THE MESSIANIC CONSCIOUSNESS OF JESUS.

I.

ACCORDING to the evidence of our oldest source, which is closely followed by the other Gospels, Jesus began His public ministry with the proclamation of the Kingdom of God or of Heaven.[1] And this being so, the question at once arises, In what relation does Jesus represent Himself as standing to this Kingdom? Or, in other words, What is the nature of His Messianic consciousness?

It is a question obviously that can only be answered by observing closely His own self-revelation, as evidenced in His words and deeds. And here we are at once met with the significant fact that during the early part of His ministry at any rate Jesus observed a studied reticence with regard to His Messianic claims. For not only did He avoid advancing any such claims Himself, but He imposed silence with regard to them upon others who sought to make them known, as when He forbade the demons to speak (Mark i. 34, iii. 12), or charged the leper whom He had healed to say nothing to any man (Mark i. 44).

Nor is the reason of this far to seek. For Jesus to have begun by openly proclaiming Himself the Messiah, without first of all preparing the way by showing the true nature of the Messianic Kingdom, would have tended only to confirm the false expectations that were then current amongst the Jews, and so have precipitated the very crisis that He wished to avoid. But this is very far from saying that the full consciousness of His Messiahship was not meanwhile constantly present to Jesus' own mind. And though, with the evidence before us, it is impossible to decide whether He arrived at this consciousness all at once or whether it was the result of a gradual development in His own

[1] Mark i. 14; comp. Matt. iv. 17, Luke iv. 43, John iii. 5.

mind, it is now very generally admitted that from the time of His Baptism at any rate, not only was Jesus the appointed Messiah, but that He knew Himself to be so.[1] Then, as the Synoptists are all careful to note, "*the Spirit of God*," which had always been regarded as the peculiar Messianic endowment, descended upon Him:[2] and the full significance of the immediately succeeding Fasting and Temptation can only be realized when we see in them the testing and defining in Jesus' own experience of the truths alike of His Messianic calling, and of the nature of the Kingdom He had come to found.[3]

We are not surprised therefore to find Jesus from this time onwards dropping various scattered hints of this aspect of His Person, as when He identifies Himself with the Bridegroom of Old Testament prophecy (Mark ii. 20; cf. Hos. ii. 21, etc.), or describes Himself as the Coming One, by whom are wrought the wonderful works currently associated with the times of the Messiah (Matt. xi. 4 ff.; cf. Isa. xxxv. 5 f., lxi. 1). But without dwelling upon any such general intimations as these, we may pass at once to the evidence that is afforded regarding Jesus' Messianic consciousness by His two most significant titles, Son of man and Son of God. The consideration of these should

[1] Dr. Martineau's assertion (*Seat of Authority in Religion*, p. 331) that "the Messianic theory of the person of Jesus was made for him, and palmed upon him by his followers, and was not his own," so far from being "a reasonable inference," can only be regarded as an ingenious paradox in view of the general evangelic tradition. Harnack, for instance, whom Dr. Martineau himself quotes, says, "Dass Jesus sich selbst als den Messias bezeichnet hat . . . scheint mir auch die schärfste Prüfung auszuhalten" (*Lehrbuch d. Dogmengeschichte*, i. 57, 58 note).

[2] Matt. iii. 16; Mark i. 10; Luke iii. 22, cf. Luke iv. 18 ff.; Isaiah xlii. 1, lxi. 1.

[3] In this connexion it is interesting to notice that on the first occasion when Jesus announced that it was in Him and His ministry that the Kingdom was actually fulfilled, He pointed out that this ministry among the people must have been preceded in His own experience by a conflict with Satan, out of which He had come victorious (Matt. xii. 27 ff., Luke xi. 19 ff.). See Weiss, *Life of Christ*, E. Tr. ii. 279.

help to bring home to us not only the reality of that consciousness, but also the light in which Jesus Himself regarded His Messianic claims.

