

THE QUEST OF THE SON OF MAN

By DAVID STANLEY

THERE IS a certain ambivalence in the title of this essay of which cognizance may be taken at the outset. Is the 'quest' to be understood to mean the unflagging search for his fellow human beings on the part of the Son of Man, or is it rather to be taken as the continuing search of the christian for the Son of Man? The quest for God in Jesus Christ has long been a classical theme of christian spirituality. One of the fundamental questions to be put to the candidate seeking admission to the monastery, according to St Benedict's *Regula Monachorum*, is whether he be seriously intent upon the search for God. 'And let this elder watch carefully to see whether the novice is truly seeking God, and is zealous for the Word of God, for obedience, and for humiliations'.¹ On the other hand, the inspired authors of the canonical gospels, each in his own personal manner, presents Jesus Christ as the Son of Man whose whole mission is devoted to the quest of men. The characteristic marcan statement of this divine-human purposefulness is well known: 'Why, even the Son of Man has come to act as a servant, not to be served; and to give his life as ransom for the rest of men'.² Matthew conceives it in terms of the dynamic presence in history of the glorified Emmanuel: 'I can assure you that among those standing here there are some who will not experience death, until they behold the Son of Man coming in his kingdom'.³ Luke in his turn states this central christian truth in function of his own christology: 'The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost'.⁴ The author of the fourth gospel finally has also incorporated the same conception into his spirituality: 'I solemnly assure you that you will behold the sky opened, and the angels of God going up and coming down upon the Son of Man'.⁵

Actually, as will shortly become evident, it is imperative to take account of both senses of this 'quest of the Son of Man', if we are

¹ Ch 58.

² Mk 10, 45.

³ Mt 16, 28.

⁴ Lk 19, 10.

⁵ Jn 1, 51.

to do justice to the New Testament data relative to this superlatively significant christological theme in the faith of the apostolic church. For in the minds of first and second generation christians, man's only hope of success in his quest for God in Christ depends essentially upon the unwavering conviction that the exalted Lord never tires in his persevering quest for man, by virtue of the truth that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself'.¹ Accordingly, both aspects of the quest will be borne in mind in this presentation of the Son of Man theme and its place in the theological reflection of the earliest christian writers, the four evangelists.

The quest in the Spiritual Exercises

Before beginning our discussion of the Son of Man christology and its function in the four distinctive spiritualities represented by the gospels, it may not be unhelpful to recall the central position occupied by the quest, understood in both senses already described, in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius Loyola. In that 'golden little book' the dialectic of the redemption, which we have denominated as the quest of the Son of Man, appears under the rubric of the Election, which is unquestionably the focal point of the entire series of graduated religious experiences which St Ignatius has called spiritual exercises. While the ignatian Election makes its appearance in the text of the *Spiritual Exercises* only in the middle of the second week, it is in effect a continuing process, inaugurated by the opening consideration, the Principle and Foundation, and effectively operative throughout the four weeks, reaching its climax with the Contemplation for Obtaining Love. Since the term election is capable of being misapprehended as consisting principally in the exercitant's devoted efforts to choose Christ, it may not be irrelevant here to insist upon the profoundly biblical sense which the word election always carried for St Ignatius. His constant awareness of the primacy of the divine free choice of man, which this word connoted for him, may be seen by his habitual use of a formula, which runs like a refrain through his collected correspondence: 'I beg God our Lord that he may deign in his generosity and goodness to grant us a superabundance of grace, in order that we may fully experience his most holy will and carry it out entirely'. Thus for Ignatius Loyola election denoted the same mysterious free and untrammelled choice by God of men, which appears so prominently

¹ 2 Cor 5, 19.

in the spirituality of Israel.¹ St Ignatius was ever conscious that it is only by virtue of God's having elected me in Christ that I am empowered to make the ignatian election of God in Christ. Such an election then is not merely an ethical act of my free choice, nor is its value to be estimated merely in terms of effective psychology. It is most fundamentally a part of the dialectical process we call grace. 'You have not chosen me: I have chosen you!'²

