

(b) Luther wrote no *Summa* or *Institutes*. In all his theological writings he pursued definite practical reforms. If Wittenberg and Rome had only differed on the fine theological balance between faith and works, they would have been able to reach a compromise. But more concrete matters were at stake. Is it permissible to change traditions of the church? Is the organized church the mistress or the handmaiden of the Word? Shall Christian energy be directed into secular vocations? On these and many other points the theological issues touched the raw edge of life, and here it was that Rome refused to yield. In the last analysis the issue was legalism. No doubt the followers of Luther soon developed a legalism of their own and, thank God, the heirs of Trent are swinging towards a more dynamic understanding of the Word and of the church. But this is not the time to shrug off the healthy impetus that has come from the Reformers. Had they not encouraged the intent and uncompromising study of Scripture (perhaps more than their latter-day followers liked) we would never have come to the present state of agreement. It would be too bad if we should now discourage this attention to Scripture or hedge it in by accepting the voice of Scripture only when understood "in the light of Catholic principles." Here we need nothing less than the absolute authority of Scripture. In fact only by listening to Scripture itself are we likely to discover the inner core of tradition.<sup>4</sup> At this time, when Roman Catholics are willing to lend an ear to the concerns of the Reformation, we need, not less, but more attention to its genius. Otherwise they may soon not only read the Bible more zealously than we, but canonize the Reformers at a time when we have decided to dismiss them with a patronizing nod.

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4. This point is well made by Gerhard Ebeling in a paper, " 'Sola Scriptura' and the Problem of Tradition," prepared for the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, Montreal, 1963.

#### REMARKS ON THE "SON OF MAN"

WE ARE TOLD from time to time that, in puzzling out exactly what Jesus meant when he referred to himself as the Son of Man, we must look solely at the usage of this expression in the Old Testament, and in Daniel in particular, for the background of his sayings. Vincent Taylor, for example, urges us to cease perusing the pseudepigraphic literature (e.g. 1 Enoch and 4 Ezra) for parallels to the sayings of Jesus, and to rely solely on Daniel: "There is good reason . . . to think that Jesus' use of the title was independently derived from reflection upon the basic Old Testament passage Dan. 7<sup>13</sup>."<sup>1</sup> Alan Richardson writes in a similar vein: "It is not

1. V. Taylor, *The Names of Jesus* (London: Macmillan, 1953), p. 27.

necessary to look beyond these [the canonical prophets] for the raw materials out of which the Gospel figure of the Son of Man is constructed."<sup>2</sup> I propose to do precisely what is suggested by these men—to look at the Old Testament background again.

It is well that the phrase "son of man" is usually merely a semitism for "man," and as such serves as a poetic device:

What is man that thou art mindful of him?  
And the son of man that thou visitest him? (Ps. 8:4)

It should be remarked, however, that as a synonym for "man" it occurs rarely in the Old Testament, except in Ezekiel, where it is a frequent title for the prophet himself—as, for example, in Ezek. 2:1 "Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee."

Richardson says that the use of the title here and elsewhere in Ezekiel "seems to indicate the dignity of the otherwise insignificant person whom God has condescended to address."<sup>3</sup> I wonder whether this is so. Seen in its context immediately following Ezekiel's vision, does not this first instance of the title in the book impress upon one the complete insignificance of the person addressed before the presence of the omniscient and omnipotent God, rather than his dignity? Can it be that Richardson has introduced the idea of the dignity of the person addressed here with a view to carrying it over into his discussion of Jesus' use of the title? But if what I have suggested is true—namely that the expression "son of man" simply indicates the insignificance of the prophet before God, then Richardson surely must fall back on the use of the title in Daniel as background for its use in the Gospels, since Jesus would hardly be likely to choose for himself a title denoting the insignificance of the holder—and moreover the things which the Son of Man does, such as forgiving sins and coming on the clouds of heaven as judge, are themselves highly significant actions.

If then Ezekiel is of no importance as background for the New Testament use of the title, and if we are still to remain within the confines of the Old Testament, we are limited to Daniel. The *locus classicus* is Dan. 7:13 but, lest we bring too many presuppositions to this important text, let us look first at some of the other places in Daniel where we find the title or something akin to it.

