"SON OF MAN" IMAGERY: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGY AND DISCIPLESHIP*

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In her little book of poems translated *Prayers from the Ark,*[1] Carmen Bernos de Gasztold expresses, as she imagines, the prayers and observations of Noah and twenty-six of his animal companions on that fateful diluvian voyage. Noah's prayer begins:

> Lord,
> What a menagerie!
> Between Your downpour and these animal cries
> one cannot hear oneself think!

And it concludes with the dual requests:

> Guide Your Ark to safety;
> Lead me until I reach the shore of Your covenant.

The cock's prayer, however, begins and ends on a somewhat different note:

> Do not forget, Lord,
> it is I who make the sun rise.
> . . . . . .
> I am Your servant,
> only do not forget, Lord,
> I make the sun rise.

The giraffe cannot deign to bow his neck, and rather loftily lectures the Lord—and any who might overhear—on his superior qualities:

> Lord,
> I who see the world from above
> find it hard to get used to its pettiness.
> I have heard it said
> You love humble creatures.
> Chatter of apes!
> It is easier for me
> to believe in Your greatness.
> I feed on exalted things
> and I rather like
> to see myself so close to Your heaven.
> Humility?
> Chatter of apes!

The cat, without seeking to be presumptuous, asks only:

> If You have by some chance, in some celestial barn,

*Presidential address at the 26th meeting of ETS, December 26, 1974.

[1]New York: Viking Press, 1962.

a little white mouse,
or a saucer of milk,
I know someone who would relish them.

And then she offers but one small suggestion:

Wouldn't You like someday
to put a curse on the whole race of dogs?
If so, I should say,
Amen.

And so it goes throughout each of the twenty-seven prayers: each viewing life from its own perspective; each voicing its own prejudices; and each circumscribed by its own interests. After vicariously entering into the individual situations represented by the prayers, one can't help agreeing with Noah in the opening lines of his petition to God: "Lord, what a menagerie!"

The analogy is obvious. How like the Ark is the Church, and Christians like its inhabitants—all too provincial, all too limited by our own interests, and viewing everything from our own perspectives. And this is particularly true, I would suggest, in our work as Christian theologians and in our lives as Christian disciples. What we need, of course, is some objective standard by which we can check our all-too-human notions and our all-too-worldly lifestyles. And this is exactly what we have been given, we believe, in the Word made flesh and in the Word inscripturated. Yet given these revelational standards, the hermeneutical question as to what is central in them for Christian thought and life still remains.

In what follows, I would like to focus on one dominant feature in the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus—that of Jesus as the "Son of Man"—and to suggest that a proper understanding of this image has important implications for the construction of our theologies and the expression of our convictions in life as Christians. My justification for raising this issue in this form is twofold: (1) While much has been written on the Son of Man already, particularly within the past two decades by a vast number of New Testament specialists, there seems to be emerging a new thrust in the discussion that I believe to be highly commendable; and (2) While the importance of this motif for the shaping of early Christian theology is widely recognized by New Testament scholars (whatever their views as to how exactly it occurred), little of this seems to have spilled over into the theological and devotional literature of our day. I would, therefore, first of all like to report on the state of Son of Man studies today, spelling out in the process what I believe to be a growing and laudatory new thrust in the discussion,[2] and then to attempt to indicate what I believe to be some rather important implications of all of this for the construction of our theologies and the living of our lives as disciples of Christ. I cannot hope to lay out before you anything like a programmatic proposal in these latter regards, for that goes far beyond the measure of my poor abilities. But I

[2]Admittedly, I'm covering again some of the same ground I've covered in a previous article in this journal (XII, 1969, pp. 151-58) and in my *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (London: SCM, 1970), pp. 82-93, but with a bit more perception (hopefully) here and as a necessary prelude to highlighting certain implications.

do hope to be suggestive in these matters, pointing the way toward a type of theological construction that I believe would be more biblically based and a lifestyle that would be more like that of Christ's.

Son of Man Studies Today

Current studies of the Son of Man expression focus on three areas of concern: (1) its background in pre-Christian thought; (2) its dominical status; and (3) its meaning for the evangelists and for Jesus (if we can believe it to have had dominical status). The three areas, of course, overlap considerably. Yet they may be treated somewhat separately for purposes of analysis.