The Son of Man: a New Testament concept

The (to us) somewhat esoteric phrase, 'the Son of Man', appears almost exclusively in the New Testament in the four gospels, where it is presented as Jesus' favourite expression of his own self-identification. The only exception to this unvarying practice of the evangelists, in whose books no one but Jesus ever refers to him by this mysterious title, is found in Acts, where Stephen is represented as declaring at the moment of his death, 'In truth I can see that the heavens have been opened wide, and the Son of Man is standing at God's right hand'.³ The author of the Apocalypse indeed twice describes the exalted Christ as 'one like a Son of man',⁴ but this is a direct citation of Daniel.⁵ The author of Hebrews likewise employs psalm 8, 5 (in the Septuagint version), in which 'son of man' appears as a synonym for man, to underscore the superiority of the glorified Christ over the angels.⁶ Actually, however, these references to the Old Testament cannot rightly be considered instances of the unique title, which is the object of our investigation.

We may assume here with the majority opinion among modern New Testament scholars that it was Jesus himself who originally applied the title, the Son of Man, to himself during his public ministry, although on what occasion or how frequently he did so is probably still debatable. What is the meaning of the phrase and what was Jesus' source for such a self-designation? Since the term man in hebrew and aramaic actually designates mankind, conceived as a concrete group, an individual human being is customarily designated by prefixing the prepositional phrase son of (which is employed to pick out one of a species). Consequently, the expression, 'the Son of Man', in the mouth of Jesus, appears to indicate that he chose to call himself 'the Man'. At any rate, in the christological thought of early Church, this title would seem to

¹ Cf the election of Israel as Yahweh's 'acquisition' presented in Isai 43, 1-7.

² Jn 15, 16.

³ Acts 7, 56.

⁴ Apoc 1, 13; 14, 14.

⁵ Dan 7, 13.

⁶ Heb 2, 6.

have been adopted fairly widely, in order to express certain important facets of the central christian belief in the universal lordship of the exalted Jesus. It is paralleled in the writings of Paul, who never employs the phrase itself, by the characteristically pauline expression, 'the last Adam'.¹ Since the significance of 'the Son of Man' *in the context of our gospels* is of some moment to our present investigation, we shall devote some space to it after answering the second question raised above, *viz.*, what was the source used by Jesus for this self-imposed title?

The symbolic figure in Daniel

That Jesus drew his inspiration for referring to himself as 'the Son of Man' from the celebrated vision in the aramaic section of the book of Daniel, concerning 'one like a son of man', appears to be fairly probable. This symbolic figure appears as the climax of the seer's vision, preceded by four beasts which represent four of the mighty pagan empires of antiquity.² The author of the book points out, a few verses further on, that the symbol signifies 'the saints of the most High', who are destined 'to receive the sovereignty', and retain it eternally.³ In more prosaic language, this mysterious figure of 'one like a son of man' stands for redeemed Israel, the true 'Israel of God'.⁴ On the analogy of the symbolic beasts which represent the great pagan empires of the ancient near East, it is perhaps more accurate to say that the symbol represents, in addition to the collectivity of Israel, a mysterious leader of God's people. Indeed, in the subsequent literary development of this theme in the inter-testamental literature dependent upon the book of Daniel,⁵ the Son of Man becomes a messianic king, a transcendent and pre-existent figure, who ushers in a new age.

While the influence of such pseudepigraphical works upon Jesus' consciousness remains of necessity largely conjectural, it seems not improbable that the dramatic figure of 'one like a son of man' in Daniel appealed to him because of its very mystery and its allusive character. It appears to be easier to explain its attractiveness for the evangelists, who wrote their accounts of the earthly history of Jesus in the light of their Easter faith. On the one hand, it presented itself to these writers as an effective means employed by Jesus during his public ministry for guarding the supreme mystery

¹ Cf THE WAY 6 (1966), pp 104-112.

³ Dan 7, 18.

² Dan 7, 13-14.

⁴ Gal 6, 16.

⁵ The *Similitudes of Henoch*, the *Sibylline Oracles*, and *Fourth Esdras*.

of his own person, a 'messianic secret' only comprehended with the eyes of christian faith. On the other hand, its implication of a collectivity, the new Israel, provided a veiled indication of Jesus' intention to found the Church. Moreover, the very 'open-ended' nature of the symbol made it an apt vehicle for expressing their unshakeable christian belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ. These significant christological values will be illustrated presently, when we come to review the gospel texts dealing with the presentation of Jesus as 'the Son of Man'.

