

THE HISTORICAL JESUS' VIEW OF HIMSELF AND OF HIS MISSION*

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Introduction

In 1991 Marinus de Jonge published his book, *Jesus, The Servant-Messiah*.¹ This work examines what opinion the historical person Jesus of Nazareth had of himself and his mission. In this article I wish to examine some of de Jonge's most important conclusions in more detail. In particular, I wish to reconsider the question whether Jesus spoke of himself as the 'Messiah' and as the 'Son of Man'.

1. *The Views of M. de Jonge*

For clarity, let me first briefly restate the conclusions of de Jonge. (His arguments will be discussed in sections 2 and 3 of this contribution in which I will go into two main themes more fully.)

To begin with, de Jonge considers it highly probable that Jesus saw himself as a prophet in the line of the prophets of Israel. If Jesus regarded himself as a prophet, he must also have expected that his message and person would be rejected and that he would meet a violent death.²

It can also be assumed that Jesus regarded himself as a suffering

* A somewhat longer Dutch version of this essay was read as a paper at a symposium held in Leiden, 25 January 1991, honouring M. de Jonge on the occasion of his retirement from the Faculty of Theology at Leiden. The Dutch version was published in the proceedings of that symposium in H.E. Wevers *et al.* (eds.), *Jezus' visie op Zichzelf: in discussie met de Jonge's Christologie* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1991), pp. 48-64.

1. M. de Jonge, *Jesus, The Servant-Messiah* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), also published in Dutch as *Jezus als Messias: Hoe Hij zijn zending Zag* (Boxtel: Katholieke Bijbelstichting; Brugge: Uitgeverij Tabor, 1990).

2. De Jonge, *Jesus*, p. 37.

righteous man.¹ He must therefore also have reckoned not only with resistance, suffering and a violent death, but also with his early rehabilitation or vindication by God in the form of an exaltation to heaven. Jesus probably expected to be resurrected soon after his death.

It is not excluded, though it cannot be proven, that Jesus reckoned with the possibility of dying a martyr's death. In other words, it is uncertain whether Jesus felt that he would die as the representative of a group of like-minded people, for their sake and in their place. It also remains uncertain whether Jesus expected that, thanks to his death, God would be reconciled to those others and grant them his favour.

At this point, de Jonge's argument enters a stage of critical importance. He states that the earliest traditions we can discover already do not represent Jesus as one prophet among many, or just another martyr who remained true to God until his death. From the beginning they present Jesus as the last prophet sent by God, as God's suffering and righteous servant *par excellence*, as the man in whom the history of Israel and the world had reached a point of no return and had definitively taken a new turn. The person and the work of Jesus, the earthly Jesus included, were already regarded as unique in history by Christians soon after Jesus' death.

De Jonge's viewpoint can be summarized as follows. First, he argues that the recognition of Jesus as a unique emissary of God by the Christians in the time soon after his death must go back to the same recognition of Jesus by his followers in the time before his death.

Secondly, he explains (and this is the most important part of his argument) that the view of Jesus as a unique intermediary authorised by God, the view that must already have been held by his followers during his activity in Galilee and Judea, goes back to pronouncements of the historical Jesus himself. In those pronouncements Jesus must have communicated his vision of himself and his special task in God's plan to his disciples. The question which especially concerns de Jonge is therefore in what terms did Jesus speak of himself and his task, and what did these terms mean for him.

According to de Jonge there is nothing to show that Jesus understood himself and spoke of himself as the suffering servant of the Lord in Isaiah 52-55. But it may be assumed that Jesus spoke of himself as the 'Son of Man'.² This term, according to de Jonge, is absent from

1. De Jonge, *Jesus*, pp. 38-39.

2. De Jonge, *Jesus*, pp. 53-54.

contemporary Judaism and both Mark and Q show little enthusiasm for this epithet. Indeed, both exhibit a certain resistance to it.¹ On the grounds of the so-called criterion of dissimilarity, the use of the title 'Son of Man' can be ascribed to Jesus himself. The term indicated a rejected and humiliated person, yet one with authority, even if this authority was contested. The 'Son of Man' was also someone who would be vindicated by God, that is, justified and rehabilitated. All in all, the term 'Son of Man' denoted the suffering righteous man *par excellence*.

