

2

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT JESUS AND THE SON OF MAN

The Christology of the New Testament cannot, of course, be fully and adequately treated in one chapter. Nor is the subject of this chapter in any way limited by the title, "The Finality of Christ." For what else is the entire New Testament about except precisely the finality of Christ?—whether it is expressed in Johannine terms of the Logos which was before creation and is now made flesh; or in the terminology of Hebrews, which contrasts the preparation of the Old Testament era and the activity of God in these last days; or in the magnificent language of Ephesians, which sees Christ exalted to sit in heavenly places at the right hand of God; or in the "simple" message of the gospels, where the dawning kingdom of God (and this remains true whatever breed of eschatology one favors) is closely connected with the person and preaching of Jesus. Faced with this situation, one must choose one aspect of the theme, and I have rashly ventured to choose that of the Son of man—though once again, one needs a book to do justice to the subject.¹ But I choose it for two reasons: (a) be-

¹ I hope shortly to publish a more detailed examination of this subject.

The Christology of the New Testament: Jesus and the Son of Man

cause, if the Gospels are to be believed, this is the term which Jesus himself used of himself: here, if anywhere, we are in touch with his own understanding of his finality, and it therefore seems appropriate to use it as the focus of our study; (b) because I suspect that the ideas with which it is associated underlie much of the rest of the New Testament, even though they are expressed elsewhere in different terms.

I

The traditional belief that Jesus spoke of himself in terms of the Son of man has recently been under the strongest attack. The view of Rudolf Bultmann,² that Jesus spoke of another as Son of man, once regarded as extreme, is now almost orthodoxy on the continent; recent supporters of this view are John Knox³ and A. J. B. Higgins.⁴ Such is the change in the climate of thought, that when I ventured to support the more traditional view recently, I was told by one Swiss scholar that my views were "revolutionary!" Bultmann's views are no longer regarded as radical; in the opinion of some scholars—e.g., Vielhauer⁵ and Conzelmann⁶—he has not gone far enough. In their view Jesus never used the term "Son of man" at all, whether of himself or another, and its presence in the Gospels is due entirely to the early church. I do not myself believe that the evidence of the Gospels supports this view, but these scholars have laid a finger on one of the fundamental weaknesses of

² E.g., *Theology of the New Testament*, Kendrick Grobel, tr., I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 26-32.

³ *The Death of Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), pp. 52-109.

⁴ *Jesus and the Son of Man* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965).

⁵ "Gottesreich und Menschensohn in der Verkündigung Jesu," *Festschrift für Günther Dehn*, W. Schneemelcher, ed. (Neukirchen: Kreis Moers, 1957), pp. 51-79.

⁶ "Gegenwart und Zukunft in der synoptischen Tradition," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (Tübingen, 1957), pp. 277-96.

Bultmann's and Knox's position: the role of Jesus himself.⁷ If, as all these scholars believe, Jesus himself stood in a particular relation to the coming kingdom, then what room is there for another who is Son of man? For this relationship in itself seems to imply some kind of "fuality" for Jesus; he is more than simply one who announces the kingdom's coming. If, on the other hand, he spoke of another as the coming Son of man, who is to be the eschatological Judge, then what is the role of Jesus himself? Is he only the penultimate figure? It is this apparent contradiction between sayings about the kingdom and sayings about the Son of man which causes some scholars to solve the problem by attributing the former tradition to Jesus and the latter to the church, and viewing them as two different ways of expressing the finality of Christ.

For the majority of Christians the mind of Jesus himself—how he thought of himself and the terms which he used of himself—is all-important. Their attitude can be summed up in the words of J. W. Bowman: "*The Church cannot indefinitely continue to believe about Jesus what he did not know to be true about himself!*"⁸ This declaration raises important questions for Christology which I cannot deal with now; I simply note here that its assumptions have been challenged recently by John Knox.⁹ But whatever our attitude to this problem, the question, "Did Jesus think and speak of himself as the Son of man or not?" remains an important one. Possibly even more important is the question: "What did those who first identified Jesus with the Son of man—whether it was Jesus himself or the early church—mean by this term?" I believe that the answer to this question may perhaps provide also the answer to the ques-

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 281-82.

⁸ *The Intention of Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), p. 121.