Background. Most modern treatments of the subject begin on the premise that there existed in pre-Christian Judaism a generally well-defined concept of a transcendent Redeemer figure, spoken of as the Son of Man, whose coming to earth as Judge would be a feature of the drama of the End Time, and that evidence for such a conception can be found in Daniel 7, I Enoch 37-71 and IV Ezra 13.[3] Such a premise, however, demands closer scrutiny than it has usually received to date. It is not often enough realized that to begin with such an understanding of the pre-Christian situation is to control the succeeding discussion in terms of these categories—which, of course, is true for any premise, and therefore requires of us that our premises be more carefully scrutinized than is often done. But, further, it is not often enough recognized that there is much that can be said against assuming such a premise.

The major difficulty with such a view is that to date there is no evidence for the pre-Christian provenance of I Enoch 37-71 (Bk. II of Ethiopic Enoch, the so-called "Parables" or "Similitudes of Enoch"), and it is precarious to deduce the existence of a firm Son of Man concept in pre-Christian Judaism on the basis of Daniel 7 and IV Ezra 13 alone. Of the twenty-nine or so extant manuscripts of Ethiopic Enoch (which consists of the full 108 chapters), most belong to the eighteenth century A.D. and none can be confidently dated earlier than the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries—and even if R. H. Charles' guess be accepted that the Ethiopic version was translated in the sixth or seventh centuries, or F. C. Burkitt's speculation that this may have occurred as early as the fourth, we are still centuries removed from pre-Christian times.[4] And none of the few Greek portions of the work discovered in 1886-7 contains material from Book II of Ethiopic Enoch. It is for this reason that C. H. Dodd and a

[3]Cf., e.g., O. Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament,* trans. S. C. Guthrie and C.A.M. Hall (London: SCM, 1963), pp. 139-44; H. E. Tödt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition,* trans. D. M. Barton (London: SCM, 1965); A.J.B. Higgins, *Jesus and the Son of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1964); F. Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), pp. 13-53; R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner's, 1965), pp. 34-43; P. Vielhauer, "Gottersreich und Menschensohn," *Festschrift für Günther Dehn,* ed. W. Schneemelcher (Neukirchen: Moers, 1957), pp. 51-79; *idem.* "Jesus und der Menschensohn," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche,* LX (1963), pp. 133-77; *idem,* "Ein Weg der neutestamentlichen Theologie. Prüfung der Thesen Ferdinand Hahns," *Evangelische Theologie,* XXV (1965), pp. 24-72.

[4]Cf. J. Y. Campbell, "The Origin and Meaning of the Term Son of Man," *Journal of Theological Studies,* XLVIII (1947), p. 146.

few British scholars influenced by him at this point have refused to erect any arguments on evidence drawn from the Similitudes,[5] though there seems to be little reticence in accepting a pre-Christian provenance for these chapters on the Continent and in North America. In addition, while the caves of Qumran have produced portions of ten or so manuscripts whose content corresponds to every other chapter in Ethiopic Enoch (with the possible exception of chs. 105 and 108), they have yielded no fragments from the Similitudes themselves (i.e., chs. 37-71).[6] This fact has compelled such scholars as J. T. Milik, F. M. Cross, Jr., Jean Daniélou, J. A. Fitzmyer, C. F. D. Moule, R. Leivestad, J. C. Hindley and Lloyd Gaston to suggest a late first-century or early second-century A.D. date for the composition of the Enochian Similitudes and to view them as possibly representative of some type of early Jewish Christianity.[7] And I have argued this position earlier myself.[8]

Admittedly, to argue from (1) omissions in the extant Greek fragments, and (2) the absence of these chapters in the evidence to date from the Dead Sea materials is to argue only negatively. Such an argument, of course, suffers from the inability of conclusive demonstration. Who, for instance, can argue from the lack of evidence that something couldn't have existed? It is also a tenuous argument in the sense that a great deal of material from Qumran has yet to be identified and published, and more may yet be found, some of which may present evidence to the contrary. What would happen if, say, material from chapter 46 of Ethiopic Enoch were to be identified in the Aramaic portions from Qumran? Well, undoubtedly, we'd have to revise considerably our thesis as here stated—perhaps even renounce it altogether. But as matters stand today, such an argument based on the absence of evidence is of sufficient import as to be highly significant. And it should give pause and cause for concern to those who erect upon the basis of the Similitudes such imposing Son of Man christologies as have become fashionable today (though, sadly, it seems to have had only minimal effect in many quarters).

[5]C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Nisbet, 1952), pp. 116f.; *idem, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1954), pp. 242f. Cf. T. F. Glasson, *The Second Advent: The Origin of the New Testament Doctrine* (1945), Part I.

