Chapter 4

THE SON OF MAN

1. The Problem

At the beginning of this work we claimed that one of the most important contributions made by modern biblical studies to the interpretation of the New Testament, and especially of the Gospels, is an emphasis on the theological rather than historical questions. We insisted, however, that the historical origin of the Christian message must not be lost in the interpreter’s search for the original author’s or his own ‘existential’ understanding of the phenomena which lie behind that message. With the exception of Rudolf Bultmann’s basically Lutheran insistence on ‘sola fide’ (faith alone), most scholars, including Bultmann’s own school, would nowadays admit that Christianity must look to Jesus of Nazareth if it is to understand itself.¹

In any quest for the historical Jesus, the argument ultimately hinges upon what one decides about the Gospel’s use of the Christological title ‘the Son of Man’. This is the only title which is used strictly by Jesus himself to refer to his person, his mission and his destiny. It appears 71 times in the Synoptic tradition (Mark 14 times; Matthew 31 times; Luke 26 times). If we are anxious to know what Jesus thought of himself, his mission and his destiny — the so-called ‘self-consciousness’ of Jesus — then this looks like the title which should supply the answer. However, the solution is not so near at hand, as there is little agreement on the significance of the title — if it is a title at all! Matthew Black has written: ‘The Son of Man problem in the Gospels is one of the most perplexing and

¹. For a consideration of Bultmann’s position and the more recent attempts to return to the historical Jesus, see J. M. Robinson, A New Quest of the Historical Jesus, Studies in Biblical Theology 25 (London, SCM Press, 1959).
challenging in the whole field of Biblical theology. Other scholars are not so optimistic. John Knox complains that the problem is like a jigsaw puzzle in which some of the pieces are missing and others have been altered in the course of transmission, while James Robinson describes the whole discussion among scholars as a 'methodological impasse'. It is beyond our scope to survey this battlefield. We merely wish to sketch the main positions taken by scholars in the debate.

(a) All are authentic sayings of the Lord.

(b) A large group of scholars look to Dan 7 as a scene describing the apocalyptic end of time, and claim that this was the way Jesus used the title which came from Dan 7.13. This theory looks to other intertestamental literature — especially the Book of Enoch and 4 Esdras — to show that Dan 7 and the Son of Man was interpreted in this way at the time of Jesus. Sayings about the suffering Son of Man and the Son of Man among men as the lord of the Sabbath and the forgiver of sins are regarded as creations of the early Church, taking the title from what Jesus said about his final apocalyptic appearance, and widening its use to Jesus among men. This is a very common opinion among German scholars, and the recent work of H. E. Todt has carried this line of thought one step further by claiming that Jesus spoke of an apocalyptic Son of Man, but did not identify himself with that figure. Edard Schweizer will not allow a clearly defined title in the world of Jesus. He argues that Jesus used 'the Son of Man' to refer to himself as the 'present' Son of Man who called all men into question by his use of an enigmatic title.

(d) Some suggest that Jesus never used the term. P. Vielhauer has argued that Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God — never of the Son of Man. Norman Perrin, in his excellent and influential book, Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus, has claimed that the early Christian community explained the resurrection in terms of Dan 7.13, and thus gave birth to the widespread use of the title for Jesus.

(e) Another attempt to solve the problem has come from Geza Vermes, who claims that in Jewish sources the Aramaic 'bar nasha' was only a circumlocution for 'I'. The phrase 'the Son of Man' has no theological content, and is not to be linked with Dan 7.13.

None of this is very satisfactory, and it is now in serious crisis because of lack of evidence. The scholars who assumed that the title was a current apocalyptic title of honour used to confidently point to Enoch and 4 Esdras as evidence. The Qumran material has brought this view into question, as the caves have produced fragments from every chapter of the Book of Enoch, except chs 37-71. Inter-


4. Pre-critical scholarship generally assumed this as the case.


estingly enough, this is a section of the book which has always been recognised as 'apart' from the rest of the work. It is a series of parables or 'Similitudes', and it is only here that the title 'the Son of Man' is found. None of this section seems to have been known by the sectarians, and this has caused J. T. Milik and others to argue that the Son of Man section of the Book of Enoch is a later Christian interpolation, and not evidence for a pre-Christian apocalyptic use of the title which may have been formative in the Gospel traditions.10