The apostolic church and the contemporary Christ

While modern New Testament scholarship has frequently maintained that the chief preoccupation of the first christians was with the second coming of the glorified Christ at the end of history (an event moreover which they are said to have considered imminent), it is far truer to say, I believe, that the main concern of the early Church was with the contemporary Christ.

A reflection of this concern and of its paramount importance to these first disciples may be seen in the pauline formula of faith, 'Jesus is Lord!'¹ This concise and primitive *credo* evinced the confident and optimistic conviction that the universal lordship to which, at his exaltation 'at God's right hand', Jesus had acceded, meant in reality a deeper and profoundly dynamic involvement with the ongoing historical process, especially insofar as it concerned the life of the Church herself. As Lord of history, Jesus Christ now effectively directed and controlled the destinies both of the Church and of the universe. Far from being removed by his ascension into heaven from the happenings in this world below, the Lord Jesus was actually more actively present to his Church and to mankind than he had been during 'the days of his flesh'. It is this firm belief in Jesus' newly acquired lordship, which explains a remarkable feature of our canonical gospels: the complete lack of anything like nostalgia for the 'good old days' of Jesus' public ministry, when the disciples had enjoyed such privileged intimacy with him.

Another feature of the paschal faith of the apostolic Church in Jesus as Lord is the realization that the Son of God, who had assumed human nature in order to effect the redemption of the human race, has chosen to remain man for ever. This implied the conviction that the exalted Lord Jesus is *what he now is*, in virtue

¹ Phil 2, 9-11; 1 Cor 12, 3; 2 Cor 4, 5; Rom 10, 9.

of the mysteries of his earthly history. His very constitution as 'Son of God in power by resurrection from death'¹ was determined, in no small way, by the experiences of his earthly life. Accordingly, all that 'Jesus began to do and to teach',² particularly in the presence of the twelve during his public life, constituted so many privileged moments (once their significance was grasped by christian faith) in the approach of each believer to the Lord Jesus. In other words, it was primarily through the contemplation of these mysteries of his earthly life, that each one who had accepted Christ by baptism was to grow steadily in that personal relationship to him who was revealed to the Church at Pentecost as the very embodiment of *aggiornamento*, ever modern and up-to-date, always actively present in the lives of successive generations of his followers. Since then, as these first christians believed, the events of Jesus' earthly history retained a veritable actuality in him as he now existed in his glorified state, they could never be regarded merely as past events, to be simply recalled or reconstructed by the historian's art. They were in a very real sense effective means offered to the christian in every age, whereby he might relate himself to the Lord Jesus in faith. Their contemplation was intended to produce in the believer a *Heilsgeschehen*, a salutary, personal participation in the mysteries of the life of the incarnate Word.

The Son of Man: basic meaning in the gospels

As has already been observed, this title is characteristic of the four gospels, being employed exclusively by the evangelists amongst New Testament authors. It is the title most commonly conferred upon Jesus in the synoptic gospels, and it ranks prominently among those given Jesus in the fourth gospel. Modern commentators customarily distinguish at least three different phases of Jesus' activity in the 'Son of Man' sayings: (1) his earthly mission; (2) his passion and resurrection; (3) his eschatological function. They generally point out moreover that in the fourth gospel the title denotes only the glorified Christ.

Yet, if account be taken of what has already been said of the preoccupation of the early Church with the contemporary Christ, whose exaltation signified in the first place a deeper involvement in the continuing process of salvation history, and whose decision to remain human forever meant the perpetual actuality of con-

¹ Rom 1, 4.

² Acts 1, 1.

temporaneity of the mysteries of his earthly history, then it would seem more accurate to view the title, 'the Son of Man', most properly as a designation of the contemporary Christ. It is unquestionably he who was the principal object of the faith and devotion of the primitive Church, who was proclaimed in the apostolic kerygma. Accordingly, it is he of whom the evangelists wrote in their fourfold account of 'the gospel', the good news to a despairing world of how God had in Jesus Christ effectively wrought the world's salvation.

