

CHAPTER I

SON OF MAN

Of all Christological titles, that of the Son of man has been the most thoroughly investigated.¹ The reason for this is that it has been hoped, by means of this predicate of dignity, to penetrate most deeply to the preaching of Jesus Himself; moreover, the outlook of the early Palestinian community on the person and work of Jesus is discernible in a relatively exclusive context.² Hence the consideration of the title of the Son of man is an appropriate starting point for an investigation of the oldest Christological traditions. But of course the history of criticism has shown how many problems are bound up with this stream of tradition, and up to the most recent literature on the subject decisive points are still being debated, so that even here we cannot start from firm conclusions; a short exposition and discussion of the material is necessary.³

1. *Philological Problems and Problems connected with the History of Religion*

The phrase, unusual in the Greek language, *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, sets the task of philological derivation. Since in the NT we have frequently to reckon with traditions stemming from the sphere of Semitics the explanation does not seem to be difficult. For it is obvious to take into account a collective idea, which by means of the genitival link "son of . . ." is used to denote an individual. This would imply that "Son of man" is nothing other than "man" and represents only a slavish reproduction of the Semitic expression; just like the Hebraic אָדָם the Aramaic אֲנָשׁ would then express the idea of the species, and the form אָדָם בֶּן אֲנָשׁ or בֶּן אֲנָשׁ would serve the purpose of distinguishing the individual member of the species.⁴

This point of view has been expressed especially by Wellhausen, who was also of the opinion that in Dan. 7:13 and 2 Esdras 13 the word is used only metaphorically and in the metaphorical speeches of the Ethiopian Enoch only with express

reference to Daniel;⁵ hence in the mouth of Jesus, the expression "Son of man" may have been merely a general expression denoting an individual man; only the primitive community, in connection with its expectation of the parousia, stamped it with titular character.⁶

Lietzmann went a step further, denying altogether a titular use in the sphere of Aramaic speech, and reckoning with quite a late emergence of *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* in the sphere of the Hellenistic community.⁷ On the contrary, he regarded *בֶּר (א)נִשָּׂא* as a merely pleonastic form side by side with the simple *אֲנִישָׁא* and rejected any distinction in view of the fact that the Semitic language is devoid of all conceptual discriminations.⁸

Dalman had, however, maintained the opposing thesis that the simple *אֲנִישָׁא* was the only currently used word for "man": "the extraordinary *בֶּר (א)נִשָּׂא* was not in current use, and was employed only in imitation of the Hebraic Biblical text, where *בֶּן אָדָם* belongs to poetic speech";⁹ he considered that the determinate *בֶּר (א)נִשָּׂא* both in Judaic-Galilean and in later Christian-Aramaic speech was an innovation due to the influence of the Mesopotamian-Aramaic dialect.¹⁰ The consequence of this is that *בֶּר (א)נִשָּׂא* cannot simply mean "man", and in no case is a meaningless mode of speech, but an emphatic and selected type of expression which may only appropriately be rendered by such phrases as "son of man" or "child of man".¹¹

After these three very different attempts at a solution, the problem was again taken up by Fiebig, and linguistically investigated on a broad basis. He showed that a highly varied use of speech must be assumed for the Aramaic of Jesus' time: *נִשָּׂא (א)*, *אֲנִישָׂא (א)*, but also *בֶּר (א)נִשָּׂא* and *בֶּר (א)נִשָּׂא* can all be used in the same sense. The forms with and without *בֶּר* have the same meaning, hence there is no plain difference between the concept of the species and that of the individual; but furthermore the undetermined and the determined forms are not clearly distinguished from each other; they may both convey the idea of "a" or "the" man.¹² However, where we have an at least formally precise translation, we must reckon with the fact that *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* goes back to *בֶּר (א)נִשָּׂא* although no special significance is assigned to the latter expression in Aramaic.¹³ This solution has been widely accepted.¹⁴

If no specially coined and emphatic mode of expression may be assumed in Aramaic, this by no means precludes the possibility that **בֵּר (א)וֹשָׁא** may be linked to a very firmly fixed conception, and in certain contexts even used technically, in some contexts in fact receiving a titular character.¹⁵ Just like the “anthropos” in gnosticism, or the “day” in apocalyptic writings, so also the “man” in apocalyptic contexts implied an unequivocal significance. Dan. 7:13f.; 2 Esdras 13 and the metaphorical speeches of the Ethiopian Enoch furnish proofs of this. The fact that in Dan. 7:13f. and 2 Esdras 13, the “man” is spoken of only in a comparison, hence metaphorically, is no contradiction of this contention.