It seems clear from the above confusion that it is time to look at our sources once more. C. F. D. Moule and M. D. Hooker have done this by presenting an interpretation of Dan 7.13, which, they argue, stands behind Jesus' use of the title, and its use in the Synoptic tradition.11 The figure of the Son of Man in the famous vision represents or symbolises the faithful Israelites during the persecutions of Antiochus IV. What is promised in the vision is that these faithful ones will be finally vindicated. Through obedience to the will of God and humble acceptance of the suffering which this obedience must bring with it, 'the Son of Man' (the faithful Israelites) will be ultimately vindicated in the court of heaven. The certainty of his final vindication gives the Son of Man his authority — he is the one who will have the last word. From this understanding of Dan 7, one can see the Son of Man sayings in the Synoptic Gospels as Jesus' very possible application of this idea to himself, as he has fulfilled the pattern of humble obedience and suffering. However, he is confident in the hope of a final vindication. Its nature could not have been known to Jesus, but we believe that it took place in his resurrection-exaltation. It


is, then, in the acceptance or refusal of the authority or a refusal to share in the same suffering that men can either gain or lose their own ultimate vindication.

Despite the fact that it has now been proven, especially by the work of C. H. Dodd,12 that the Johannine Gospel rests upon ancient traditions, related to pre-Synoptic traditions, but which developed along their own trajectory, very few look to the last Gospel's use of the title 'the Son of Man' to see if it can shed light upon the early Church's use of the title. This reticence is explained by the presumption of most scholars that by the time the Fourth Gospel was written (about 100 A.D.) the Son of Man title had lost all its original sense, and was to be identified with the major Johannine titles for Jesus — the Logos and the Son of God. It seems to us, however, that this presumption is not justified by the evidence of the Son of Man sayings in the Gospel. Even a rapid survey of these sayings shows that there is a Johannine Son of Man Christology which adds to our understanding of both the use of the title in the early Church and the Johannine presentation of the person and significance of Jesus.13

The first remark that must be made concerns the location of the Johannine Son of Man sayings. A. J. B. Higgins has claimed that the use of the title is 'scattered haphazardly' throughout the first thirteen chapters of the Gospel.14 It must be noticed that Jn 1.12 deals with the public manifestation of Jesus, and then in 13.31 Jesus announces, in the final Son of Man saying: 'Now has the Son of Man been glorified,' Jesus appears in public at the


13. I have attempted to prove this point in two works: The Johannine Son of Man, Biblioteca de Ciencias Religiosas 14 (Rome, LAS, 1978); 'The Johannine Son of Man', Biblical Theology Bulletin 6 (1976), pp. 177-189. What follows is a simplification of this article.

end of the book, in his Passion. Again, something allied to the title appears as Pilate points to Jesus and announces: 'Behold the man!' It appears that limitation of the title ‘the Son of Man’ to the public appearances of Jesus may be an important indication that its use has something to say about the public manifestation of God in and through Jesus. A survey of the sayings themselves confirms this indication.

2. The Sayings

   John 1.51

Because of the awkward change from singular to plural in ‘And he said to him, “Truly, truly I say to you (plural), you (plural) will see the heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man”’ (Jn 1.51), many scholars regard this strange saying as a detached saying about the Son of Man, added to the otherwise homogeneous passage of 1.43-50. Whatever the pre-history of this passage may have been, importance must be given to the uniquely Johannine use of the double ‘amen’. The Evangelist shows, by his use of this solemn introduction, that he wishes to make a point which he considered important. He may have taken the saying from somewhere else, but we can only speculate about that. The question which must be asked is: what does this saying mean in its present context?