It is fair to say, I believe, that of all the titles given Jesus Christ in the gospels, the Son of Man is best suited to express the various facets of christian belief in the ever contemporary Lord Jesus Christ: his continuing humanity, which in its risen state perpetuates the reality of the mysteries of his earthly existence, and his divinity, concealed from men during his mortal life and only revealed through his exaltation. Little wonder then that it is the most frequently used title in the synoptic gospels.¹

We wish now to review the passages in our gospels, in which the title, the Son of Man, occurs in order to see how each evangelist employs it in presenting the quest of God for man in Christ and man's responsive quest for God in Christ. It will presently become evident, I believe, that each author has his own personal way of expressing this twofold quest: in other words, each evangelist has his own distinctive christian spirituality.

The Son of Man in Mark

Of the marcan instances of the title with which we are concerned, all with but two exceptions² occur in the second gospel after Peter's profession of faith in Jesus' messiahship at Caesarea Philippi.³ Moreover, all the Son of Man sayings, except for the two cited above and Jesus' solemn profession before the supreme tribunal of judaism,⁴ are addressed to the disciples. This may well be an indication that, during his lifetime, Jesus employed the expression only in the hearing of his close followers, and that moreover only after the close of the galilean phase of his ministry. The hypothesis becomes the more plausible when, as we shall presently indicate, the two first marcan examples of the use of this title owe their

¹ It appears in Mark fourteen times, in Matthew thirty times, in Luke twenty-five times. In the fourth Gospel, whose author employs the phrase Son of God in its strictly christian theological sense (ten times), the title the Son of Man is used thirteen times, being surpassed only by the favourite johannine term, the Son, which recurs nineteen times.

² Mk 2, 10; 2, 28.

³ Mk 8, 29.

⁴ Mk 14, 62.

origin to the early Church rather than to Jesus himself, while the last instance in Jesus' address to the Sanhedrin is simply a citation of Daniel.¹

Jesus then, it appears, began to identify the Son of Man with the deutero-isaian suffering and exalted Servant of God only after the disciples had been led to acknowledge his messianic character. It is this mysterious identification of himself which most interests Mark, and the evangelist has built his whole christology upon the question, 'How is it that scripture says concerning the Son of Man that he must suffer greatly and must be despised?'² In fact, half the Son of Man texts in Mark deal with his mission as a suffering messiah. It is perhaps significant that, of these seven instances, only three are repeated by both Matthew and Luke. Thus we seem to be dealing with a conception of Jesus as Son of Man, which is peculiar to Mark.

Accordingly, for Mark the mystery surrounding Jesus may be best expressed by reminding his reader that he who taught his disciples³ and declared to his judges⁴ that he himself would one day be recognized as the one described in Daniel,⁵ was in reality to suffer and die and rise as Son of Man. In the marcan gospel, Jesus insists on this truth in the triple prophecy of his passion and resurrection.⁶ He repeats it in the logion which is regarded as characteristic of Mark: 'Why, even the Son of Man has come to act as a servant, not to be served, and to give his life as ransom for the rest of men'.⁷ The theme also recurs in the marcan passion-narrative.⁸

A word must be said about the two earliest occurrences of the title in Mark to justify the suggestion already made that 'Son of Man' has been introduced into these logia either by the evangelist himself or by the apostolic tradition he records. Both texts present Jesus' claim to equality with God himself. The first deals with the power to forgive sin, which on the admission of Jesus' adversaries is a uniquely divine prerogative.⁹ 'Now in order that you may realize that the Son of Man possesses authority to forgive sins *in this world* . . .'¹⁰ The second text is likewise a clear assertion of Jesus' divinity, a mystery which Mark consistently represents (as do all the evangelists) as revealed only after Jesus' resurrection through the holy Spirit. 'Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord (*Kyrios*) even of the sabbath'.¹¹ Here we have the only instance of the post resurrec-

¹ Dan 7, 13.

⁴ Mk 14, 62.

⁷ Mk 10, 45.

¹⁰ Mk 2, 10.

² Mk 9, 12.