The only questionable point is whether the **כְּבֹר אֱנוֹשׁ** of Dan. 7:13 and the *quasi similitudinem hominis* of 2 Esdras 13:3 admits the use of the expression in a titular sense. An unequivocal answer cannot be had from the visionary speeches for the meaning of the demonstrative in “Son of man” is disputed.¹⁶ It can be explained in the sense that the demonstrative serves for the translation of the Greek article since Ethiopic has no special means of determining the article, but this cannot be quite certainly proved.¹⁷ What is undisputed is that in Daniel and 2 Esdras, as in the visionary speeches of the Ethiopian Enoch, what is in question is the stereotyped description of a quite specific heavenly being.

It is not the conception and the technical use that is problematical, only the titular use. The latter is overwhelmingly probable for pre-Christian Judaism; for in favour of the titular use of the word is not only the demonstrative expression in the Ethiopic Enoch, but also the self-explanatory titular use in the whole synoptic tradition. The Aramaic basis **בֵּר (א)וֹשָׁא** of the Greek expression has indeed no special rank, but perhaps we may say that the individual significance, as also the determination, could most plainly be expressed thus, and this was most clearly to be maintained by the literally faithful translation *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* as distinct from the *υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου* of the Septuagint (also Dan. 7:13).¹⁸

Much discussion has taken place in recent times about the so-called corporate interpretation of the figure of the Son of man. It cannot be disputed that in Dan. 7:13f., 27 we have a corporate interpretation, since the Son of man is equated with

TITLES OF JESUS

the "people of the saints of the Most High"; he represents the eternal kingdom of the time of salvation, and by the "saints of the Most High" are probably to be understood the heavenly hosts.¹⁹ But such a corporate idea is not present in 2 Esdras 13 and the visions of the Ethiopic Enoch, and even in regard to Dan. 7 it may be questioned what traditional presuppositions constitute the norm of interpretation. Apart from the later additions in vv. 7, fin. 8, 11a, 20-22, 24f.²⁰ the real vision vv. 1-7, 9f., 11b-14 must be distinguished from its interpretation in vv. 15-19, 23, 26-28; moreover, in the vision the concept of the four world kingdoms²¹ and the view of the divine judgment and the appearance of the Son of man are closely bound together.²² It must be noted that the corporate understanding results not merely from the interpretation of vv. 15ff. but already from the link between the concept of the Son of man and the vision of the four world kingdoms. But is this true of the concept of the heavenly man in general?

The consideration that behind Dan. 7 and the visions of the Ethiopic Enoch there stands a common individualistic concept of the Son of man, which only in Daniel has received a corporate interpretation, has in any case something to be said for it.²³ However it may be as regards the priority of the collective or individualist interpretation, in the post-Daniel tradition of Judaism there is to be found a clearly individualist conception. In regard to the preaching and person of Jesus the corporate idea in any case raises not inconsiderable difficulties.

T. W. Manson, who above all has urged this interpretation, has to presuppose a direct reference to Dan. 7 and furthermore to assume that Jesus on account of the failure of His disciples at the end of His life Himself vicariously assumed the functions of the corporately understood figure of the Son of man.²⁴ Hence in the last resort he does not manage without having recourse to a personal exegesis, and notes both a corporate and individualist conception in the gospels. His thesis, which in this form found scant acceptance,²⁵ was nevertheless at times adopted with certain modifications, for example by Taylor who refers the words about the eschatological coming of the Son of man to "the Elect Community of which He was to be the Head"²⁶ or by Theo Preiss who ascribes to the figure of the Son of man an inclusive sense as well;²⁷ similarly, Cullmann speaks

of a certain ambiguity in the expression and connects it with the concept of perfected humanity.²⁸

However, it should not be overlooked that, quite apart from the definite individualist understanding of the figure of the Son of man in pre-Christian Judaism, the NT words about the Son of man give no indications which demand such an interpretation,²⁹ that the currency of corporate concepts in Semitic thought³⁰ together with the one text Dan. 7 is not a sufficient reason and that the primitive Christian statements did not arise with an exclusive reference to Dan. 7³¹ but imply a broad stream of tradition which is no longer sufficiently discernible to us.³²

A further much discussed problem, which has been dealt with especially by Joachim Jeremias and was likewise discussed by T. W. Manson within the framework of his interpretation, is the connection between the concepts of the Son of man and the suffering servant of God,³³ but while the former critic assumes the connection already to exist in late Judaism,³⁴ the latter sees it effected only with Jesus Himself;³⁵ R. H. Fuller also makes a similar judgment.³⁶ Admittedly the influence of the idea of the suffering servant is not to be denied in the Son of man text—Mk. 10:45 and par.,³⁷ yet this word is quite singular within the corpus of NT Son of man texts; further, Mk. 10:45 can hardly be traced back to Jesus Himself.

