justin's Dialogue with Trypho 32:1 where Trypho says, "These and similar passages of scripture compel us to await one who is glorious and great and who receives the everlasting kingdom from the Ancient of Days as son of man; but this your so-called Christ is without

⁵ Cf. Morna Hooker in Text and Interpretation (Essays presented to Matthew Black, ed. Ernest Best and R. McL Wilson, 1979), 157.

honour or glory... for he was crucified." This shows that in certain Jewish circles in the second century A.D. the Messiah was identified with the heavenly personage "like a son of man" mentioned in Daniel 7:13. It does not follow that this identification was current in the early first century.

Even if it should be discovered that someone before Jesus had identified Daniel's figure with the Messiah, it would still be unlikely that Jesus, a Galilean carpenter, would have known of it, even less that anyone hearing him calling himself the Son of Man would have understood the allusion. Strack and Billerbeck (Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash I. 486, 959), after quoting various rabbinic references, concluded that it cannot be said that in Jesus' time the name "Son of Man" was a customary designation of the Messiah.

There is some reason to suppose that before Jesus' time the Messiah was sometimes referred to as "The Man". But if this is where Jesus took his title from, why did he alter it to "Son of Man"? The natural answer is that "The Man" had Messianic connotations, and Jesus wishing to avoid such connotations in his public teaching chose a neutral title. B. Westcott, in his judicious excursus on the Son of Man at the end of Chap. I of his commentary on St. John's gospel said, "It is inconceivable that the Lord should have adopted a title which was popularly held to be synonymous with that of Messiah, while he carefully avoided the title of Messiah himself."

IV Jesus did not derive either the title or its meaning from any previous source: it was his original creation.

The sacred scriptures known to Jesus contain four uses of "son of man" which might conceivably have given rise to Jesus' title. (We do not know whether Jesus knew the scriptures in Hebrew or Greek or an Aramaic targum, but it should be borne in mind that nowhere in LXX is the expression υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου governed by the definite article.) These four uses are as follows:-

(a) Psalm 8 asks, "What is man that you are mindful of him, or son of man that you care for him?". "Son of man" here is simply a doublet of humankind, not a title.

(b) Psalm 80 (79 in LXX) prays at verse 18 (in translation from the LXX) "May your hand rest upon the man (ἄνθρωπος) at your right hand, and upon the human personage (ἐπὶ υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου) whom you have made mighty for yourself." This seems to be a twofold allusion to some contemporary ruler or leader of Israel, or possibly to the nation regarded as a corporate person.

(c) Ezekiel was often addressed by God as "son of man", i.e. "man".

There is no sign that Jesus applied any of these three usages to himself.

(d) The fourth instance, Dan. 17:13 requires more detailed consideration. In a dream Daniel saw four beasts coming out of the sea, one like a lion (but with a human heart), one like a bear, one like a leopard, and a fourth a terrible creature with ten horns, and in the midst of the ten horns an eleventh which consumed three of them and had eyes like human eyes, and made war against the saints. Then thrones were set up, the Ancient of Days took his seat as judge, surrounded by a great host, and judgement was delivered against the fourth beast, who was killed and his body burnt. Then on the clouds appeared a personage in human form (ὥς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου LXX); he came to the Ancient of Days, and everlasting power over all the earth was given to him. Daniel was puzzled by this dream and asked for interpretation. He was informed that the four creatures were four kingdoms, and the eleven horns eleven kings of the fourth kingdom; the power of the fourth kingdom will be transferred to the saints (or holy ones) of the Most High, and they will reign for ever over all other kingdoms.

Two things should be observed about this chapter:-

(1) The heavenly personage mentioned in verse 13 does not bear the title "son of man"; he is merely "in human likeness", just like the supernatural visitants who touched Daniel's lips and comforted him in 10:16, 18.

(2) This heavenly personage does not belong to the world of fact. Like the beasts he is merely a symbol designed to show that the saints of the Most High (presumably the faithful Jews persecuted by Antiochus Epiphanes⁶) are as superior to the kingdoms of the world as humanity is to the animals. The kingdom and the saints are in the world of reality; the beasts and the human personage are only symbolic dream-figures. The human figure is not the leader or saviour of the people, only their image.

Many scholars have contended that Jesus, meditating on this vision, saw in the heavenly personage a prophecy of himself, and therefore converted the words of his description ("in human likeness") into a title "the Son of Man". For four reasons this contention seems unlikely:-

(a) As shown above, the Danielic personage does not bear the title "the Son of Man"; he is merely described as "in human likeness".

⁶ It is less likely that the ἄγγιλοι are the angelic host, for the dream is of a court of law in which the saints are given justice against the beast.

(b) He is only a symbol, not a real being.

(c) Jesus (if we may rely on the synoptic gospels as giving a generally trustworthy account of his sayings) conceived of his mission on earth as a drama in five acts - I. his preexistence⁷, II. his life of humiliation on earth, III. his sacrificial death, IV. his resurrection, and V. his final glorification. The Danielic personage is relevant only to Act V.

(d) When Jesus was addressed as Messiah it was his practice to substitute the title Son of Man, presumably to avoid the implication that he had come as a political deliverer. To represent himself as a heavenly being symbolizing and inaugurating the political rule of God's holy people over the whole earth would have encouraged rather than avoided this misunderstanding.

Other scholars - e.g. C.F.D.Moule and Morna Hooker⁸ - have invited us to think of Jesus as meditating on the reality of Daniel 7 - the saints of the Most High - and seeing in himself the leader of a people who, like these saints, would go through suffering and then be vindicated by God. Perhaps Jesus did think of himself and his people in that way; but if that is really so it is not clear why he chose the Son of Man as his title for that purpose, for the human personage in 7:13 is neither identified with his people in any real sense, nor is he their pioneer or champion or leader. Moreover (as will be suggested in the next section of this article) Jesus seems to have conceived of himself as the champion of the whole human race rather than merely of persecuted Jews.