⁵ Dan 7, 13.

⁸ Mk 14, 21; Mk 14, 41.

¹¹ Mk 2, 28.

³ Mk 13, 16.

⁶ Mk 8, 31; 9, 31; 10, 33-34.

⁹ Mk 2, 7.

tion title *Kyrios* applied to Jesus during his earthly career by Mark. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to conclude that both these sayings in their present form are the fruit of the christological reflection of the apostolic Church.

How does Mark then conceive the quest of the Son of Man? Jesus carries on this quest during his earthly life in the guise of the lowly, suffering Servant of God, who ultimately gives himself as ransom for men, although they are ignorant of who he really is, the Son of God. The human response to this quest is indeed made possible in any true sense only after Jesus' resurrection. Jesus himself asserts this to his faithful followers in foretelling the destruction of the sanctuary in Jerusalem. 'And then will men behold the Son of Man coming upon clouds with great power and glory'.¹ He repeats the same idea in his reply to the highpriest's query.² Only the man with eyes enlightened by christian faith can comprehend the mystery of the quest of the Son of Man and respond by seeking him in turn. This truth Mark will depict dramatically by means of the second cry uttered by Jesus upon the cross – a cry of victory belonging properly to the risen Christ, which terminates the old religious regime (symbolized by the rending of the temple veil),³ and evokes the astonishing response, 'In truth this man was God's Son!'⁴

The Son of Man in Q

Before we examine the Son of Man theology in the other two synoptic evangelists, we must take account of the other principal literary source employed by both Matthew and Luke in addition to their use of Mark. It has been commonly designated as *Q* in modern critical scholarship from the german *Quelle*, source.

Literary critics of the synoptic gospels generally assign seven Son of Man sayings to *Q*. While these appear in both the matthean and lucan gospels, their lucan form is probably a more faithful representation of the original source, since Matthew has demonstrably altered several of these logia to make them conform more exactly to his own characteristic conception of the Son of Man.

The first of these insists upon the completely human character of the Son of Man, a source of scandal to many who dealt with Jesus during his public ministry. 'The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, Look at the glutton and drunkard, the lover of tax-gatherers and sinners'.⁵

¹ Mk 13, 26.

² Mk 14, 61 - 62.

³ Mk 15, 38.

⁴ Mk 15, 39.

⁵ Lk 7, 34; cited exactly by Mt 11, 19.

The next saying, also identical in Matthew,¹ is a puzzling statement. 'Foxes have holes; the birds in the sky, nests; the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head'.² The logion seems to contradict certain indications in the gospels that Jesus did have a home in Capharnaum during his public life.³ The saying then is more comprehensible in the light of the early Church's faith in the dynamic presense of the contemporary Christ, who is everywhere engaged upon the quest of men's allegiance without being confined by the limitations of his earthly, mortal condition.

Luke presents Jonah, the preacher of repentance to a non-Israelite people, as a type of Jesus' quest of men. 'Just as Jonah was a sign for the ninevites, so will the Son of Man be for the men of this age'.⁴ The next instance of our title reminds the christian reader that only the Church is cognizant of the mystery of the lordship of the risen Christ, expressed through the title, Son of Man. Accordingly, 'those outside' the faith, who are unaware of who he really is, will be excused for their unfavourable reaction to the gospel which proclaims him Lord. 'And every man who will say a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven: the one who blasphemes against the holy Spirit will not be forgiven'.⁵ It is those who have once come to the christian faith and then closed their hearts to the operation of the holy Spirit (the sin 'impossible' of forgiveness),⁶ who are incapable, morally speaking, of repentance.

The next logion forms the conclusion of a little parable, the purpose of which in Luke appears to consist in keeping the Church perennially alerted to the final coming of her Lord. 'You in your turn must be ready also, because at an hour you do not anticipate the Son of Man is coming'.⁷ The parable, which presents the master as waiting upon his vigilant servants, like Jesus at the last supper, has probably a eucharistic orientation; and so forms a kind of echo of St Paul.⁸ It is principally at the celebration of the eucharist that the Church's expectancy of the contemporary Christ's return in glory is stimulated and nourished.