⁹ *The Death of Christ*, pp. 33-51.

tion: "Did Jesus use the term of himself?" For the attack on the old traditional view has been made on the grounds that the self-identification of Jesus with the Son of man is psychologically incredible, and that form-criticism has unraveled the process by which the strange hodgepodge of "Son of man" sayings were attributed to Jesus. Any defense of the traditional view, therefore, must convince us, firstly, that the self-identification of Jesus with the Son of man is psychologically credible, and, secondly, that the "Son of man" material in the gospels is perhaps more coherent than has often been supposed. It is my purpose in this chapter to suggest that an examination of the background of the term reveals such a coherent pattern.

We must begin in the Old Testament, and I make no apology for doing so; we can never understand the New Testament without it—least of all on a subject such as the finality of Christ. In this particular case I believe it to be of especial importance, because the Old Testament and intertestamental evidence seem to be at variance with the assumptions which many scholars make about the term "Son of man" in the Gospels. I turn first to Daniel 7.

II

If we are going to understand the significance of the figure "like a Son of man" in Daniel 7, then it is essential to consider it in relation to the background of the book and not to isolate it from the rest of what Daniel has to say. There is a tendency to separate the description of the one like a Son of man from the rest of Daniel's message, and to speak of the glorious Son of man without much reference to the rest of the book, or even the rest of the chapter. This approach leads, I believe, to a misunderstanding both of Daniel's purpose and of the Son of man.

The background against which the book of Daniel was written was a desperate one; the situation can be summed up in the three words—war, occupation, and martyrdom. The outlook for the Jewish faith could not have been more grim. God seemed to have abandoned his people, and those who were faithful to him and to his Law were the ones who suffered. It is in this situation that the author of the book of Daniel attempted to write a message of encouragement and comfort to the faithful remnant in Israel, urging them to remain true to their faith and to the Law. Although at the moment things could not look blacker, yet he urges them to hang on, because eventually everything is going to be all right. It is this basic situation and message of hope which is depicted in chapter 7 in pictorial language. The enemies which have oppressed and overrun Israel are depicted as wild animals; the Ancient of Days then sits in judgment, and Daniel watches while the fourth and most terrible beast is slain; finally, one like a Son of man is brought to stand before the Ancient of Days and is given authority and glory and rule.

The fact that the phrase "Son of man" is used in Dan. 7:13 as a comparison suggests that, whatever else this figure may or may not be, he is not a mere Son of man, any more than the beast which is described in verse 6 as "like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back; and . . . four heads" is to be understood as a mere leopard. What, then, is he? One popular explanation is that the origin of Daniel's figure is to be found in that of the Urmensch. Various scholars have endeavored to trace the "one like a Son of man" to some form of the idea of a primal or heavenly man, and the attempt is justified, in so far as both belong ultimately to the same mythological pattern of thought. But it is very doubtful whether the Urmensch helps us in understanding the figure "like a Son of man" in Daniel. Even if the author did have such a heavenly being in mind,

the ideas which he borrowed have been so radically changed in his use of them that it is doubtful whether they could have been of any great significance to him, and even more doubtful whether they would have conveyed any particular significance to his readers. His concern—and theirs—is not with a heavenly man, but with the fortunes of Israel.

The pattern of the vision in Daniel 7 has been shaped by the primitive myth of creation; the emergence of the beasts from the sea, their defeat by Yahweh, and the bestowal of dominion on a human figure, are all motifs taken from this background. Creation mythology played a central role in the Babylonian cultus, and it is possible that Daniel has borrowed traits from her tradition. Far more significant, however, is the fact that a similar pattern of thought was already an integral part of Hebrew religion; Daniel is not introducing ideas which were alien to the Hebrew tradition. His affinity with earlier Hebraic thought is illustrated by the character in which he portrays the beasts: they are still the powers of chaos, revolting against God's rule, but now they are no longer natural forces but nations. In depicting Israel's enemies as wild beasts, Daniel is following the tradition of prophets and psalmists, who often described hostile nations in these unflattering terms.¹⁰

We can trace in the Old Testament two distinct but interwoven themes: one is the conflict between Israel and her enemies, represented as wild beasts; the other is the conquest of chaos by Yahweh. The relationship between these two themes is plain: Yahweh's struggle with the monster is parallel with the nation's battle with her enemies, and it is God's victory which ensures the well-being of the people. In the Babylonian ritual the two themes seem to have coalesced, for the king played the role of the god in the battle with Tiamat. But

¹⁰ E.g., Ps. 68:30; 74:18-19; Ezek. 29:3-4.

in the Hebrew prophets, though the themes may be parallel, they are not identical. For while the powers of chaos may be reinterpreted in terms of Israel's enemies, Yahweh and the nation or its king remain distinct. Thus the emphasis is upon Yahweh as active and triumphant, working for the salvation of his people, and upon the nation as saved from the power of her enemies; the relationship is a three-cornered one, involving Yahweh, Israel, and her enemies.