I. The Son of Man.

The title occurs over eighty times in the Gospels, or more than fifty times without reckoning the parallels, and on every occasion it is used by Jesus of Himself and never put into the mouth of others.[1] This alone is sufficient to show not only that it was not a current designation at the time, but that it must have been deliberately adopted by Jesus to express some truth He was particularly anxious to convey. When however we proceed to ask what that truth was, we are immediately surrounded by difficulties. Probably no other single phrase of the Gospels has called forth a greater variety of interpretations; nor can we be said even yet to have reached definite conclusions on many of the questions which it raises.[2]

On one point however there is a steadily growing consensus of opinion, namely, that the origin of the phrase is to be sought in the apocalyptic vision of Daniel vii. The prophet, it will be remembered, has been permitted to see four beasts coming up out of the sea, typifying the four great world-kingdoms that are to bear rule over the earth. But not with them is dominion to rest, for, as he gazes in perplexity, "*I saw*," so he tells us, "*in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, . . . and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him*" (*vv.* 13, 14). It is true that not even here is there any mention of a personal Messiah.

[1] John xii. 34 can hardly be regarded as an exception.

[2] A thorough discussion of the title and of the history of its interpretation is contained in Lietzmann's tractate, *Der Menschensohn* (Freiburg, i. B. 1896), but it is impossible to acquiesce in the writer's own conclusion that the title was never used by Jesus Himself, but found its way into the Gospels from a Christian misconception.

The original reference, as *vv.* 18, 22, 27 show, is rather to "*the saints of the Most High*"; that is, the ideal Israel, for whom in the counsels of God the empire of the world is designed.[1] But while the immediate prophetic sense did not go beyond this, the evidence alike of the "Book of Similitudes" of Enoch and of the Second (Fourth) Book of Esdras proves that from an early date the title had come to be interpreted personally of the expected Messiah:[2] and, even if this had not been the case, is there any reason why Jesus should not have so understood it of Himself, putting Himself in the place of the nation, on the ground that in Him its attributes culminated? Certainly no one can read such passages as Matthew xxiv. 30: "*And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*"; or Matthew xxvi. 64: "*Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven,*" without feeling that in both cases Jesus had the Daniel passage directly in view, even while He read into the title a deeper and more precise meaning than was there contained. For no longer, it will be remarked, is it merely "*one like unto a son of man*" who is described, but "*the Son of man.*"

But while thus the origin of Jesus' favourite self-designation is to be sought in Daniel vii. 13, this is not to say that other passages from the Old Testament may not also have contributed to the sense He attached to it.[3] In this

[1] Driver, *Comm.* in loco: cf. Drummond, *The Jewish Messiah*, book ii. c. vii. A personal Messianic reference has however found many supporters, and is still favoured by Schultz, *Old Testament Theology*, E. Tr. ii. 439, and more recently has been advocated by Boehmer in his *Reich Gottes und Menschensohn im Buche Daniel* (Leipzig, 1899).

[2] Enoch, cc. xxxvii.–lxxi.; 2 Esdr. c. xiii. The date of this portion of Enoch is much debated. Its latest English editor places it between 95–80 B.C. or 70–64 B.C. (Charles, *The Book of Enoch*, p. 30), but the possibility of later Christian interpolations must be admitted.

[3] Bousset, in his *Jesu Predigt in ihrem Gegensatz zum Judentum* (Göttingen,

connexion two passages from the Psalms are specially instructive.

The first is from Psalm viii. 4:—

> "*What is man, that thou art mindful of him?*
> *And the son of man, that thou visitest him?*"

where, though again there is no evidence that the Psalm was ever accounted by the Jews to be directly Messianic, we can easily understand how in the vivid picture it presents of man rising through frailty to glory and honour Jesus would find a description of the destiny awaiting Himself.[1]

The same may be said of the striking words of Psalm lxxx. 17:

> "*Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand,*
> *Upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself*,"

words which, unlike the preceding passage, were interpreted Messianically in the Targums, and obviously point not merely to humanity in general, but to "an individual, chosen from the mass and endowed with special gifts and graces for God's work."[2]

So far then as we have come it would seem that Jesus' favourite designation, whatever else it implied, contained at least a clear Messianic reference. This is by no means however generally admitted, and more particularly in recent times strong objections have been raised against it on the ground of the supposed Aramaic original of the phrase. This, it has been said, would be bar 'ĕnāsh, contracted into bar-nāsh. And as in Aramaic this could only

1892) has done good service in emphasizing that not only does Jesus use the title in an altogether original manner, but that with Him the idea underlying it is no "einheitlicher Begriff," pp. 104 ff.