   The verse comes at the end of a long series of titles, given to Jesus by the Evangelist or other people (vv. 20, 21a, 21b, 29, 34, 41, 45, 49). Jesus’ reply to the acclamations of others is found in v. 51, and he replies in terms of ‘greater things’ which his disciples will see in the ascending and descending of angels upon the Son of Man. Here John could be using a traditional pattern, according to which Jesus replied to other titles in terms of the Son of Man (see Mk 8.31 par.; Mk 14.61-62 par.). In Jn 1.19-49

15. The double ‘amen’ is found only in John in the New Testament. It appears 24 times.

the belief of the early Church is certainly reflected, but John indicates another point of view. Using a current understanding of the scene of Jacob’s dream from Gen 28.12, John speaks of Jesus as the place where God communicates with man. There is no historical fulfillment of the scene, as the disciples are promised that they ‘will see’ the revelation of God in the Son of Man. The use of the verb ‘to see’ in the Fourth Gospel frequently refers to faith in the revelation of God, which can be ‘seen’ or ‘not seen’, according to the response of the one called to faith in Jesus. This is most clearly shown in Jn 9, but is frequent in the whole Gospel (see 3.6; 11.4a; 16.16; Jn 3.2). The disciples will be called to believe in this revelation. Jn 1.51 must be understood as programmatic for the whole of the public revelation of God in the appearance of the Johannine Jesus; it is the promise of the Son of Man.

   John 3.13-15

As we have already seen, Jn 3 has a puzzling mixture of narrative, monologue and reflection which has always caused difficulty for the interpreter. We have argued that 2.23-3.36 must be seen as a section of the passage from Cana to Cana (2.1 - 4.54) which deals with the problem of various types of faith. In our passage Nicodemus shows incomplete faith (3.1-10) and is corrected in a reflection from Jesus (vv. 11-21) while the Baptist shows correct faith (vv. 22-30), and this leads to a reflection from the Evangelist (vv. 31-36).

Within this context we again find ‘the Son of Man’ used by Jesus to correct an incomplete confession of faith (see v. 2). Vv. 13-15 must be understood as a statement about Jesus as the revealer of the heavenly things mentioned in v. 12. Jesus’ words are directed against the suggestions of a current stream of Jewish piety, which claimed that the great saints of Israel (Moses, Elijah, Isaiah etc.) had ascended to receive their knowledge of God, and then

16. See above, pp. 57-59.
descended to reveal it. Jesus does not say that he ascended, but that no-one (oudeis) has ascended to see God and find out about him so that he could descend again to reveal him. There is only one who can reveal God with ultimate authority — the Son of Man, who has descended in the incarnation to reveal God to men. As this is the case, then vv. 14-15 can be readily understood as the further specification of what has been said in v. 13. As Jesus is the unique revealer of God, John can now tell us how that revelation takes place (v. 14), and spell out its consequences (v. 15). The Son of Man who is the unique revealer must be lifted up on a cross, so that all may look upon him and have eternal life in him (see Num 21.8-9). If the unique importance of the Son of Man had not been clearly stated in v. 13, then there would be no point in vv. 14-15. The parallel drawn with the serpent on a stake must be kept; it refers to the paradox of the Johannine Cross, which is at once a ‘lifting up’ of Jesus on a cross and his exaltation and enthronement.

In vv. 13-15 we meet, for the first time, the indication that the Son of Man title is intimately linked with the human Jesus. It is used to speak of Jesus who has ‘descended’ in the incarnation, and who was lifted up on a cross. The event of the crucifixion is an eminently human event. Only a man can be nailed to a cross, and the lifting up of Jesus on the Cross is always spoken of in terms of ‘the Son of Man’ (see 8.28; 12.23,34). Never do we hear of the crucifixion of the Son of God!

17. Many English translations (New English Bible, Jerusalem Bible, Knox Bible) have ‘who is in heaven’ in v. 13. This is not found in the best manuscripts, and should be omitted (as in the Revised Standard Version).

18. This double sense is given by the use of the verb hupsothenai, which can mean both ‘to lift up’ in a physical sense, and ‘to exalt’ in the sense of a raising in honour. See W. Thüising, Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu im Johannesevangelium, Neuentestamentliche Abhandlungen 21/1 (Münster, Aschendorff, 1970), pp. 3-37.