Now it is precisely this three-cornered relationship which reappears in Daniel's vision. For the first decisive event takes place between the Ancient of Days and the rebellious beasts, and does not involve the one like a Son of man at all. Judgment is given, the forces of chaos are crushed, and the fourth beast is slain. Only at this point does the Son of man arrive before the throne of judgment. He is, in fact, a curiously inactive figure—no heavenly Redeemer this, but simply the recipient of God's mercy and salvation, as Israel has always been. To this human figure the Ancient of Days gives the kingdom which has been usurped by the rebellious forces of chaos.

Now the point of Daniel's imagery here lies, I believe, in the Jewish belief that Israel was the chosen nation of the Lord and in the way in which that belief was often expressed in contemporary literature. In some of the apocryphal and pseudopigraphal writings, we find the idea that Israel, as the chosen nation, is the inheritor of the promises which were made to Adam. The authority and dominion which were given to Adam at the creation were meant also for his descendants—not, however, for mankind in general, but for Israel. As for the rest of the nations, they are not recognized as true descendants of Adam; on the contrary, they are often depicted as the beasts, who have usurped the authority and rule which by rights belong to Israel. Typical is this passage from II Esdras 6 in which the author complains about God's inactivity:

On the sixth day thou didst command the earth to bring forth before thee cattle, beasts, and creeping things; and over these thou didst place Adam, as ruler over all the works which thou hadst made; and from him we have all come, the people whom thou hast chosen.

All this I have spoken before thee, O Lord, because thou hast said that it was for us that thou didst create this world. As for the other nations which have descended from Adam, thou hast said that they are nothing, and that they are like spittle, and thou hast compared their abundance to a drop from a bucket. And now, O Lord, behold, these nations, which are reputed as nothing, domineer over us and devour us. But we thy people, whom thou hast called thy first-born, only begotten, zealous for thee, and most dear, have been given into their hands. If the world has indeed been created for us, why do we not possess our world as an inheritance? How long will this be so?

When, in his vision, Daniel depicts Israel's enemies as beasts, and Israel herself as one like a Son of man, he is expressing this same belief that Israel is the inheritor of the promise made to Adam, whose authority has been usurped by the other nations. His vision is a prophecy of what he believes will shortly take place upon the earth. Restoration is at hand; as in the old mythology the beast is slain by Yahweh, and dominion is given to man, so now, those who are like beasts are to be conquered, and dominion is to be given to the one like a Son of man. In other words, Daniel's vision is an assurance to Israel that the purposes of God have not failed and will not fail; Israel is the one like a Son of man, the inheritor of the promises made to Adam, who is intended by God to rule the world. In spite of the fact that at the moment other nations have usurped the power and dominion which belong by right to Israel, they will be overthrown by God himself, who will restore the kingdom to Israel.

All this is, of course, typically nationalistic. But we should notice the other side of the picture. Adam lost his authority and dominion in the world because he was disobedient to God, and Israel will only be given back this authority and dominion if she is obedient to God. Obedience and authority go together. It is not Israel as a whole to whom dominion and glory are promised, but the saints of the Most High—those who are obedient to God and faithful to the Law. It is to those who fulfill the will of God that Daniel can confidently promise authority and glory and dominion.

The beasts and the human figure in Daniel are not, then, mere symbols which disguise the real characters in the drama. His vision is not simply a fanciful and pictorial representation of a pious hope that everything will come right in the end, but a revelation which conveys a message of real significance to a tortured people. Daniel offers a message of hope. But it is important to notice the basis of this hope. It is not, as is so often said, a hope that Israel will one day become the Son of man, and so be given glory, dominion, and authority. Rather, it is precisely because Israel is now the Son of man, that Daniel can confidently promise a glorious future; these things will come to Israel because they are Israel's right, as the inheritor of the promises of God. Although not recognized as such, Israel is the Son of man to whom the kingdom belongs. This is why Daniel can say to the faithful nucleus of the nation: Cheer up! If you are faithful to God and stand firm, then he will be faithful to his promise to give you the earth and dominion over it. At the moment other nations do not recognize either God's authority or yours, and so you are suffering, but eventually God will intervene, and you will be given the glory and rule intended for you.