[1] Keim in particular has laid great stress on this Psalm as encouraging Jesus to adopt the title, *Jesus of Nazara*, E. Tr. iii. 87 f. See also Colani, *Jésus-Christ et les Croyances Messianiques de son Temps*, p. 115.

[2] Stalker, *The Christology of Jesus*, p. 52.

mean "man" or "mankind," the same general sense, it is argued, must be given to the title "Son of man" when it occurs in the Gospels. The Messianic sense is thus either got rid of altogether,[1] or the title is treated more or less impersonally.[2]

But against this reasoning, to which Holtzmann attaches the merit of a "discovery"[3] perhaps the most eminent Aramaic scholar living, Professor Gustav Dalman of Leipzig, has entered his protest on the ground that the assumption on which it rests is by no means a necessary one. The phrase "the Son of man" (*ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*), determined as it is by two articles, is rather, he points out, the product of great perplexity on the part of the Evangelists to reproduce the impression which the Son of man with the articles conveyed in Aramaic, and which was certainly equivalent to more than "the man" as man.[4] And even if this were not the case, and "Son of man" in Aramaic was equivalent to no more than "man," may we not again ask what reason there is that Jesus should not have imparted to the old phrase a new and original sense? On the whole therefore we venture to think that no valid objection has been established against its Messianic reference, and how well this official sense suits the passages in which it occurs a hurried glance at them is sufficient to prove.

With regard to the passages that deal with Christ's coming to judgment there can at least be no doubt, for here it is obviously in virtue of His Messianic authority that Jesus, as *the Son of man*, claims the right to bring

[1] See Lietzmann, *Der Menschensohn*, p. 41 ff.

[2] Holtzmann thinks it impersonal in the earlier passages, and only personal after Peter's confession, *Neutest. Theologie*, i. 256 ff. According to A. Meyer, *Jesu Muttersprache*, 1896, pp. 91 ff., Jesus in many places, e.g. Matthew xi. 19, meant by it no more than "jemand."

[3] "Entdeckung," *Neutest. Theologie*, i. 256.

[4] *Die Worte Jesu*, 1898, p. 196.

in the Messianic kingdom and to "*render unto every man according to his deeds*" (Matt. xvi. 27; cf. x. 23 etc.), just as before by the same authority He had forgiven sins (Matt. ix. 6), and decided as to the fulfilment of the Sabbath law (Matt. xii. 8).

And even when it is the lowly, rather than the exalted Jesus who is referred to, as for example in the familiar passage in which the true nature of the Messianic rule is so clearly laid down, it is noteworthy that it is as *the Son of man* again that Jesus speaks of Himself as coming "*not to be ministered unto,* but *to minister and to give His life a ransom for many*" (Mark x. 45).

Nor is it different with those passages in which at first sight the title seems to be little more than a self-designation. The Messianic sense, though hidden, may still be found lurking. For was it not the demands of His calling and not merely natural exigences that determined Jesus' homeless mode of life—"*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head*" (Matt. viii. 20); or from another point of view that led to the contrast with the Baptist—"*For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!*" (Matt. xi. 18, 19).