[6]Cf. M. Black, "The Fragments of the Aramaic Enoch from Qumran," *La Litterature Juive entre Tenach et Mischna,* ed. W. C. van Unnik (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

[7]J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea,* trans. J. Strugnell (London: SCM, 1959), pp. 33f.; F. M. Cross, Jr., *The Ancient Library of Qumran* (London: Duckworth, pp. 202f.; J. Daniélou, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity,* trans. S. Attanasio (New York: New American Library, 1958), see esp. appendices; J. A. Fitzmyer, *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (London: Chapman, 1971), pp. 136f., 152f.; C.F.D. Moule, in review of H. E. Tödt's *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition* in *Theology,* LXIX (1966), pp. 173-75; *idem,* "Neglected Features in the Problem of 'the Son of Man'," *Neues Testament und Kirche. Festschrift für Rudolf Schnackenburg* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974), pp. 413-28; R. Leivestad, "Der Apokalyptische Menschensohn ein Theologisches Phantom," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute,* VI (1968), pp. 49-105 (an English summary by the same author appears under the title "Exit the Apocalyptic Son of Man," *New Testament Studies,* XVIII [1972], pp. 243ff.); J. C. Hindley, "Towards a Date for the Similitudes of Enoch," *New Testament Studies,* XIV (1968), pp. 551-65; L. Gaston, *No Stone on Another* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), pp. 370ff.

[8]See my *Christology of Early Jewish Christianity,* pp. 82-88.

In actual fact, the only instances of the expression in Jewish writings that can be demonstrated to be certainly pre-Christian are to be found in the canonical Old Testament and once in the Qumran texts: (1) Ps. 8:4 where it appears as a locution for man generically ("What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you should visit him?"); (2) Ps. 80:17 where in context and in association with "the vine" imagery it is to be understood as a locution for the nation Israel; (3) the prophecy of Ezekiel as a vocative addressed by God to the prophet; (4) Dan. 7:13-14 as a symbolic representation of the One who comes before the Ancient of Days and is given dominion, glory and a kingdom; and (5) 1QGen. Apoc. 21.13 as a semitism for man generically ("I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth which no man [literally, 'son of man'] can number, so your descendants will be without number"). Probably also Geza Vermès' demonstration that *bar nash,* both in its indefinite and its definite forms, was used by the rabbis both for the generic idea of man and as a deferential locution for the first person pronoun "I" should be viewed as having been true as well for the earlier Pharisees—and, presumably, for other Jews during the time of Jesus.[9] We must return in a moment to the question of the meaning of the expression in these biblical, Qumranic and talmudic passages. But suffice it here to say that we ought no longer to be dominated in our understanding of the pre-Christian situation with regard to the expression Son of Man by the categories of the Enochian eschatological Redeemer figure and Judge, for there is no evidence to date that the Similitudes of Enoch are pre-Christian in either their date of composition or their characterization of theological conviction. And IV Ezra 13, which bears some resemblance to I Enoch 37-71 in its Son of Man doctrine but is more directly dependent upon Daniel 7, cannot be dated before the end of the first century A.D.

Dominical Status. It has been commonly asserted, particularly since the appearance of Rudolf Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament,* that (1) Jesus never employed the expression Son of Man of himself, (2) Jesus only used the title with regard to the coming Enochian apocalyptic Redeemer figure who would vindicate his own earthly ministry at some time in the future and with whom he would be associated in some manner (the so-called Son of Man "A" sayings), (3) it was the early church that via a series of misconceptions applied the title directly to Jesus, at first identifying him as the coming Son of Man himself (the so-called Son of Man "B" sayings) and then identifying him as the Son of Man in his earthly ministry and sufferings (the so-called Son of Man "C" sayings), and (4) all evidence to the contrary must be discounted as having been fabricated by the church in order to justify its own later ascriptions of Jesus as the Son of Man.[10] But though this line of argument is convincing

[9]G. Vermès, "The Use of *bar nash/bar nash'* in Jewish Aramaic," Appendix E in M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts,* 3rd. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), pp. 310-28.

[10]Cf. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament,* vol. I, trans. K. Grobel (London: SCM, 1952), pp. 29-31, 49. For detailed expositions of this position, see the works by Tödt, Higgins, Hahn and Fuller cited above. For an extension of the position beyond the guidelines laid out by Bultmann, see the works of Vielhauer (cited above) and H. M. Teeple, "The Origin of the Son of Man Christology," *Journal of Biblical Literature,* LXXXIV (1965), pp. 213-50.