And so we find that the paradox of the suffering Son of man is an integral part of Daniel's vision. It is a paradox, because

the Son of man is meant to exercise authority over others; but at the moment that authority is not recognized, and the saints are suffering.

The evidence of Daniel does not, then, support Sigmund Mowinckel, when he writes:

We can conclude from Dan. vii that about 200 B.C. or earlier there was in Judaism a conception of a heavenly being in human form who, at the turn of the age, the dawn of the eschatological era, would appear, and would receive from God delegated power and authority over all kingdoms and peoples.¹¹

Neither the material used by Daniel nor the interpretation which he gives to it, supports the view that such a heavenly being was known in Judaism at that time.

But what of the time of Christ two centuries later? Has the Son of man by this time become a heavenly eschatological figure? According to I Enoch, at least, the answer is "Yes." The author has interpreted the symbols of Dan. 7:13 literally, and the Son of man is now an eschatological figure exercising judgment over the kings of the earth; he is both an individual and a heavenly being. Yet it is perhaps as well to remember that he is not entirely individualized—nor, indeed, entirely heavenly. Though no longer corporate, the Son of man retains vestiges of his corporate nature. As leader of the elect community, he is closely associated with his followers; he can, indeed, be described as a prototype of Mary with her little lamb, for wherever the Righteous and Elect One goes, there, sure enough, the little righteous and elect ones go, too. And though now an exalted figure, his feet are not entirely off the ground and on

¹¹ *He That Cometh*, G. W. Anderson, tr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 352; italics mine.

the clouds, for at the end of the Similitudes he turns out to be none other than the humble, righteous Enoch.

By the time we get to II Esdras, however, at the end of the first century A.D., the Son of man has become a true eschatological figure who rises from the sea and hovers in the clouds and lands on mountaintops, like some giant eschatological helicopter.

III

I have already referred to the psychological difficulties which some scholars feel in supposing that Jesus identified himself with the Son of man. This point of view has been put most ably and persuasively by John Knox: "How could [so sane a person] have identified himself with the essentially superhuman personage of the apocalypses—with him who, 'sitting at the right hand of Power,' will come 'with the clouds of heaven?'"¹²

Now the point of Knox's difficulty is that he finds it impossible to think of a sane man identifying himself with an eschatological supernatural figure sitting on the clouds. But are we sure that, when Jesus spoke of the Son of man, he was necessarily thinking of this eschatological cloud-borne figure? Knox and Bultmann are, and for that very reason they have eliminated any other kind of "Son of man" saying (e.g., the predictions of suffering) from the discussion. But is there perhaps not a flaw in the argument here? They begin their examination with the belief that the Son of man is an eschatological figure, eliminate all the "Son of man" sayings in the Gospel tradition which do not fit that eschatological picture, and then complain that they find the remaining evidence, on its own, incredible. I suggest that this procedure is only justified if we

¹² *The Death of Christ*, p. 58.

are certain that "the Son of man" was necessarily and exclusively interpreted at the time of Jesus as meaning "the eschatological redeemer who is going to appear at the end of the time riding upon clouds."

Now at first sight the evidence seems to support this kind of interpretation. For the Gospels seem to point firmly to Daniel 7 as the source of the sayings in the mouth of Jesus, and the reference there is to the Son of man coming in the clouds. The only explanations of Daniel 7 which we have (in I Enoch and II Esdras) both understand the term "Son of man" in this way. And the largest group of Son of man sayings can be classified as eschatological. Nevertheless, I do not believe that this evidence does support the idea that "the Son of man" is a kind of shorthand for "the eschatological redeemer who rides on the clouds."

1) The evidence of Daniel does not support it, for in Daniel the one like a Son of man represents Israel, and the vision is not meant to be taken literally. The author does not expect an eschatological redeemer to appear on clouds at the end of the world; he expects the saints in Israel to be vindicated by God. Obviously this does not necessarily mean that Jesus (if he used the term) applied it in the same sense; but it does leave the possibility open that he, too, used it symbolically rather than interpreting the details literally.