John 5.27
Our next saying appears in ch. 5, which, as we have already seen, is greatly concerned with the Johannine understanding of Jesus as the Son of God. Throughout the first part of the discourse (vv. 19-30) Jesus speaks of his relationship to his Father, and the consequences of that relationship. In v. 22 we are told that all judgment has been given to the Son by the Father. However, when Jesus speaks of the exercising of judgment, he speaks of himself as ‘the Son of Man’ (v. 27). The verses which follow (vv. 28-29) speak of some sort of future judgment. John usually speaks of judgment as already taking place (see v. 25), but the Fourth Gospel’s idea of ‘realised’ eschatology is carefully balanced by a word about the other side of death, and the traditional future eschatology is found, for example, in 5.28-29. In 5.27 is dependent upon the Greek translation of Dan 7.13-14 — also the background for the Synoptic Son of Man sayings — and could well be the oldest application of the title, taken directly from Dan 7.13, to Jesus. As in the Greek vision of Dan 7.13, the title is used here without an article (‘a Son of Man’) and may refer to the ‘humaness’ of Jesus, but it must also be understood as a title, and as the specification of Jesus’ role as judge. He is able to exercise judgment, because he is Son of Man. In vv. 24-25 reference is made to the self-judgment of men through their reaction to the revelation brought by and in Jesus. This is continued into v. 27. The Johannine Son of Man is ‘where judgment takes place’ in the way described in vv. 24-25. The theme of judgment was very important in the Synoptic Gospels’ presentation of Jesus as the Son of Man (see, for example, Mk 8.38; 13.26; Matt 13.41; 16.13; 26.2; Lk 6.22; 7.34; 9.58; 17.24-26; 22.48 etc.), and again John’s link with the older traditions can be felt. In 3.15 we learnt that anyone who believes in the elevated Son of Man has eternal life. It is implicit, therefore, that those who refuse to believe shall die. This is the judgment that the

Johannine Son of Man exercises.

John 6.27,53,62

The sixth chapter of the Fourth Gospel is one of the most moving pieces of literature in the New Testament. With great artistry John has unfolded his teaching in the following fashion:

(I) 6.1-4: Introduction to the theme and to the Players
   Where: Sea of Galilee —
   Mountain (vv. 1 and 3)
   When: Passover (v. 4)
   Why: Signs (v. 2)
   Who: A multitude and the disciples
         (vv. 2 and 3)

(II) 6.5-21: Two miracle stories
   (i) vv. 5-15: The miracle of the Loaves
                  and Fishes and the raising of
                  false messianic hopes
                  (vv. 14-15).
   (ii) vv. 16-21: The correction of that hope—
                  at least among his disciples —
                  in the revelation of Jesus as
                  'I am' (v. 20).

(III) 6.22-24: Transition scene. The players are again
               introduced and a further development of
               the theme is indicated.
   Where: Capernaum (v. 24)
   When: Next day (closer to Passover)
          (vv. 22)
   Why: Seek Jesus (they had not been
         present at the revelation of Jesus
         as 'I am') (v. 24).
   Who: The people who had eaten the
        bread (v. 23).

(IV) 6.25-59: The discourse on the bread from heaven
              which (who) gives eternal life.

(V) 6.60-71: Two possible reactions to the revelation

of Jesus as the Bread of Life.

(i) vv. 60-65: The reaction of 'many of
               his disciples' who leave
               Jesus.

(ii) vv. 66-71: The confession of Peter,
                who accepts Jesus.

Within this dense presentation of the person and
significance of Jesus, 'the true bread from heaven', he is thrice
called 'the Son of Man' (vv. 27,53,62).

In 6.27 Jesus is again correcting the false messianic
hopes expressed by vv. 14-15. He has already revealed
himself to his disciples as 'I am' on the lake (vv. 16-21), but
the crowd which assembles in vv. 22-24 still seek him for
the wrong reasons. He corrects their false hopes in terms of
'the Son of Man'. Their hopes for a second Moses and
eschatological manna are vain.20 He offers, instead, a
revelation which will endure and which will produce eternal
life, and he offers it to men in his role as the Son of Man.