on its own presuppositions, it runs roughshod over more *prima facie* interpretations of the evidence and bases itself upon hypothetical reconstructions in favor of a more normal reading of the data. We must not deny that there were theological motives and tendencies at work in the composition of the Gospels, so that the reporting of the words of Jesus was conditioned in each case by the evangelists' own backgrounds, interests, purposes and audiences. But we handle the evidence must too loosely in our redaction criticism if we interpret the records as indicating the exact reverse of what they purport. "The Gospels," as Frederick Borsch rightly insists, "do not offer it [the Son of Man title] to us as one title among many; they clearly state that this is the designation of which Jesus spoke, and spoke consistently, as most revelatory of his work."[11]

The expression itself occurs eighty-one times in the Gospels, sixty-nine in the Synoptic Gospels (i.e., thirty-seven instances with their parallels) and twelve times in John. And with just two exceptions—Luke 24:7 (where the angel at the empty tomb quotes Jesus' words) and John 12:34 (where the people ask Jesus regarding his use of the term), neither of which are true exceptions since both reflect Jesus' own usage—all of the occurrences are attributed to Jesus himself. In no instance in the Gospels is the title recorded as having been given to Jesus by others, nor is it employed in any explanatory manner by the evangelists.[12] Apart from the Gospels, it appears only in the quotation of Ps. 8:4-6 in Heb. 2:6-8, on the lips of the dying Stephen in Acts 7:56, and in the description of the exalted Jesus in Rev. 1:13 and 14:14. It is only in the latter three cases (Acts 7:56, Rev. 1:13 and 14:14), however, that it is employed outside of the Gospels as a christological title.[13] On the face of it, therefore, it would seem that there is in the New Testament a widely-based tradition that Jesus employed the expression of himself and very little evidence to suggest any extensive use of it on the part of Christians during the first century.

Further, when the currently proposed literary criteria in Life-of-Jesus research are applied to the Son of Man sayings in the Gospels,[14] the case for the authenticity of the expression on the lips of

[11]F. H. Borsch, *The Son of Man in Myth and History* (London: SCM, 1967), p. 16.

[12]Cf. W. L. Lane's argument to the contrary with reference to the use of the expression in Mark 2:10, which, by extension, also applies to its appearance in Mark 2:28 (*The Gospel According to Mark* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], pp. 26, 96-98). On the basis of its awkward syntactical structure and the patterning of the Son of Man expression in Mark's Gospel, Lane proposes that Mark 2:10 should not be considered dominical but "a parenthetical statement addressed by the evangelist to the *Christian* readers of the Gospel to explain the significance of the closing phase of the healing *for them" (ibid.*, p. 98, italics his). It need be noted, however, that Matthew and Luke (our earliest "commentators" on Mark) treat these words as being dominical, taking over not only the expression Son of Man as a self-designation of Jesus but also reproducing the very awkward syntax as something they seem to have felt best left as is, and not as simply a Markan editorial comment, which they would probably (to judge by their usual practice) have felt no hesitancy about either altering or dropping altogether.

[13]The argument of Hebrews 2 makes it evident that Son of Man is there employed exactly as it is in Ps. 8:4-6—that is, as a locution for man, to whom many promises were made but not all have as yet been fulfilled.

[14]Cf. my "Literary Criteria in Life-of-Jesus Research: An Evaluation and Proposal," *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation. In Honor of Merrill C. Tenney,* ed. G. F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

Jesus comes off rather well—unless, of course, one is disposed to deny such authenticity whatever the evidence. The criterion of *multiple attestation* (or, "the cross section method"), which arose in conjunction with the discipline of source criticism, argues that our assessment of the authenticity of any particular saying of Jesus can be heightened when that saying appears in more than one tradition (i.e., Q and Mark), in all or most of the Gospels in the same manner, or within one tradition or Gospel in more than one form (e.g., a parable and an aphorism). Son of Man sayings appear in all the strata of the Gospel tradition: in Mark, in the non-Marcan material common to Matthew and Luke ("Q"), in the material distinctive to Matthew ("M"), and in the material distinctive to Luke ("L"). In addition, they appear in all of the Synoptic Gospels in the same manner, with the same blend of suffering and future elements present (the blend of elements in John's Gospel is somewhat different, but not contradictory). A second criterion of contemporary literary criticism focuses on the *semitic features* in the teaching of Jesus, and argues that the retention of such features in Gospels written in Greek is, to quote J. Jeremias, "of great significance for the question of the reliability of the gospel tradition."[15] And in this regard, the authenticity of the expression Son of Man on the lips of an Aramaic-speaking Jesus comes off again quite well, for the cumbersome and rather inelegant *ho huios tou anthrōpou* was hardly coined in a Greek milieu and seems rather to be solidly based upon the Aramaic *bar nash.* A third criterion, and with the rise of form criticism probably the most extensively employed criterion in Gospel criticism today, is that of *dissimilarity* (or, "distinctiveness"), which asserts that "material may be ascribed to Jesus only if it can be shown to be distinctive to him, which usually will mean dissimilar to known tendencies in Judaism before him or the church after him."[16] The criterion has been often grossly misused. And when applied in a ham-fisted manner, it tends to give us only a caricature of Jesus rather than a characterization of him. But if there is any feature in the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus which can be legitimately validated by the criterion, I suggest that the dominical status of the term Son of Man ought to be it—for, as we have pointed out, there is no evidence that it had currency in pre-Christian Judaism as a title and little evidence that it was carried on as a christological ascription among first-century Christians. And the other literary criteria in vogue today in the analysis of the Gospels (i.e., *eschatological context* and *coherence*) are similarly able to be employed in defense of the dominical status of the expression as well.