2) The evidence of I Enoch and II Esdras does not support it. Certainly, they indicate that in some circles the vision of the Son of man was interpreted literally. But we do not know how widespread this interpretation was. There is no other evidence for this approach; was it the normal interpretation of Daniel 7 during the first half of the first century A.D.? I Enoch is of uncertain date; II Esdras was certainly not yet written. Moreover, II Esdras interprets the details of Daniel's vision in a more crude and literal sense than Enoch, and this suggests

that this kind of understanding was still developing after the time of Jesus.

3) The Gospel evidence does not support it. We have a considerable number of sayings in which "the Son of man" quite clearly does not mean "the eschatological redeemer coming on the clouds." In order to support the view of Bultmann and Knox, we must regard these other sayings as inventions of the early church. The explanation given is that the church made two mistakes: (a) it falsely assumed that when Jesus used the term "Son of man" he was referring to himself, not to another, and so it came to identify him with the Son of man; (b) it concluded that Jesus commonly used the term "Son of man" to designate himself where he might well have said "I," and so it incorrectly inserted the term in inappropriate contexts. But there are grave difficulties with this explanation: (a) This development all happened very quickly—during the Aramaic-speaking period of the church. Was there time for both these steps to be taken? (b) For Bultmann and Knox "the Son of man" is a symbol for "the eschatological redeemer coming on the clouds"; this is what makes Jesus' use of the term as a self-designation incredible. But if "Son of man" is shorthand for "eschatological redeemer coming on the clouds," how did the church—at such an early stage—come to use the term in these other contexts where, *ex hypothesi*, it so obviously did not fit? The fact that the church so quickly, according to Bultmann and Knox, forgot the "real eschatological meaning" of the term, suggests that it was not quite so eschatological and supernatural as they suppose. (c) There is a tendency in the Gospel tradition to develop and emphasize the apocalyptic and eschatological element in the "Son of man" sayings. If there is a development toward the eschatological interpretation, does not this suggest that the "original" Son of man in the Gospels may in fact have been less supernatural than now

appears? May it not be a distortion of the evidence, then, to eliminate this other, noneschatological element altogether? (d) Was the early church quite so ready to put Christological terms into the mouth of Jesus as is supposed? A comparison with the term "Christ" suggests not. Certainly "Christ" is found occasionally in the words of Jesus in the Gospels and may well have been put there by the early church. But there is a marked contrast between the scanty references to Christ in the Gospels, and the large number of references to the Son of man, as also between the vast number of references to Christ in the rest of the New Testament, and the almost complete absence of references to the Son of man.

The Son of man whom Knox finds a psychological stumbling block is a figure built up out of part of the evidence. In his approach he has followed the method which is almost invariably used by those who tackle this problem. The first step is to divide the sayings into various groups—usually three: the "eschatological," the "suffering," and the "general." The next step is to eliminate one, two, or even three of these groups from the discussion. One reason for this method is that it is very difficult to see how the three groups hang together. It is easier to present a coherent picture with only two of them, even easier with only one. So we find even C. E. B. Cranfield,¹³ who does not normally eliminate sayings from the Gospels, prepared to sacrifice one group for this reason.

Nevertheless, to bulldoze a third or even two thirds of the evidence in this way is a highly dangerous procedure. If we cannot see how the strands of tradition belong together, may it perhaps not be because we have the wrong ideas about the Son of man? If three strands of string are twisted together to

¹³ *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), pp. 100, 117-18.

make a rope, it is obviously a foolish procedure to divide them, extract one, and say "this is the real rope." May it not be that the three strands of tradition in the Gospels together represent the truth about the Son of man? That perhaps the church has got them all slightly tangled? And that we, in trying to pull the strands apart and separate them, have only added to the confusion? When Higgins, e.g., dismisses the "Son of man" sayings from the discussion one by one on the grounds that they are "inauthentic," may he not be simplifying the issue?

IV

I should like to illustrate this by looking at the total picture presented by Mark. I choose his gospel because it is the earliest and because the pattern of Son of man sayings is seen there most clearly. Obviously such a choice is open to the criticism that the picture which emerges may be Mark's own, but the same pattern can, I believe, be found elsewhere. Let us begin with the "eschatological" sayings. Here we have Knox's "supernatural redeemer on the clouds of heaven." Or have we? Certainly we have clouds, in 13:26 and 14:62, and glory, in 8:38 and 13:26. And certainly Mark seems to have understood the clouds literally. But did Jesus? Did Jesus really foretell the arrival of a supernatural Son of man to exercise judgment on the earth? Or did he, like the author of Daniel, intend his language to be understood symbolically? The fact that his quotations are taken from Daniel suggests that we should at least consider the possibility that he is using Daniel's language in Daniel's way. It seems to me significant that all three of these sayings appear in a context where they stand in contrast to the present suffering of Jesus and his followers. The irony of the paradoxical situation is seen in the trial scene: the Son of man has been handed over into the power of men, who do with him what