The reference to the Son of Man in 6.53 certainly
contains eucharistic overtones, but the message of the revelation
of the Son of Man and the life to be found therein,
so dominant in vv. 27-47, is still present. As in other
eucharistic passages in the New Testament (Mk 14.22-26;
Matt 26.26-30; Lk 22.15-20, I Cor 11.23-25), the Cross is
also central to John's thought here, introduced by v. 51c:
'The bread which I shall give is my flesh for the life of the
world.' John continues to develop his Christology of the

20. The Jews' expectations of vv. 14-15 reflect their conviction that the Messiah would be announced by a second Moses and another miracle of manna. See, for example, the sentiments of a book written in the second half of the first century: 'And it shall come to pass at that self-same time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it in those years, because these are those who have come to the consummation of time. And it shall come to pass after these things, when the time of the advent of the Messiah is fulfilled, that he shall return in glory' (2 Baruch 29.8-30.1).
Son of Man as the place, among men, where God is revealed. The food which remains forever (v. 27) is to be had in the full acceptance, in faith, of the revelation of God by and in the Son of Man, which will reach its climax on Calvary (v. 53). This is not mere mysticism, however, as it can be experienced in the celebration of the Eucharist.\(^{21}\)

Jesus’ reply to the dissatisfaction of his listeners in the difficult vv. 62-63 is not to be regarded as a reference to an ascension which will either condemn or save them. Jesus does not want to discourage them further, so he asks a rhetorical question: ‘And if you were to see the Son of Man ascend?’ There is no need for this, as Jesus adds ‘to where he was before’! Because of his pre-existence as the Logos, the Word made flesh in the Son of Man is the fulness of God’s revelation. Recalling 3.13 and the Jewish speculations which stood behind that saying,\(^{22}\) Jesus reminds his listeners that he has no need to ascend because he comes from above. He was there ‘before’ and thus the authoritative words which he has spoken to them are spirit and life (v. 63).

**John 8.28**

As Jesus moves closer to the end of his ministry, the conflict with his opponents becomes more marked. In Jn 8.12-30 we have a last effort on the part of Jesus to give witness to the light (v. 12) before an unbelieving audience. We see the first part of the discourse in ch. 8 as running from vv. 12-30, and as positive in tone. It is not ‘too late’ for the Jews, and their questions (see especially the difficult v. 25) are not hostile but rather ignorant. That this is the case is indicated by the conclusion of the section:

> ‘many believed in him’ (episteusan eis auton) (v. 30).

The second section concludes ominously: ‘so they took up stones to throw at him’ (v. 59).

In the more positive section of the discourse Jesus reveals himself as the one ‘from above’, and he speaks of himself as ‘I am he’. They must believe in this unique revelation brought by Jesus if they are to be saved (vv. 23-24). This announcement meets with a total lack of understanding (v. 25) and draws an exclamation of frustration from Jesus in ‘a mood of yearning impatience.’\(^{24}\) Despite the obtuseness of his audience, Jesus shows a continual resolve to do the will of his Father (v. 26). That this interpretation is correct is confirmed by the editorial note of v. 27: ‘They did not understand that he was speaking to them of the Father.’ In a final attempt to convince them, he announces that his true identity will be recognized when they have lifted up the Son of Man: ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he.’ Throughout the passage Jesus has been concerned with his origin ‘from above’ and his being sent by the Father (vv. 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29). Because this is true he is the one who can authentically reveal the Father. Unless the Jews believe this they will die in their sins (v. 24). Despite their obtuseness (vv. 25-27), they will be able to look upon the Son of Man whom they have lifted up on a cross, and there they will find God’s revelation to men (v. 28). This is the significance of the identification of Jesus with the ‘I am he’ formula. By using this formula John

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22. See above, pp. 77-78.

23. In v. 30 the verb *pisteuō* is used with *eis*, while in v. 31 the same verb is followed by a dative. This could be an indication of two different types of faith. The second type (v. 31) is insufficient. See R. E. Brown, *John*, pp. 513-515 and the bibliography mentioned there. Against this distinction is R. Bultmann, Art. ‘pisteuō’, *TDNT* VI, pp. 222-223.

identifies Jesus with the God who revealed himself in this way in the Old Testament, especially in the Pentateuch (see Exod 14.4,18; 20.2,5; 29.46; Lev 19 passim; 20.17) and in Second Isaiah (see such passages as 43.10 and 45.18). Jn 8.28, therefore, claims that the elevated Son of Man will always be the place where man can find God's revelation to men and judge himself by accepting or refusing it.