The Bultmannian position which asserts that Jesus only spoke of a future Son of Man distinct from himself, and that the identification of this Son of Man with Jesus and all references to a suffering Son of Man must be credited to the early church as it placed later christological titles of its own manufacture back on the lips of Jesus, is unconvincing. Why, if this be true, should the church have been so careful in the composition of the

[15]J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology,* vol. I, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1971), p. 8.

[16]N. Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), p. 71.

Gospels to insert the expression into the words of Jesus alone, and not also allow it to appear on the lips of others in the accounts or in the editorial comments of the evangelists, when (as Bultmannians believe) it really represented the church's own christology and not his? And why were Christians so circumspect as to preserve such a saying as that of Luke 12:8 ("Everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God," which Bultmannians point to as a definite instance of Jesus' distinction between himself and the coming Son of Man) when for them (as Bultmannians insist) there existed no such distinction between Jesus and the Son of Man?[17]

The expression, as Ernest Best points out, "is varied very little by Matthew and Luke in their adoption of the passages in which it occurs in Mark," which suggests "a particular reverence for it" and supports the conclusion that "it was continued because it lay deep in the tradition."[18] We cannot, therefore, speak of the Gospels' use of Son of Man as being simply editorial or the product of community theology. It may have had meaning for the evangelists, or it may have been almost as ambiguous to them as when Jesus first used it. But though it was not a current designation for Jesus in their circles at the time of writing, the evangelists received it and preserved it—probably in large measure, as Best theorizes, because they did not know to what other title they might change it.[19]

Meaning. No christological ascription has been more variously understood by Christians than that of Son of Man. Since Ignatius, Justin Martyr and the Gentile Fathers who followed them, it has been commonly considered simply a locution for the true humanity of Jesus. And that is how it often appears in our systematic theologies, in our devotional literature, and in our hymns. On the other hand, most biblical theologians of the past few decades have taken it as signalling to some extent the eschatological Redeemer and Judge of the Enochian Similitudes. Such confusion, however, has not been reserved for the church. Only in the generic usage of 1QGen.Apoc. 21.13 does the expression demonstrably appear in the pre-Christian literature of late Judaism (assuming Daniel 7 to be earlier). And the question of the people in John 12:34, "Who is this Son of Man?," indicates further something of the ambiguity of the term. Nevertheless, the Gospels report that Son of Man was Jesus' favorite self-designation.

Perhaps, as Eduard Schweizer and I. H. Marshall suggest, Jesus "adopted the term Son of Man just because it was an ambiguous term, revealing as well as hiding."[20] Though in view of his explicit reference to Daniel's "abomination of desolation" in the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:14,

[17]Rephrasing slightly the question put by E. Schweizer, "Son of Man Again," *New Testament Studies,* IX (1963), p. 257n.

[18]E. Best, *The Temptation and the Passion* (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), p. 162.

[19]*Ibid.,* p. 163.

[20]E. Schweizer, "Son of Man," *Journal of Biblical Literature,* LXXIX (1960), p. 128. Cf. also *idem,* "Son of Man Again," *New Testament Studies,* IX (1963), p. 359; I. H. Marshall, "The Divine Sonship of Jesus." *Interpretation,* XXI (1967), p. 93; *idem,* "The Synoptic Son of Man Sayings in Recent Discussion," *New Testament Studies,* XII (1966), pp. 327-51.