De Jonge also takes the view that Jesus not only taught that God's reign was at hand, but also that God's reign was in a way already a reality in his (Jesus') own deeds, and it was therefore not only Mark and Q who placed the beginning of God's reign on earth in the activities of Jesus—Jesus himself did so.

The historical Jesus, in de Jonge's view, claimed to act by virtue of a special mandate granted him by God.² Thus Jesus himself already had a Christology, so to speak, and indeed not merely an implicit but an explicit one. De Jonge writes that in the lifetime of the historical Jesus 'an incipient explicit Christology' already existed both for Jesus' disciples and for himself.³

Apart from the term 'Son of Man', de Jonge claims that Jesus also applied the designation 'the anointed of the Lord' or, for short, the term 'anointed' (Messiah, Christ) to himself. This was because of his realization that he was a prophetic son of David.

We do not know whether Jesus also called himself the 'Son of God'. But Jesus addressed God as father in a way which betrays his awareness of a unique relationship to this father.

Thus far I have summarized the thesis of de Jonge. I wish now to examine in more detail two important points of this thesis. First, the question whether Jesus spoke of himself as 'the anointed one' and then whether he spoke of himself as the 'Son of Man'.

2. *Did Jesus Speak of Himself as 'The Anointed One'?*

Did Jesus speak of himself as 'the anointed one', or did others give him this name? And if the latter is the case, did it happen during Jesus' lifetime or after his death?

1. De Jonge, *Jesus*, p. 53.
2. De Jonge, *Jesus*, p. 65.
3. De Jonge, *Jesus*, p. 68.

De Jonge's initial assumption is that the name of *Christos* cannot only have become attached to his person after his death. Formulaic expressions such as 'Christ has died' and 'Christ died and rose again' were, to judge by their frequency in traditional material in the epistles of Paul, disseminated too early for the designation *Christos* to have only become attached to him after his death. I emphatically agree with de Jonge on this point and add an argument of my own. After the death of Jesus there was no special historical motive to apply the title 'anointed' to Jesus, as something new, if it had not already been bestowed on him. Consequently he must already have borne that title before his death, during his earthly activity.

The rest of de Jonge's argument runs as follows.¹ The term 'the anointed one' occurs surprisingly rarely in Jewish sources around the beginning of the Christian era, as a title of an expected eschatological person. In these sources, the term can indicate a king, a priest and a prophet. But when the disciples of Jesus applied the term 'anointed' to *him*, they clearly used this word to indicate a king. This usage fits in well with certain Jewish sources of about the same date. To be sure, as I have just noted, the term 'the anointed one' rarely occurs in them as the title of one who will play a role in God's decisive intervention, but when it does occur it is mostly with reference to a future ideal Davidic king of Israel.

At this point I begin my discussion with de Jonge. Would Jesus have wished to present himself as a future earthly king of Israel? The historical Jesus had no ordinary political ambitions or pretensions. Must one therefore conclude that Jesus did not refer to himself as the 'anointed' one, but that only others, his followers, gave him this name? De Jonge is unwilling to draw this conclusion, because he deems it very unlikely that in early Christianity the word *Christos*, 'anointed one', could have become the central term to be used for Jesus if Jesus himself had always avoided it and advised his disciples not to use it in connection with him.² Consequently, de Jonge argues that Jesus himself must already have spoken of himself as the 'anointed one'.