John 9.35

The importance of 'the Son of Man' for Johannine Christology is made clear in 9.35, where the man born blind is asked, after a gradual progression towards the light (see vv. 11, 17, 35), to confess his faith in the Son of Man. Nowhere else in the New Testament is the Son of Man made the object of a profession of faith. When the man enquires who this Son of Man is, Jesus replies: 'You have seen him and it is he who speaks to you' (v. 37). The Son of Man is thus identified with the revealer — the one who is 'seen' and the one who 'speaks'. Against this progression towards the true light of the authentic revelation of God, John sets the failure of the Pharisees to see and understand this light which Jesus, the Son of Man, brings. He is the revelation of God among men, the light of the world (v. 5), the manifestation of God to men (v. 3) who can be seen and heard (v. 37) by people who are prepared to see and hear him (v. 39). In their decision they judge themselves according to their choice of the light or the darkness (vv. 39-41). Again Jesus is presented as the unique revealer of God, and consequently as the place of judgment. It is not necessary to find other New Testament passages where the Son of Man is made the object of a confession of faith. It is sufficient to recognise what this title meant in the Johannine Church: Jesus as the place where God's revelation is to be found and, consequently, as the place where men will judge themselves. As this is the case, it is not at all strange to find the Johannine Jesus asking: 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'

John 12,23,34

Introduced by the prophetic announcement of Caiphas (11.45-53) and the arrival of the final Passover feast (11.55; 12.1), Jn 12 is dominated by the coming passion. The hints given throughout the Gospel that the supreme moment of the revelation of the Son of Man would take place on the Cross (1.13-14; 6.27,53; 8.28) are now made fully explicit in 12.23.34. In the context of an anointing for death and a prophecy of the betrayal, his entry into Jerusalem is presented as the acclamation of a political messiah by John's reference to the palm fronds, and his addition of 'the King of Israel' to the quotation from Ps. 118 (v. 13). 25 On hearing of the advent of the representatives of the Gentile world Jesus can now proclaim, against the false messianic hopes aroused by his entry, that 'the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified' (v. 23). The glorification referred to in this context must be the Cross, and this is made clearer in vv. 32-33. The Jews, however, will not accept this Son of Man, as they have their own ideas about the Messiah (v. 34). They have failed to understand the Johannine Son of Man and 'walk in the darkness' (v. 35).

John 13.31

After the conclusion of the public ministry the passion starts with the symbolic washing of the feet and Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Jesus announces the arrival of the passion by saying: 'Now is the Son of Man glorified and in him God is glorified' (13.31). Jn. 13.31-32 is closely linked with 17.1-5. There seem to be two moments in the glorification of Jesus. Firstly Jesus is glorified and glorifies God on the Cross (13.31), with the perfection of the task 'on earth' which the Father had entrusted to Jesus (17.4. See also 19.28-30). Secondly, intimately linked with the same 'hour', is the glory which will come to the Son when he

returns to that glory which was his with the Father ‘before
the world was made’ (17.5; 13.32. See 1.1-2:14). It is only
in the context of the human manifestation of the glory of
God in Jesus that John uses the title ‘the Son of Man’. The
human Jesus, especially in his being lifted up on the Cross,
is the place, on earth, where men can see the revelation of
God. Once Jesus, through the hour of the Cross, returns to
his Father, to where he was ‘before the world was made’
(see 1.1-2 and 17.5), he is never referred to as ‘the Son of
Man’, but as ‘the Son’ (17.1.5).

John 19.5
All the Son of Man sayings point, ultimately, to the Cross.
In the trial scene before Pilate the significance of the
Johannine Cross is fully explained. At the centre of this
scene, Jesus is ironically crowned (19.1-3), after which he
comes before the crowd, still dressed as a king, and Pilate
proclaims: ‘Here he is — the Man’ (19.5). This is probably
the final indication that the promises initiated in 1.51 are
now fulfilled.