Matt. 24:15) and his allusions to the imagery of Dan. 7:13 in that same discourse (Mark 13:26, par.) and in his reply before the Sanhedrin later (Mark 14:62, par.)—and both with explicit reference to the Son of Man—it can hardly be doubted that Daniel 7 was the primary biblical source upon which he based his own understanding of the expression and to which he pointed in his use of the term. It seems, in fact, as Gustaf Dalman long ago insisted, that what Jesus meant to say in employing this expression of himself was "that He was that one in whom this vision of Daniel was to proceed to its realisation."[21]

But the question remains: How did Jesus understand the Son of Man imagery of Daniel 7? Various answers, of course, have been and can be given. C. F. D. Moule has argued, cogently I believe, that the Son of Man in Daniel 7 is not only a figure who is vindicated and glorified, as in 7:13-14, but that suffering is also involved, for "in Dan. 7:21, 25, the specially aggressive 'horn' on the beast's head 'made war with the saints, and prevailed over them' and was destined to 'wear out the saints of the Most High'; and it is precisely with these saints of the Most High that the Son of Man is identified."[22] Furthermore, in his recent article in the Schnackenburg *Festschrift,* Moule reminds us that "it is important to recollect a broad background of thought about man's function and destiny in general and Israel's function and destiny in particular, and to see both Daniel and his successors in the light of this background."[23]

It may legitimately be argued, I suggest, that in the terms Son of Man Jesus saw an ascription that (1) pointed to man, both generically and corporately, as he exists both in lowliness and under the ordination of God, and (2) combined the features of both suffering and glory—and which he could employ to signal a number of aspects concerning his redemptive ministry. By reaching back to the enigmatic figure of Daniel 7 (a figure so enigmatic that neither pre-Christian Judaism nor the early church knew exactly what to make of it), he sought to explicate his person and ministry in terms of vindication and glory through suffering, in fulfilment of the prophet's vision. In so doing, he provided for his followers and for all who have succeeded them an interpretive key into the nature of his person and ministry. Or, as Dalman more aptly expressed it: "In using the title He purposely furnished them with a problem which stimulated reflection about His person, and gave such a tendency to this reflection that the solution of the problem fully revealed the mystery of the personality of Jesus."[24]

This is not to say that Jesus only used Son of Man as a title (in line with

[21]G. H. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus,* trans. D. M. Kay (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), p. 258.

[22]C. F. D. Moule, in review of H. E. Tödt in *Theology,* LXIX (1966), p. 174. On a suffering motif in Daniel 7 and Psalm 80, see also W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1955), p. 280; C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures,* p. 117; E. Best, *Temptation and Passion,* pp. 163f.

[23]C. F. D. Moule, "Neglected Features in the Problem of 'the Son of Man'," *Neues Testament und Kirche,* p. 415.

[24]G. H. Dalman, *Words of Jesus,* p. 259.

Daniel's prophecy), for certainly there are places in the portrayals of the Gospels where a case can be made that he employed it as a locution for the personal pronoun "I" (in line with contemporary Aramaic usage, as Vermès has demonstrated). Nor is it to assert that when he did use it as a title he was thereby setting aside an understanding of his person and ministry in terms of Messiah or as the Servant of Jahweh—though until his resurrection there was a decided reticence on his part to allow himself to be acclaimed in messianic terms, and the laying out of a servant motif in Jesus' self-consciousness depends more on inference and allusion than direct statement. I personally believe, granted these concessions, that an excellent case can be made for all three of these motives (i.e., Son of Man, Messiah, Servant of Jahweh) as being intertwined in Jesus' own consciousness and as underlying his ministry.[25] What I'm attempting to point out here, however, is that when Jesus wanted to set before his disciples the nature of his person and ministry he did so repeatedly in terms of his being the Son of Man.

Probably nowhere is this seen more easily or more clearly than in Mark's portrayal. While the Second Gospel begins with the affirmation: "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God," the first half of the evangelist's presentation is given over to a gradual unfolding of the "messianic secret" that reaches a climax in Peter's Caesarean confession: "You are the Christ (i.e., the Messiah)." But according to Mark's Gospel, Jesus was not content with such an affirmation regarding his person and status. Immediately after this most significant of confessions (Mark 8:29), and after Jesus' injunction to silence (Mark 8:30), the evangelist portrays in three parallel cycles of material our Lord as reinterpreting what Messiahship means for himself and for his disciples[26]—and this he did in terms of the title Son of Man:

> Mark 8:31—He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.
>
> Mark 9:31—He said to them: "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."
>
> Mark 10:32-34—Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

In each case, however, Mark makes it a point to note that the disciples failed to grasp the significance of Jesus' words, both as to the nature of his

[25]Cf. my *Christology of Early Jewish Christianity,* pp. 63-82 and 104-09.

[26]Cf. W. L. Lane's observation that Son of Man in its twelve occurrences in Mark after Peter's confession "provides the key to Jesus' self-disclosure *to his disciples*" (*Gospel According to Mark,* p. 96, italics his). See also his development of the three cycles of material in Mark 8:31—10:52 (*ibid.,* pp. 292ff.).