While however this is the general sense of the phrase in Jesus' own consciousness, it is a wholly different question whether it was so understood by the disciples. And indeed, in view of His own repeated declarations, to which we have already referred, that He wished no one to know that He was the Messiah, it is clear that Jesus could never have used the title as He did had it been a currently accepted Messianic title. If so, the natural conclusion seems to be that the title, while corresponding to Jesus' own inner sense of His Messianic dignity, was intended to conceal

that dignity from the people until such time as they were prepared to receive it.[1] It served in fact the purposes of an incognito, and was, as Beyschlag calls it, "a title which was no title,"[2] allowing the Person of Jesus to recede as far as possible, in the first instance at any rate, behind the Divine Kingdom He had come to establish, and at the same time indicating the essential character and dignity of that Kingdom.[3]

But while the phrase was thus primarily an official designation on the lips of Jesus, it is equally certain that by its very form it must have suggested to Him certain truths regarding His Person, which specially fitted Him for the discharge of His Messianic functions. And popular interpretation has rightly laid hold of the most obvious of these in the emphatic reference to the true humanity of Jesus, which it finds underlying the phrase; just as it is in virtue of his human likeness, in contrast to the brute creation, that there is "given" to the ideal figure of Daniel's vision his Kingdom at the hands of God. At the same time we must be careful not to press this aspect of the phrase too far. To speak of Jesus as presenting Himself in this way as "the realized ideal of humanity," as Neander does,[4] is not only to put too abstract and philosophical an interpretation on the simple language of the Gospels, but is also unsuitable to the large class of passages where the sufferings of the

[1] The passages from Enoch and Esdras already referred to offer no real contradiction to this; for, apart from the uncertainty of date attaching to the former, we have no evidence that these books were sufficiently widely known to give anything like general currency to the use of "Son of man" as a Messianic title.

[2] *New Testament Theology*, E. Tr. i. 66.

[3] Dalman thinks that it is possible that before the great confession of Cæsarea Philippi, Jesus may never have used the title at all (*Die Worte Jesu*, p. 216); but this is to do unnecessary violence to such passages as Matthew viii. 20, ix. 6, x. 23, etc. See Keim, *Jesus of Nazara*, iii. 80; Stanton, *The Jewish and the Christian Messiah*, p. 245.

[4] *Life of Christ*, E. Tr. (Bohn), p. 99; and to the same effect Reuss, *History of Christian Theology*, E. Tr. i. 198, "the normal or model man."

Son of man are predominant. Nor, on the other hand, must attention be directed too exclusively in this connexion to these sufferings, as if in the title we are to see nothing more than Jesus' expression for the weakness of His human nature,[1] or even his equivalent for the suffering Servant of Jehovah.[2] The title rather touches both poles, the glory and the humiliation, or, perhaps we should rather say, it unites them, for it was, as we have already seen, through humiliation that the true Messianic glory was reached. And Christ's favourite designation becomes thus a brief compendium of the central truth of His whole Gospel, glory through shame, life through death.

In general use however we can easily understand how it would be always the thought of Christ's oneness with our humanity that the title would most readily suggest, and hence probably the exceedingly sparing use made of it by the Apostolic writers.[3] They had come to regard their Master so exclusively in the light of the exalted Lord, that any such name as Son of man was felt to be utterly inadequate in expressing their idea of Him.[4] That notwithstanding this feeling the Evangelists should in their narratives have so constantly preserved the title on the lips of Jesus may thus be taken as an additional proof of their reliability and desire to reproduce as closely as possible the very words of their Master.

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[1] As Wendt, *Teaching of Jesus*, E. Tr. ii. 139 ff.

[2] As Bartlet, THE EXPOSITOR, 4th ser. vi. 427 ff.

[3] In the New Testament outside the Gospels it occurs only in Acts vii. 56 (in Apoc. i. 13, xiv. 14, there is no article in the Greek): and in early Christian literature, according to Stanton, it is not found unless in actual quotations of Christ's own words, except in Euseb. ii. c. 23 (*Jewish and Christian Messiah*, p. 243). Cf. also Lietzmann, *Der Menschensohn*, p. 57 ff., 86.

[4] "Dem Zuge der Zeit entsprach die Verherrlichung, die Vergöttlichung des Auferstandenen und Erhöhten; den Menschensohn empfand man dabei eher als ein Hemmniss." Holtzmann, *Neutest. Theologie*, i. 258.