The last two logia from Q have been set by Luke into his discourse on the parousia of the Lord Jesus. The first saying insists upon the undeniable clarity of the final manifestation of the risen Lord. 'Just as lightning flashing lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be (in his day)'.⁹ The second

¹ Lk 9, 58.

² Mt 8, 20.

³ Mk 2, 1; 2, 15; 3, 20; cf Jn 2, 12.

⁴ Lk 11, 30.

⁵ Lk 12, 10; Mt 12, 32.

⁶ Heb 6, 4-6; 10, 26-27; Mt 21, 3.

⁷ Lk 12, 40.

⁸ 1 Cor 11, 26.

⁹ Lk 17, 24.

logion expresses the culpably negligent attitude of the unbelievers who will be caught unprepared by the parousia. 'Just as it was in Noah's time, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man'.¹ The third evangelist reinforces this warning with two sayings found only in his gospel. He compares the attitude of the faithless to the insouciance of Lot's fellow-citizens: 'It will be similar on the day the Son of Man is revealed'.² The other saying forms the conclusion of the lucan parable about the judge and the importunate widow. 'But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith upon earth?'³ Luke does not appear too optimistic about the acceptance by man of the contemporary Christ, despite his unwearied quest for man.⁴

The Son of Man in the matthean gospel

When we examine Matthew's christology of the Son of Man, we discover that he is indebted (more than Luke) to Mark for his conception. In fact, Matthew has carefully recorded all the marcan logia, even if, in two instances, he has omitted the expression Son of Man itself.⁵ On the other hand, he has notably modified three of the logia deriving from Q, in order to incorporate them into his own theology of the Son of Man, which is characterized by his concentration upon the contemporary *presence* of the glorified Christ in history and particularly in the Church. Thus our evangelist has transformed the sign of Jonah as preacher of repentance into a symbol of Jesus' death and resurrection. 'Just as Jonah spent three days and three nights in the whale's belly, the Son of Man will likewise spend three days and three nights buried in the ground'.⁶ The other two Q logia, included as we have seen in Luke's discourse on the final manifestation of the parousiac Christ, have been inserted into the matthean instruction on the ruin of the temple. 'Just as lightning from the east flashes clear over to the west, so will be the presence (parousia) of the Son of Man'.⁷ 'The presence (parousia) of the Son of Man will be a repetition of what happened in Noah's time'.⁸

Here Matthew's peculiar usage of the term parousia is to be noted. The first evangelist does not employ the word in its technical pauline sense of the second coming of Christ at the end of history. Rather it signifies for him the *manifested presence* of the contemporary Lord Jesus, revealed through certain events in christian sacred

¹ Lk 17, 26.

⁴ Lk 19, 10.

⁷ Mt 24, 27.

² Lk 17, 30.

⁵ Mt 10, 33; 16, 21.

⁸ Mt 24, 37.

³ Lk 18, 8.

⁶ Mt 12, 40.

history, e.g. the destruction of Jerusalem. Such a presence, of course, can be revealed only to the eyes of christian faith, since it is an historical 'visitation' of the exalted Lord similar to God's divine visitations of Israel in the Old Testament. A saying peculiar to Matthew, which recapitulates his view of God's celebrated visitation in Noah's day, makes the same point. 'Men were unaware until the deluge came and destroyed them all: so will the presence (parousia) of the Son of Man be'.¹

This dynamic presence of the contemporary Christ is alluded to in other logia found only in Matthew. 'I can assure you, you will not have exhausted the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes'.² In the same vein Matthew interprets the parable of the sower. 'By way of answer, Jesus said, The farmer sowing good seed symbolizes the Son of Man'.³ The guidance of the Church by the apostolic college is a form of manifestation of the invisible direction of the Church by the exalted Lord. 'I can assure you, that you who have become my followers will in the new age, when the Son of Man takes his place upon his glorious throne, also take your places on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel'.⁴ This 'judging', in Matthew's view, appears to mean the contemporary exercise of apostolic authority, not an eschatological judgment.