In the Son of man idea proper to late Judaism there is lacking, so far as we can see, any clear proof of the assimilation of elements from the suffering servant, for while certain links between Son of man statements and Isa. 42:1ff.; 49:1ff., may be established, this is not so for Isa. 50:4ff., 52:13ff., and in view of the exegesis then prevalent, which did not regard the servant songs as an independent unity, it may not be at once assumed that all the elements of the Deutero-Isaianic conception were taken over. Hiddenness and removal have nothing to do with suffering, and least of all demonstrative is the frequent description of the Son of man as "servant" in 2 Esdras, for neither in the OT nor in Judaism is this name of honour exclusively linked to the servant tradition of Deutero-Isaiah.³⁸

A problem which in many respects is still insufficiently clarified is that of the origin of the Son of man concept.³⁹ The older derivations characteristic of the history of religion school⁴⁰ need examination⁴¹ and conclusive recent results have

TITLES OF JESUS

not yet been attained. In any case it is necessary to adhere to the thesis that the Son of man figure in Judaism is not to be explained apart from foreign influences.⁴² A certain connection (albeit very broken and modified by some not clearly discernible intermediate stages) with the idea of a primal man cannot be flatly rejected.⁴³ Yet we must be careful not to accept too quickly a kinship with some developments of the idea of the primal man, e.g. the Adam-Christ typology in Paul.⁴⁴ Whatever be the truth about the roots of the concept as far as the history of religion is concerned, in NT times it had for long become a characteristic traditional element in Judaism and also formed a certain point of crystallization for apocalyptic expectations of the end.⁴⁵ History of religion problems are therefore of subordinate importance for the NT.

A last question to be touched on here is the relation between the Son of man and the Messiah. In so far as the word Messiah is not loosely used as an inclusive concept for the saviour at the end of time, the supposition of reciprocal dependence involves as a rule certain theses concerning the history of religion and tradition. Thus, in particular, when Riesenfeld or Bentzen propose to trace back not only the Messiah, but also the Son of man conception to ideology centring around the king.⁴⁶ Without prejudice to certain points of contact with the concept of the kingly Messiah, that of the Son of man, not only on account of its origin, but still more on account of its independent development and elaboration, must be radically distinguished from true messianism, if we are not to promote confusion about the facts of history and tradition. A derivation from kingly ideology must here quite certainly be excluded. Enquiry must be made into particular cases of mutual influence.⁴⁷

Summary. It must be said that the philological problems may be regarded as clarified: **בן אדם** is a description of the individual man, but not the only one possible; in any case the phrase has no special significance or emphasis. That does not prevent, however, this general concept from having a clearly defined position as a *terminus technicus* in marked apocalyptic contexts. It is not quite proved, but overwhelmingly probable, that already in pre-Christian Judaism a titular use had established itself which was adopted by Jesus and the primitive community. The collective understanding of the Son of man

which exists in Daniel is lacking in 2 Esdras 13 and the similitudes of the Ethiopic Enoch, and is just as little to be assumed as far as the NT is concerned. A connection with the idea of the suffering servant cannot be proved in regard to Judaism; in the primitive Christian tradition it can be established only in one single instance. The derivation from the standpoint of the history of religion has not yet been sufficiently clarified. In any event, foreign influence will have to be taken into account; on the other hand, the concept was in a high degree adapted by Jewish thought, even if it was not widespread. It belongs to its own characteristic stratum of tradition, and for this reason is to be fundamentally distinguished from the concept of the Messiah.

2. The Son of Man Concept and the Preaching of Jesus

The Son of man sayings have come down to us almost without exception as sayings of Jesus Himself. Hence the question arises in what relation they stand to the preaching of Jesus. If anywhere in Christological titles, in regard to the "Son of man", it may be considered that Jesus Himself made use of this predicate. This does not preclude the fact that a string of sayings are secondary accretions. But which Son of man sayings may be regarded as the oldest and included in the preaching of Jesus is disputed. It has even been questioned whether the Son of man concept is to be reckoned at all as part of the preaching of Jesus. It is always according to how we answer these questions that the development of tradition must be estimated. Hence it is advisable to begin with basic considerations rather than detailed discussion of Son of man texts.