they want: nevertheless, his vindication is at hand: very soon he will "come" on the clouds of heaven, and sit at the right hand of God: not only will the human judgment be reversed, but the Son of man will be given a position of authority. In Mark 8:38, the vindication or condemnation is of those who follow him or have been ashamed of him: the Son of man exercises judgment. Mark 13:26 is rejected by almost all commentators as sheer apocalyptic. It would be rash indeed to build on that chapter. Yet it is worth noting that the saying about the Son of man appears in the same kind of context: after the trials and tribulations of Jesus' followers, their sufferings are ended by the advent of the Son of man: for them, this event means vindication and the reversal of their former fortunes.

Is it accidental that Mark links the coming of the Son of man with the sufferings of the faithful (as in Daniel), rather than dwelling on the details of the judgment (as in I Enoch)?

But whether we take these "Son of man" sayings symbolically or literally, there is no denying that their basic reference is to the future authority of the Son of man. Whoever or whatever he is, the Son of man is intended to exercise authority in future, and, as in Daniel, to receive dominion and judgment.

But what of the *suffering* Son of man? There are two popular ways of dealing with these sayings. One is to add the idea of the Servant. The other is to subtract the term "Son of man." The first is popular with British commentators who believe that Jesus combined the title "Son of man" with the concept of the Servant;¹⁴ the second is adopted by those scholars who believe that these sayings reflect the dogma of the early church. Neither solution answers the problem. Why does the tradition here preserve the title "Son of man"? For this

¹⁴ I have discussed this view in *Jesus and the Servant* (London: S. P. C. K., 1959).

group of sayings presents us with the belief that it was as Son of man that Jesus suffered. Can it perhaps be that it was precisely because he was Son of man that he suffered?

At first sight the suggestion that the idea of the Son of man itself necessarily includes that of suffering may seem absurd: he is a figure naturally associated with glory. It is true that the saints in Daniel 7 suffer, but this suffering is not a necessary attribute of the Son of man—quite the reverse; it is something which ought not to happen. At this point, however, we may perhaps approach the problem in a different way and ask, not “Why must the Son of man suffer?” but “How can the Son of man suffer?” If we turn again to Daniel, the answer to this question is immediately clear: the Son of man can—and will—suffer when his rightful position and God’s authority are denied. This is the situation in Daniel 7, where the “beasts” have revolted against God and have crushed Israel who, as Son of man, should be ruling the earth with the authority granted by God. Given this situation of the nations’ revolt and their rejection of the claims of the one who is intended to exercise authority, it is true to say that the Son of man not only can but must suffer. Similarly, in II Esdras, Israel suffers, although destined to be Adam’s heir, because the other nations have seized power and denied Israel the inheritance: the nation will be released from suffering and take over the rule, only when the other nations are subdued and recognize Israel’s authority.

If we return now to the sayings in Mark and ask how the Son of man there can suffer, then the answer will be the same. He can—and will—suffer if men set themselves up against God and reject the claims of the one to whom he has given authority. In this situation the suffering of the Son of man is inevitable, and the suffering will end only when his authority is recognized and accepted. This, however, is precisely the situation which, according to Mark, already exists. The rejection of

Jesus by the authorities is described in these sayings as a future necessity, but the necessity arises from the fact that the rejection has already taken place; scribes and Pharisees have already refused to accept the claim of the Son of man to God-given authority; Pharisees and Herodians have already plotted together to kill him. The authority of the Son of man has been repeatedly demonstrated and repeatedly rejected, and, unless and until the powers which have set themselves up in opposition to God are finally overthrown, suffering is inevitable. The suffering of the Son of man results from the opposition of the beast, who represents rebellion against the authority of God. This is the theme which underlies the whole gospel: the suffering and death of Jesus, like the whole of his ministry, represent a conflict with the satanic forces of evil and rebellion against God.

There is, then, a close and essential link between the authority of Jesus and his rejection, between his Messiahship and his suffering. It is for this reason, I suggest, that the teaching about the passion is so closely linked with the confession at Caesarea Philippi. It is only to those men who accept his authority that Jesus can explain the necessity and inevitability of his suffering, for the one arises, paradoxically, out of the other. When authority is rejected, suffering must follow.