Thus Matthew's Son of Man christology is in harmony with his favourite conception of the risen Christ as 'Emmanuel (with us is God)',⁵ whose perpetual presence in the christian Church, particularly through her liturgical celebrations,⁶ was the object of the ascending Christ's final promise to his own.⁷ Where Mark was chiefly concerned to show that the exalted Son of Man attained his contemporary status by obediently following his vocation as the Suffering Servant, Matthew – without indeed neglecting the role of the Son of Man as the eschatological judge⁸ – is principally interested in presenting him as dynamically involved with the on-going historical process. The living faith of the apostolic Church continues to declare, in response to the question 'Who do men say the Son of Man is?',⁹ that he is 'the messiah, the Son of the living God'.¹⁰

Luke's conception of the Son of Man

Like Matthew, Luke has made use both of Mark and of Q. He

¹ Mt 24, 39.

⁴ Mt 19, 28.

⁷ Mt 28, 20.

⁹ Mt 16, 13.

² Mt 10, 23.

⁵ Mt 1, 23.

⁸ Mt 13, 41; 16, 27; 25, 31.

¹⁰ Mt 16, 16.

³ Mt 13, 37.

⁶ Mt 18, 20.

has recorded only eight of the marcan Son of Man logia, however, in contrast with Matthew's twelve instances. On the other hand, Luke has probably preserved the Q sayings in the form in which he received them. All but one of these he has inserted into the rather lengthy section of his gospel devoted to Jesus' last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem.¹ This ascent to the holy city for the *dénouement* of Jesus' mission of salvation through his death and resurrection has become for Luke a symbol of that 'exodus'² from this world by which man's redemption was wrought. In fact, twelve of the twenty-five lucan Son of Man logia are found in this part of the third gospel, which contains most of the materials uncovered by Luke's personal research. It is then in this section of Luke's gospel that we may expect to find indications of his own characteristic Son of Man christology.

Luke, more than any other evangelist, regards the quest of the Son of Man as primarily an act of *salvation*,³ and Jesus appears in this gospel as Saviour.⁴ 'The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost'.⁵

Another lucan peculiarity is the repeated insistence upon the divine necessity under which Jesus carried out his saving mission. The constantly recurring expression, 'it is necessary' (*dei*), is a characteristic of Luke, who traces to the will of God the source of the good news of the gospel. It is of course in 'the scriptures' that this divine decree of salvation in Christ is foretold. Accordingly, Luke repeats Jesus' triple prophecy of his passion and resurrection found in Mark,⁶ while reformulating the logia with his own theological emphasis. 'Listen carefully to these words; for the Son of Man is surely (*mellei*) to be betrayed into men's hands'.⁷ 'Remember we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything written in the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be fulfilled . . .'⁸ Luke, alone of the synoptics, has entirely recast the angelic message to the women at the tomb on easter day, in accordance with this christology. 'Recall that he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man had to be (*dei*) handed over to sinners and be crucified, and rise the third day'.⁹

Finally, Luke is noted for the frequency with which he employs the post-resurrection title, 'the Lord', to designate Jesus during his mortal career.¹⁰ This preoccupation with the contemporary Christ,

¹ Lk 9, 15-19, 27.

³ Cf Lk 1, 69, 71, 77; 2, 30; 3, 6; 19, 9.

⁶ Lk 9, 22; 9, 44; 18, 31-33.

⁹ Lk 24, 6-7.

² Lk 9, 38.

⁴ Lk 2, 11.

⁷ Lk 9, 44.

⁵ Lk 19, 10.

⁸ Lk 18, 31 ff.

¹⁰ The phrase occurs about eighteen times after Lk 7, 13.

dynamically involved in the christian historical process, which forms the principal theme of Acts, may be perceived in certain lucan Son of Man sayings. 'Happy are you when men hate you, and when they excommunicate you, and denounce you, and reject the name you bear as evil on account of the Son of Man'.¹ 'I tell you, every man who confesses me before men, the Son of Man will also confess him before the angels of God'.² 'Days are coming when you will yearn to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it'.³ This christian consciousness of a profoundly personal relationship to the contemporary Son of Man will support the faithful disciple in times of crisis, like the destruction of Jerusalem. 'Watch prayerfully always, that you may succeed in escaping all this which will assuredly happen, and may stand in the presence of the Son of Man'.⁴