In Dan. 3:25 we read that Nebuchadnezzar saw four "men" walking in the fire. They are Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego, and one other, and "the aspect of the fourth," Nebuchadnezzar said, "is like a son of the gods." We are later told (3:28) that this fourth figure was an angel. The term "sons of men" occurs at 5:21, but this is simply a case of the semitic idiom already referred to. Similarly, the term "son of man" in 8:17 is addressed to Daniel, and recalls the usage common in Ezekiel. God's angel puts in an appearance again at 6:22, when he rescues Daniel from the lions, but

2. A. Richardson, *Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1958), p. 132.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

he is not here referred to as a "man" or "son of man." In the course of another vision, however, Daniel sees a "man" who turns out to be none other than Gabriel himself (8:15-17), and at 9:21 the "man" Gabriel is again referred to.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, at Dan. 7:13 Daniel sees one like a "son of man" coming before the Ancient of Days and receiving a kingdom on behalf of the saints of the Most High. Two points must be made here. First, I believe that anyone reading through Daniel with no presuppositions at all will understand this passage to say that an angel (possibly Gabriel) receives the kingdom on behalf of the saints of the Most High. The verse is intelligible in its context in Daniel, without any reference to the "Son of Man" whom we meet in the Gospels. An angel represents the saints of the Most High, in contrast to the beasts who represent the heathen empires. If in fact the "son of man" of Dan. 7:13 is not one of the frequently mentioned angels, but is rather an enigmatic figure whom we meet here for the first time, it seems extraordinary that we should be offered no explanation of who he is, although we are given a rather full explanation of the fourth beast (7:19ff.). Secondly, on the basis of this and other texts it seems fair to say that there is no concept of the "son of man" in Daniel. What we read about is "one like a son of man"—the literal translation—or "one like a man"—a simpler and equally valid rendering. There is no "son of man" in Daniel in the sense that there is one in the Gospels; we merely find references to an angel receiving a kingdom or to angels being variously described as "men" or "sons of men."

From the foregoing considerations it seems plain to me that Jesus did not derive the title "Son of Man" from independent reflection on Dan. 7:13, and this view is corroborated by the fact that he nowhere had to explain what he meant when he used the term. On the contrary, his disciples and other hearers seem to have known exactly what or whom Jesus was talking about. If we believed that Jesus' use of the title was derived solely from Dan. 7:13, we should therefore have to suppose that his followers had also meditated upon this text to the same effect—and that is surely very doubtful. The title was obviously in fairly general use in the circle in which Jesus moved, and if by the phrase "Son of Man" he meant to signify something different from its recognized meaning, he would presumably have said so. (The circle to which I refer is of course that in which the "Similitudes of Enoch," where we meet the eschatological "son of man," was produced.)

A final question must be addressed to those who remain unconvinced by my argument. Is it likely (or even possible) that Jesus should have derived the title which was most frequently on his lips—it occurs thirty-seven times in the Synoptic Gospels alone, discounting parallels and editorial additions<sup>5</sup>—from one solitary Old Testament passage? Perhaps this will be thought an improperly speculative question. But surely it is significant that the other

4. The Hebrew vocabulary of these texts is not strictly uniform.

5. Taylor, *The Names of Jesus*, p. 30.

titles applied to Jesus in the Gospels have a considerable background in Jewish usage. Would it not be strange if "Son of Man" alone had no traceable pedigree?

If, however, the title "Son of Man," as used in the Gospels, cannot be understood on the basis of the Old Testament alone, why should it be denied that Jesus was acquainted with ideas which we find in the pseudepigraphic literature and that he incorporated some of these ideas into his own thought? Perhaps (as Professor D. E. Nineham has suggested in a lecture) it is thought that it would somehow have been more "respectable" for Jesus to draw on Old Testament sources than on pseudepigraphic materials. Or, alternatively, it may be argued that the "Son of Man" in the Gospels is so vastly different from the figure we meet in the "Similitudes" that Jesus could not possibly have drawn upon this source. It is undeniable that the "Son of Man" in the Gospels is very different from the Enochic "son of man." But it should be added that most Jewish messianic ideas—particularly those reflected in the Psalms of Solomon—are also vastly different from Jesus' own conceptions, yet it is apparent that the latter took shape as his creative genius reinterpreted and recreated the earlier notions. I suggest that precisely the same thing happened in the case of the eschatological "son of man" image. At the hands of a master workman the idea was recast and adapted to his own purposes, yet the task was so skilfully carried out that his hearers readily appreciated his description of himself as the "Son of Man."

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#### THE BISHOP OF WOOLWICH AND MARY YOUNG'S SAMPLER: A CONFRONTATION

AMONG THE SPOKESMEN for what is commonly referred to as the "new theology" it is a favourite ploy to present the world-view of traditional theology and piety in the crudest and most ridiculous terms. To be fair, I must add that it is not always easy to determine whether this ploy is an artful dodge or an unwitting confession of blissful ignorance. But in any case it is widely effective in conditioning unwary readers to accept almost any alternative to an obviously indefensible tradition.

John Robinson's polemic against the "God 'up there'" and the "God 'out there'" is a good example of this method of theological salesmanship. By more or less consistently identifying the idea of transcendence in classical theism with the notion of spatial remoteness, Robinson effectively paves the way for his own immanent doctrine in which, to say the least, the distinct identity of "God" becomes problematical.