These two groups of sayings about the Son of man represent two aspects of his authority. We see what happens when that authority is rejected, and what will happen when that authority is finally established. But what of that third group of “Son of man” sayings, of which we have two examples in Mark, which refer to the Son of man without mentioning either suffering or glory? Now commentators are generally very unhappy with these two sayings. Those who believe that Jesus spoke only of a future, glorious Son of man, obviously regard references to the Son of man here as an anachronism introduced by the early

church; but many of those who think that Jesus spoke also of a suffering Son of man can find no link between these two passages and their understanding of the term "Son of man."

Support for this view that the sayings come from the early church is often found in the fact that these two sayings stand alone in splendid isolation from the rest of the "Son of man" sayings, not only in their content, but in context, too. Six chapters separate them from the rest of the sayings, which all occur after Caesarea Philippi. This fact leads Cranfield, e.g., to suspect 2:28. He writes: "Would Jesus have used the term thus openly at this stage of his ministry and in conversation with his opponents?"¹⁵ Now this argument is really rather curious. For the position of an incident in Mark can tell us something about the probable genuineness of its contents only if we can fix that position with absolute certainty, and even Cranfield would hardly maintain that this particular incident necessarily happened at this early stage of the ministry—indeed, as he himself says, it is probably part of a pre-Marcian grouping on a topical basis. The fact that Mark has chosen to put this saying in chapter 2, therefore, should not be used in evidence against its reliability as a genuine word of Jesus.

Let us look a little more closely at these two sayings in chapter 2. The first and most striking thing which we notice in both these sayings is that they are concerned with the authority of the Son of man. Both occur in conflict stories, where the activity of either Jesus or his disciples is being questioned; in both cases Jesus replies by appealing to the authority of the Son of man. Once again we should ask: Why as Son of man? Is it because, once again, the authority belongs to the Son of man as Son of man?

In the first story Jesus claims authority to forgive sins—an

¹⁵ *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, p. 118.

authority which goes far beyond anything which other men possess, for, as the scribes rightly comment, only God can forgive sins. When Jesus claims the authority to forgive sins, he is claiming that he has been invested with the authority of God himself, that he is acting as God's representative and with his power. There is no indication in Jewish thought that even the Messiah was ever credited with the authority to forgive sins. Nor, of course, was the Son of man. But it is significant that the Son of man is given kingdom and rule by God and acts as God's representative—on the earth; he acts as judge. If anyone on earth is given the authority to forgive sins, then one would expect it to be the Son of man.

The second saying is concerned with the authority of the Son of man over the sabbath. The sabbath was made for man, we are told—which takes us back to the purpose of creation—and the Son of man is lord of the sabbath. It is perhaps relevant to point out that according to Jewish belief the sabbath was not given to all men to enjoy, but to Israel alone.¹⁶ One is not surprised, then, to find that the Son of man, who in Daniel represents the saints of Israel, is Lord of the sabbath.

Now it seems to me extremely significant that both these sayings, whose authenticity is so often denied, are concerned, like all the other "Son of man" sayings, with authority. This fact suggests that they, too, represent an integral part of the "Son of man" concept. It may be objected that the idea of Jesus exercising authority now as Son of man is incompatible with the Danielic picture, where vindication and glory lie in the future. But this is to overlook the fact which we have already noticed, that in Daniel the Son of man already exists (in the saints of Israel) and that by right authority already belongs to him. It is because the Son of man's claim to authority is re-

¹⁶ Jubilees 2:17-31.

jected, that he suffers and dies. It is, then, significant that Mark has placed these two incidents where he has—and where everyone thinks he ought not to have put them—namely at the beginning of his gospel, in disputes between Jesus and his opponents. For if we accept Mark's picture, then we find that he has set clearly before us in logical sequence the three aspects of the authority of the Son of man: Jesus claims authority as Son of man—a claim which is not understood by the people, and which is rejected by the scribes and Pharisees; their rejection of his authority leads to a plot to destroy him, but his claim will be vindicated—the Son of man will be seen in glory. Authority claimed, rejected, vindicated—in Mark the three groups of "Son of man" sayings belong together.

I would not be so rash as to suggest that all these sayings are "authentic." I merely wish to suggest that there is a coherence and reasonableness in the three groups: that perhaps together they may lead us back to the truth about the term "Son of man," used to symbolize the authority given to Jesus.