The Son of Man in the fourth gospel

At first sight, the Son of Man christology emanating from 'the school of John', recorded in the fourth gospel, appears to owe nothing to the synoptic tradition. Upon closer inspection however, certain themes reappear. One of these is the exalted Christ's function as eschatological judge.⁵ 'God has given him power to exercise judgment because he is Son of Man'.⁶ Another motif found in the synoptic passion narratives has become a notable characteristic of the fourth evangelist: the use of the phrase, 'the hour', to designate Jesus' passion and death. Mark represents Jesus as saying to the disciples in Gethsemani, 'The hour has come! See, the Son of Man is being handed over into the power of evil men'.⁷ John makes Jesus say, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified!'⁸

There are two fundamental johannine christological themes which characterize the fourth gospel. The first is the conception that the Son, the perfect expression of the Father, has become man principally to reveal the 'God no man has ever seen'.⁹ This office of revealer of the invisible Father takes precedence, in the thought of the fourth evangelist, even over the work of redemption. Or rather, it is precisely by revealing the Father to man that the incarnate Son carries out his redemptive quest of the whole human family. This induction into the mystery of the Godhead has been

¹ Lk 6, 22.

² Lk 12, 8.

³ Lk 17, 22.

⁴ Lk 21, 36.

⁵ Cf Mk 8, 38; Mt 13, 41; 16, 27; 25, 31-32; Lk 9, 26; 12, 8.

⁶ Jn 5, 27.

⁷ Mk 14, 41; Mt 26, 45; cf Lk 22, 53.

⁸ Jn 12, 23.

⁹ Jn 1, 18.

accomplished by Jesus Christ through his passion and resurrection, which together constitute, in the language of John, Jesus' 'glory',¹ or 'exaltation', or 'lifting up'.² Thus Jesus as the contemporary Christ is the unique mediator, the only Way to the Father. He is the new 'Jacob's ladder': 'I solemnly assure you, that you will behold the sky opened, and the angels of God going up and coming down upon the Son of Man'.³ 'No one has gone up to heaven except him, who had come down from heaven – the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that the man with faith in him may have eternal life'.⁴ 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM; and that I do nothing of myself. I simply utter those things the Father taught me'.⁵

The other theme of first-rate importance in the fourth gospel is that the Son, the Word, has become 'flesh'⁶ primarily to give man his glorified flesh to eat in the eucharist; and so integrate man into God's family life by imparting to him the Spirit.⁷ This christological conception has left its imprint upon some of the Son of Man logia preserved by John. 'Do not work for the food that spoils, but for the food leading to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For the Father has put his seal upon him'.⁸ 'I solemnly assure you, that if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink the blood of the Son of Man, you will not have life within yourselves'.⁹ Yet there are two essential preludes to the christian's efficacious participation in the eucharist. One is in the order of salvation history: the glorification of Jesus' 'flesh', since in its mortal condition 'the flesh profits nothing',¹⁰ because it cannot impart 'the Spirit who gives life', until Jesus is glorified.¹¹ The other *sine qua non* belongs to the order of christian faith. 'What if you behold the Son of Man going up, where he was before?'¹² For John the key question is that addressed by Jesus to the blind man: 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'¹³ For unless the christian can 'behold his glory'¹⁴ through the faith-filled contemplation of Jesus' death and resurrection, he cannot behold the Son in Jesus, and so come to 'see the Father',¹⁵ the ultimate object of man's quest of the Son of Man.

¹ Jn 2, 11; 12, 41; 13, 31.

³ Jn 1, 51; cf Gen 28, 12.

⁷ Cf Jn 6, 51; 7, 39.

¹¹ Jn 7, 37–39.

¹⁵ Jn 14, 9.

² Jn 3, 13–14; 8, 28; 12, 32.

⁴ Jn 3, 13–15.

⁸ Jn 6, 27.

¹² Jn 6, 62.

⁵ Jn 8, 28.

⁹ Jn 6, 53.

¹³ Jn 9, 35.

⁶ Jn 1, 14.

¹⁰ Jn 6, 63.

¹⁴ Jn 1, 14.