There is a certain consensus of critical opinion that the prophecies of suffering, at least in their present form, arose only in the community, and as a result the sayings about the dying and rising again of the Son of man are placed at the end of the development. It is debated whether the words about the coming Son of man or those about his earthly work must be regarded as primary and so referred back to Jesus Himself; it is not very probable that both are equally original.

In regard to the sayings about the earthly deeds of the Son of man, older criticism frequently asserted their authenticity on the assumption of an erroneous translation of the Aramaic phrase. It was thought that from a simple "the man" or "I"

TITLES OF JESUS

there developed only later a titular of exaltation.⁴⁸ But there are difficulties in the acceptance of this view. For, on the one hand, not all these words are intelligible as sayings about man, and often the real point is attained only through the title "Son of man", and, on the other hand, the phrase **בֶּר (אֱ)נָשָׁא**, as a circumlocution for "I", cannot be proved from the Aramaic documents which have come down to us, rather in such cases we have **הָהוּא נִבְרָא**.⁴⁹

Eduard Schweizer has maintained the thesis that in such sayings "Son of man" is by no means a meaningless circumlocution, but that Jesus deliberately adopted the concept as a means of self-description; such sayings are the most authentic Son of man logia, and are to be regarded as the starting point for a view of the whole development.⁵⁰

Quite apart from the question whether the particular words, from the point of view of content, permit this interpretation, objections may be raised. In the first place the linguistic assumptions compel us to hesitate: **בֶּר (אֱ)נָשָׁא** is regarded as the description of an ordinary man, then, however, it is thought possible that, used instead of an "I", it was "a somewhat unusual circumlocution".⁵¹ Hence the attempt has been made to leave the word with its general meaning, but to derive from its context a certain emphasis.

But in my opinion this cannot be proved in the circumstances; for either the expression was current as a modest self-description, in which case there can be no question of an unusual emphatic circumlocution, or else the expression was not in use as a mode of self-reference, in which case it was to be understood as referring only and plainly to man in general. In any case such a phrase, used to refer to "I", is not provable in Aramaic; moreover, in a string of other Son of man sayings, the "I" of the speaker is very clearly distinguished from the Son of man description.⁵²

A further objection to Schweizer's thesis is that, assuming the phrase had become fixed as a title in Judaism, it would be preferable to suppose that the Son of man description was transferred by Jesus to a new context. But Schweizer disputed precisely that a "dogmatically fixed quantity" is here present. He says that Jesus wished to draw attention to the special features of His work and not to give a convenient formula for

interpretation. Son of man is "a circumlocution which conceals as much as reveals the secret of His person" and is ambiguous from the start.⁵³ But how is this ambiguity, which can only be possible under specific firm premisses, to be recognized?⁵⁴ Further, it is to be considered that, assuming such a generalized conception, the use of the phrase as a *terminus technicus* always belongs to a quite specific circle of ideas whence it receives its meaning; once it is loosed from this framework, the special meaning is necessarily lost.⁵⁵

If the statements about the coming Son of man stand first in the historical development of the tradition, then an apocalyptic context is presupposed.⁵⁶ If, on the other hand, the sayings about the earthly deeds stand first, then such a point of reference and background of understanding is no longer discernible. Schweizer does not of course deny any kind of underlying context. Instead of referring to apocalyptic, he refers to the concept of the suffering and exalted righteous one; in this connection, however, he can only rely on the quotation of the Ethiopic Enoch 70f. and Wisdom 2-5.⁵⁷

He alleges that what is new in Jesus' proclamation is that He applies the title Son of man not only to the exalted righteous one, who will some day confront His enemies before the judgment seat of God, but already to the earthly life of the righteous one.⁵⁸ In order to demonstrate this, he must show that it is not the sayings about the parousia, but the sayings about exaltation which belong to the original core of Jesus' Son of man words. His attempt to gain the necessary proofs from Acts 7:56 and the Johannine Son of man words⁵⁹ is not, however, convincing; for it can be shown that the sayings about exaltation in the sense of an independent Christological stage of development as contrasted with the parousia sayings are secondary and imply a clear de-eschatologization.⁶⁰

Finally, particular words about the coming Son of man, implying a distinction between Jesus and the Son of man, evince a peculiarity which can only be explained if such logia are placed at the beginning of the development, and if we assess the identification of the Son of man with Jesus as a first step in Christological interpretation. It is precisely in regard to such words that the apocalyptic conception stands most plainly in the background and thus affords an important criterion for the understanding of the Son of man idea.⁶¹