It may be objected that Jesus quoted the language of Dan.7:13 when referring to his final glorification as Son of Man in Mark 13:26 and 14:62. This is certainly true of 13:26, where Jesus' words are a conflation of Dan 7:13 and Psalm 110. The version in Luke (22:69) is quite different, quoting only Psalm 110, and it is doubtful if any of the Gospels reports the actual words of Jesus' answer to the High Priest. The similar reference at Mark 8:38 to the future glory of the Son of Man quotes not Daniel but Zech.14:5. However, let it be conceded that Jesus did sometimes use the language of Dan.7:13 when referring to his future glory. It does not follow that it was from that text in Daniel that he took the title "The Son of Man". It is much more likely that

⁷ His claim to pre-existence may be inferred from the numerous sayings in which he claimed to have come, or to have been sent. The words "on earth" in Mark 2:10 imply that he had power in heaven too.

⁸ Text and Interpretation (see note 5 above) 166-68.

having devised for himself the title "Son of Man" (which is not to be found *totidem verbis* anywhere in the OT), he occasionally used the language of Dan.7:13 to refer to Act V of his drama, lifting it out of its context in typical rabbinic fashion.

V. What then did Jesus mean by the title?

On one view, this question should not be asked, because the title was not meaningful but was merely a code expression, a cover phrase which enabled Jesus to claim to be Messiah without doing so in such an explicit fashion as to fall foul of the Roman authorities and risk being silenced or put to death before his time was ripe. It seems, however, unlikely that Jesus would have chosen a title that had no meaning at all. Some attempt can be made to guess why he chose to call himself the Son of Man from the following three considerations:-

(1) Philologically, the odd expression $\acute{\omicron} \upsilon \iota \delta \varsigma \tau \omicron \upsilon \acute{\alpha} \nu \theta \rho \omega \pi \omicron \upsilon$ seems to mean "the human being", the Man par excellence, the focal point of the human race in its relation to God.

(2) A pointer to the true meaning can be found in Mark 2:28. This text is often misunderstood. Some think the essential point is in verse 27 - "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the "Sabbath". and verse 28 only confirms it; this is no doubt why Matthew and Luke have nothing corresponding to 28. Others think that Jesus meant only that mankind is lord of the Sabbath, and originally the saying was not about the Son of Man, but was a statement that the sons of men are lords of the Sabbath. These views miss the point of the word "therefore" at the beginning of 28. Verse 27 is not the culmination of the argument: it is merely a quotation of a traditional saying found also in the Talmud. The culmination of the argument is in verse 28 - an a fortiori inference from the combination of verse 27 and Jesus' title. If, as the proverb says, the Sabbath was made for man a fortiori the Son of Man, the leader of the human race, is master of the Sabbath.

(3) Another pointer can be found in Matt. 25:31-46. This is a discourse about what will happen when the Son of Man comes in his glory. At other times Jesus had identified himself with his special people ("He who receives you receives me"), but here he is identified with the whole human race, so that whoever does an act of charity to any person whatsoever does it to the Son of Man, and anyone who neglects to do such an act to any person whatsoever neglects to do it to the Son of Man.

If this evidence seems somewhat meagre, this is because of the nature of Jesus' method of speaking. It was his manner to be enigmatic about his

person and not make claims for himself directly. This comes out with special clarity in Mark's gospel. Instead of directly claiming to be the Son of God he told the parable of the vineyard (12:1-11), the obvious implication of which is that Jesus is God's Son. Instead of claiming to be both Messiah and lord of David, he set a problem about Psalm 110 which has no apparent solution unless that claim were true (12:25-37). On another occasion instead of directly claiming to be God incarnate, he said to the man who addressed him as "good teacher", "Why do you call me good? Only God deserves that appellation", meaning "Take care: you have unwittingly addressed me as God" (10:17-18). According to Mark (4:11-12) Jesus spoke in parables so that only those who really wanted to know the truth would discover it. It would fit into this picture if Jesus described himself as the Son of Man so that the casual hearer would think it merely a rather odd periphrasis for himself, but those who really wanted to know what he had come into the world for could discover a deeper meaning. As Matthew Black wrote as long ago as 1949 (Exp.T. LX pp.32-33), "No term was more fitted both to conceal, and yet at the same time to reveal to those who had ears to hear, the Son of Man's real identity."

The question may be asked, in conclusion, why the early church made so little use of the title Son of Man. It was not included in any authoritative statement of doctrine or in any liturgical formula. The following reasons may be suggested :-

- (a) The title Son of Man was not meaningful either to Jews or to Gentiles. When presenting the gospel to Jews, the Christians found it easier to proclaim Jesus as the promised Messiah, while Gentiles would find it easier to understand Jesus as the Lord or Son of God than under the obscure semitism "the Son of Man".
- (b) The expression Son of Man was not meaningful even to Christians. The followers of Jesus failed to penetrate into the deeper meaning which he gave to the title.
- (c) Insofar as the Christians knew of the title, it seemed to them to overstress Jesus' humanity. The important thing in the early years of the church was to acknowledge and proclaim Jesus as Lord, Son of God, even as the incarnation of God himself. To call him Son of Man would seem to contradict this. That is no doubt why the Epistle of Barnabas (12:10) invited its readers to "consider again Jesus, not Son of Man but Son of God, manifest in the flesh", and pointed out (12:11) that in Psalm 110 David calls him Lord, not Son.