Messiahship and as to the nature of their discipleship (Mark 8:32-33, 9:33, 10:35ff.). And, sadly, we are all too often their successors in this blindness as well.

What Jesus was evidently telling his disciples—and through them and the evangelists' narratives, the church—was that his person and ministry are not to be defined according to popular Jewish expectations of Messiahship (whether political, nationalistic, or even militaristic) or first of all in terms of glory or ontology, but rather that he should be understood first of all in terms of his redemptive identification with men and his sufferings for men. Such a "functional" theology (as it is often called), of course, is inevitably based upon a substratum of ontology and carries with it overtones of a metaphysical nature. One cannot speak of one's function without also saying something about one's person. But Jesus' starting point and emphasis in defining his person and ministry to his disciples had to do with the functional nature of his redemptive activity for mankind in suffering, and that only through such suffering was he to enter into his glory. And he signaled this by his repeated use of the Danielic title Son of Man.

Some Implications for Theology and Discipleship

All of this, of course, we are quite prepared to acknowledge, must have implications of some type for Christian thought and life today. Theoretically, we can hardly say less—though historically and at present we seem at a loss as Christians to say exactly what and how. As a faltering attempt, allow me to propose that Jesus' favorite designation of himself as the Son of Man serves as something of a paradigm for both our theological formulations and our discipleship, and to make some suggestions along these lines.

For Theology. Dogmatic theology has classically organized its material according to some logical principle: beginning with epistemology, moving on to theism, turning to revelation and authority, then to the nature, purposes and activity of God, etc.—and somewhere about half way along treating first the person of Jesus Christ and then his work. We are inheritors of Greek rationality. And our age seems to demand some such logical formulation. There is therefore abundant reason for continuing the classical order of development, rearranging the topics only slightly when confronted by some particular issue of the day.

But Jesus presented himself first of all in terms of the Danielic Son of Man who becomes vindicated and glorified only through suffering. And the early church proclaimed him in terms that were primarily functional in nature (though, admittedly, within that functional proclamation were ontological overtones that became more fully expressed in the ongoing of revelation and the continuing work of the Spirit in illuminating). Witness, for example, the preaching of Peter at Pentecost in Acts 2: it begins with a declaration of fulfilment; it speaks of Jesus as the "man accredited by God," crucified according to God's purpose by the hands of wicked men, and raised from the dead by God himself; it relates what happened in the resurrection experience of Jesus to the Old Testament; and it calls for a response. Its thrust is dominantly functional, and its message is set out

within the context of its audience's background and appreciation. The only ontological hint it seems to contain is found in the explanation of verse 24b, "because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." But then the rationale as to why it was impossible is not spelled out, though we might guess from the rest of the New Testament's proclamation that it has something to do with Jesus' own person and his ontic relationship to the Father.

A similar emphasis can be found in the hymnodic portion of Phil. 2:6-11, which may just be the earliest piece of Christian composition now extant. It begins, of course, with an ontological affirmation, "Who, being in the very nature of God" (or, as NEB has it, "the divine nature was his from the first"). But it goes on to speak almost entirely in functional terms of Christ's obedience and humiliation—such an obedience as to extend to "even death on a cross!"—and of God's exaltation of Christ because of his obedience and of God's giving to him "the name that is above every name," with the result "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." When viewed only from an ontological perspective, the hymn has appeared to many to incorporate kenosis and adoptionistic motives. But Phil. 2:6-11 is not primarily interested in ontology but in function, and thus it is neither a kenosis nor an adoptionistic theology that is being expressed but a functional Christology. And other examples, though perhaps not always as clear-cut, could be cited from the early Christians' proclamation as well.

In suggesting that as Christian theologians we begin our treatments of theology on the basis of a functional Christology, I am not arguing necessarily that we commence with a formal discussion of the Son of Man ascription. After all, the earliest Christians didn't. And judging by the fact that outside the Gospels the expression appears only three times as a christological title (i.e., Acts 7:56, Rev. 1:13 and 14:14) and by the fact that it never is included in any of the evangelists' editorial comments within the Gospels, it seems that the earliest Christians were somewhat at a loss to know what to do with the term themselves.[27] But though they might not have understood exactly what their Lord meant by the ascription, they captured the essence of the matter in their emphasis upon his sufferings on their behalf and his (and their) subsequent glory. And this is, I propose, where our formal theologies might profitably start—or, at least, where some of our writing of Christian theology could start: beginning with the functional themes of Christ's identification with men, his suffering on our behalf, his vindication and glorification through suffering, and our being reconciled to the Father and ultimately glorified with Christ by being "in Christ."