V

If this interpretation of the Son of man is correct, then I suggest that the self-identification of Jesus with the Son of man is not psychologically incredible, and that the various strands of tradition in the Gospels do form a coherent whole. If this is so, then the onus of proof is on those who deny the traditional view that Jesus spoke of himself as Son of man, for the evidence of the Gospel sayings is against them. In this case the term is of supreme importance for our understanding of Jesus' own interpretation of his person and work. Moreover, we find that it is not simply a convenient self-designation, but a term which sums up the nature and authority of Jesus and the

claims which he makes upon men, which are rooted in his own relationship of obedience to God.

As Son of man, Jesus stands as the fulfillment of the Old Testament hope for Israel which had never been fulfilled. But more: for in him the purpose of creation is fulfilled. In Jesus we see man as he was intended to be, as he was created by God, fully obedient to God's will, and therefore entrusted with authority and dominion over the world. The finality of Christ is seen in the fulfillment of God's purposes for man and for the world. The results are not confined to one man, however; those who join themselves to Jesus may expect to share in his experience; those who follow him will tread in the same path of obedience, suffering, and vindication, not in their own strength, but because they are disciples of Jesus; it is their attitude to him which is all important. The disciple cannot escape the path of suffering, for the scandal of the gospel is a crucified Messiah. No doubt it is paradoxical to speak of the finality of Christ in terms of a suffering Son of man. But when authority is denied, suffering is inevitable, and those who accept the authority of the Son of man must expect to share his suffering. Yet the Christian looks beyond, to the vindication of the Son of man and his followers, when the authority of the Son of man is finally acknowledged. The term "Son of man" contains in a nutshell the answer to the problem of the world's rejection of the Christian claim for the finality of Christ.

I suggested at the beginning of this chapter that the ideas conveyed in the term "Son of man" perhaps underlie much of the rest of the New Testament's Christology. Let me finish by mentioning the most important parallel, which is seen in the Pauline doctrine of the finality of Christ in terms of the Second Adam. For Paul, Adam is the type of the greater one who follows him, Christ, whose obedience to God's command

reverses the disastrous results of Adam's fall¹⁷; it is because of his obedience to God's command that Christ is vindicated and exalted and given the name of "Lord."¹⁸ But not only Christ; those who are joined to him—those who are in Christ—share with him suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation. It is in Christ that man is restored and renewed in the image of his creator.¹⁹ And not only man. For the final result of Christ's obedience is to be worked out in terms of the entire universe, which was subjected to futility as a consequence of Adam's sin²⁰; with the final revelation of the glory of those who are, in Christ, sons of God, the creation itself will be released from the bondage of corruption which now shackles it and be renewed according to God's purpose. It is here, perhaps, that we have the germ of the idea of the cosmic Christ developed in Colossians, where Christ, ruler of the world and triumphant over the usurping powers, stands within the created order and yet over against it, at once firstborn among many brethren and agent of the cosmic salvation. It is Christ, the perfect image of the invisible God, in whom and through whom and for whom all things were created, and in whom all things hold together.

¹⁷ Rom. 5:12-21.

¹⁸ Phil. 2:5-11.

¹⁹ Col. 3:10; II Cor. 3:18.

²⁰ Rom. 8:18-22.

3

WORD, WISDOM, AND PROCESS

As a Christian I believe that Jesus Christ is of universal and decisive significance. I am committed to the belief that Jesus is Lord. As a Christian professionally and personally concerned with trends in current thought and present apologetic possibilities, I am convinced that we need a new appreciation of these truths about the Lordship of Christ affirmed traditionally in terms of word and wisdom. We need, and have the opportunity for, a new understanding of the cosmic significance of Jesus which will match our modern understanding of the cosmos. Unless this understanding of Jesus and the modern understanding of the cosmos are brought together, we shall be failing in preaching the gospel for our age. We shall also be leaving humanity to be swamped in the apparent vastness and indifference of that cosmos as we are now coming to understand it. But when I consider making some attempt to contribute to this task, I find myself faced with an extremely daunting initial question. What are the grounds for holding that speaking of Jesus in terms of word and wisdom is anything more than outmoded mythology, philosophy, and cosmology?

I do not find myself able to agree that it is good enough for me that Paul used such language, still less that the early church developed such language. Nor do I find it sufficient when, say, some Whiteheadian enthusiastically undertakes to show me