3. Conclusions
Some conclusions can be drawn from this rapid survey.
John presents Jesus as the Son of Man when he wants to
point to the incarnation of God’s revelation, bringing
judgment in its presence in history. Why has John used
the title ‘the Son of Man’ to convey this message? There is no
need to look beyond the traditional Son of Man figure for
an answer to that question, although one must allow that
John has refurbished traditional themes in almost every
instance. This comes about from a profoundly different
vision of Jesus. Hooker and Moule have suggested that the
Son of Man is a figure whose humble obedience and
consequent suffering will be vindicated in his resurrection.
In John the glorification and vindication of the Son of Man
takes place on the Cross. This is so because Jesus comes
from God. What was traditionally ‘outside’ time can now
be comfortably drawn back into John’s enigmatic theology

of a glorification on the Cross. Given this change of view-
point, the contacts between the two traditions are very
strong:

(a) In Jn 5.27 we have a direct link with Dan 7.13. The
Synoptic tradition uses Dan 7 for the apocalyptic
appearance of Jesus at the end of history. John draws
this judgment back into history, in line with his
theology of ‘realised eschatology’.

(b) Almost every Johannine Son of Man saying comes as a
concluding statement on the lips of Jesus, resolving a
series of questions or insufficient confessions about the
person of Jesus (1.51; 3.13-14; 6.27; 8.28; 9.35;
12.23,34). This repeats a traditional pattern in the
Synoptic Gospels, where Jesus replied to his inter-
locutors — who had suggested their own answers
concerning his person and role — in terms of ‘the Son
of Man’ (Mk 8.27-9.1; Matt 16.13-28; Lk 9.18-27; Mk
14.61-62; Matt 26.63-64; Lk 22.67-71).

(c) Twice in the Fourth Gospel we are told that the Son of
Man must (dei) be lifted up (3.14; 12.34) and once it is
announced that the Jews will lift up the Son of Man
(8.28). There is a close link here with the threefold
passion prediction of the Synoptic tradition (Mk 8.31;
9.31; 10.33-34 pars). For the Synoptics this is Jesus’
lowest moment — but for John he is ‘lifted up’ to his
glorification.

(d) The Johannine Son of Man refers to the historical
presence of Jesus, the revelation of God among men —
a revelation which reaches its high point on the Cross.
The Synoptic Son of Man is also present among men,
and a suffering figure, but he is a future judge. This
future Son of Man, so central to the Synoptic tra-
dition, has been drawn back into history by John, as
man is judged by his acceptance or refusal of the
revelation brought by and in the Son of Man.

Throughout, we are dealing with the Johannisation of a
traditional theme.
It is a serious misunderstanding of the Johannine Jesus to identify the significance of ‘the Son of Man’ with that of ‘the Logos’ or ‘the Son of God’. John uses his language carefully, and he has a specific theological point to make when he presents Jesus as ‘the Son of God’. As we have already seen, Jesus’ union of love with the Father is rooted in a relationship which exists outside time and space. It begins in the Father (1.14) and ends in the Father (17.5); it is pre-existent, incarnate and resumed in the glorification of the Son through the Cross. Not so the Son of Man. The title is strictly limited to the human, historical appearance of Jesus of Nazareth. The Son of Man is glorified in the very human experience on the Cross. There is no crucifixion of the Son of God, but neither is there a pre-existent Son of Man.

John has taken the term ‘the Son of Man’ from Christian tradition. He has used the term in a way which betrays his own theological stance in every instance, but the Johannine Son of Man is the continuation of a dynamic, growing interpretation of Dan 7.13 which can be found in the Synoptic Gospel, Enoch, 4 Esdras,26 the Fourth Gospel, and which even extends into the writings of the early Fathers. Between the earlier use of the Son of Man who would come at the end of time as judge, and the Fathers’ use of the term to speak of Jesus’ human condition (see especially Ignatius, Eph. 20.2; Barnabas, 12.10; and Hippolytus, Contra Noetum, 2.15) there is certainly a change of interest. Perhaps John’s use of the term provides the link. His contact with the traditional Son of Man on the one hand, and his accentuation of the human figure on the other, could well place him at the cross-roads between the New Testament and the Fathers of the early Church.

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26. We include Enoch and 4 Esdras, while maintaining that they were not elements in the formation of the Gospel traditions. There is what C. F. D. Moule, The Phenomenon of the New Testament, p. 83, calls ‘a common fund of thoughts behind them’.