This is, of course, basic Christian proclamation. But it needs to be set

[27]Noting that for the early Christians Jesus *was* the suffering Son of Man and *would be* the glorified Son of Man who would return to complete the prophetic picture, C. F. D. Moule observes: "Half its content was already a thing of the past, and half was—at any rate in the eyes of the early Church—yet in the future.... It was naturally assumed that the Church was in a *Zwischenzeit,* between the going and the return; and what relevance has the term Son of Man to that?" ("The Influence of Circumstances on the Use of Christological Terms," *Journal of Theological Studies,* X [1959], p. 257).

forth clearly at the beginning of our formal theologies, and not shuffled somewhere into the midst of our logical development only to be leveled out as to its importance in the process. From this, then, we can go on to develop the ontological ramifications of Christology, and then move on from that to the other areas of a full-blown theology. For, after all, it is only from a knowledge of what Christ has accomplished redemptively that we come to understand who he is; and it is only from a Christocentric perspective that we truly know regarding revelation, theism, the nature of God, the purposes of God, the nature of man, the nature and purpose of the church, hope for the future, and most other matters—if not *all* other matters—of importance that go to make up a complete Christian theology. This is where, as a matter of fact, most of us began our thinking psychologically regarding the Christian faith, and it may be of great value to bring our formal logic into line with our psychological experience. In so doing we could well be allowing others to retrace our steps theologically, and not force them to take an "alien" path to arrive at the same conclusions. And in so doing, I believe, we would be closer to the mind of Jesus and to the proclamation of the early church.

To some, I suppose, such a proposal sounds like a "unitarianism of the Second Person." I don't mean it to be. All I'm suggesting is that just as some systems of Christian theology begin on the basis of a trinitarian theism, and others commence with a specific concept of revelation, and others with a particular view of man, and others with a distinctive understanding of the church, and still others with a doctrine regarding the future—and all believe themselves able to find biblical support for their positions, for the Scriptures speak to each of these topics—so we ought to give consideration to the formulation of a Christian system of theology that starts with the functional emphases of the early apostolic proclamation. Such a conclusion, I believe, lies implicit in what we have proposed to be a proper understanding of Jesus' favorite self-designation: Son of Man.

For Discipleship. To understand the pattern of Jesus' ministry according to the Danielic Son of Man imagery, however, is not only significant for the pattern of our theological formulations, it is also significant for the pattern of our Christian discipleship—for in naming him Lord, we also take upon ourselves the pattern of his life. The Gospel of Mark, again, is quite explicit in this regard. In the three cycles of material in chapters 8, 9 and 10 (to which we referred above), Mark not only presents Jesus as three times defining the nature of his ministry in terms of the suffering Son of Man (i.e., the three passion predictions), and three times depicting the disciples as unable to apprehend Jesus at this point, but also the evangelist three times portrays Jesus as setting forth the nature of true discipleship:

> Mark 8:34-35—Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."

> Mark 9:35—Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."
>
> Mark 10:42-45—Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Jesus' pattern of ministry as the Son of Man is to be our pattern of life as his disciples. And while it seems that the early church, for one reason or another, did not latch on to the title Son of Man as one of its christological ascriptions, nonetheless there certainly was in the early church a lively consciousness that to be Christ's was to take upon oneself this pattern of discipleship. Note, for example, the words of Paul in Rom. 8:17—for, in speaking of believers as both sons and heirs, the apostle cannot help but also exclaim: "if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." Note also Paul's desire as expressed in Phil. 3:10-11: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection of the dead." And this pattern is continued in such a letter as that of I Peter, setting forth as it does the Christian's life as modeled according to the life of suffering of his Lord.

Conclusion

The history of Christendom has witnessed a readiness on the part of all-too-many believers to think in all-too-human terms and live in all-too-worldly a fashion—not just in our techniques and our methods, nor just in our styles and our fashions, but more importantly in our basic orientations and our attitudes. We have tried to get Jesus to think our thoughts rather than we his; to mold him into our image, and to have him respond to us. We have too often failed to realize that our ministry, like his, is to be one of identification with men, one of strenuous exertion on behalf of the kingdom of God, and one of suffering in the extension of the gospel which he effected. We all too often appear to think and act like those deluded Christians of Laodicea who boasted: "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing" (Rev. 3:17). Now, however, as we confront the fact that Jesus defined himself and his ministry in terms of the Danielic Son of Man, we come face to face with the realization that he desires to fit us into his mold, to conform us to his image—both in our theological formulations and in our discipleship. It is a humbling and a challenging demand. But so it has always been where the claims of Christ are properly understood.