The problem then arises that Jesus can hardly have proclaimed himself a future ruler in a national-political sense, but de Jonge offers an attractive solution. It is an important and truly innovative contribution to historical research into the origins of Christology. He

1. De Jonge, *Jesus*, pp. 69-72.

2. De Jonge, *Jesus*, pp. 68-70.

points out that in *Psalms of Solomon* 17, the anointed one on whom the poet has fixed all his hopes for the future of Israel is not only an earthly and national ruler, but is also characterized as 'strong in the holy spirit, wise in prudent counsel, with power and righteousness' (v. 37) in the style of the king described in Isa. 11.2-5. De Jonge recalls that in the Old Testament, David was not only a king but also a poet, prophet and exorcist, and that Josephus, Pseudo-Philo and the Psalms Scroll from Qumran describe David as an exorcist, poet and prophet. De Jonge has thus established that in the literature of Judaism up to the time of Jesus the image of a prophetic David, who was a prophet, a wise man and an exorcist, occurs alongside the image of a royal David.

And now de Jonge can reap the fruit of his argument—the historical Jesus can have seen himself as a second prophetic David, as a prophetic son of David. Because Jesus regarded himself as a prophet, teacher and exorcist in the style of David, he could already regard himself both as a 'son of David' during his ministry in Galilee and therefore also as 'the anointed of the Lord'.¹ Jesus also communicated this vision of himself to the disciples, who acknowledged him as 'the anointed of the Lord'.² So—according to de Jonge—Jesus came to be known as the anointed one/Messiah/Christ, and, most importantly, he did so on his own initiative.

This, then, is de Jonge's creative attempt to answer the question whether Jesus already described himself as the 'anointed one'. Of course de Jonge is cautious enough to observe that he cannot produce conclusive proof of his theory. But he considers it 'probable'.³

For clarity, I will summarize the constituent parts of de Jonge's answer. There are three stages: (1) The historical Jesus was a prophet, teacher and exorcist, and saw himself this way. (2) On the basis of his self-perception he could call himself a second David or a son of David, for David too had been a prophet, wise man and exorcist. (3) Once Jesus called himself 'son of David', he could also call himself 'the anointed of the Lord' for the titles come down to the same thing.

Let me now proceed to formulate some objections. A vulnerable point in the argument of de Jonge appears to be the idea that because of his self-awareness as a prophet, teacher and exorcist, Jesus could

1. De Jonge, *Jesus*, p. 72.

2. De Jonge, *Jesus*, p. 72.

3. De Jonge, *Jesus*, p. 72.

have called himself the son of David. I do not deny that Jesus acted as prophet, teacher and exorcist. But I wonder if it is really probable that a Jewish teacher around the year 30 CE could have found the fact that he acted as prophet, teacher and exorcist, sufficient grounds to apply to himself the designation of son of David, let alone 'the anointed of the Lord'. It is true that in the literature of Israel and Judaism, David has the characteristics of a prophet, wise man and exorcist. But would a preacher ever have called himself a second David or 'son of David' because of his prophetic, didactic and exorcising gifts? Is not the title 'son of David', in spite of all the evidence de Jonge deploys to bring out its nuances, too much a reference to a ruler, however great his spiritual gifts, who will in the first place rule over Israel as its true king?

Psalm of Solomon 17 appears to me to argue against, rather than for, the view of de Jonge. He cites this psalm as a witness to the existence of the ideal of the son of David who, in the image of the messianic king of Isa. 11.2-5, will excel in his spiritual qualities. Now it is true that the son of David to whom the poet of *Psalm of Solomon 17* looks forward exercises power by his word and not by force. Wisdom, justice and trust in God are his attributes. But this son of David must first acquire and exercise the kingship of Israel, much as David had been the political king of Israel (v. 4c). He must take the place of the hated and illegitimate kings of the house of the Hasmoneans. He must have the strength to break the power of the lawless leaders (v. 22a). He must cleanse Jerusalem of the heathens (that is the Romans) who are crushing and ruining it (v. 22b). The dominion of this king must be recognised far beyond Israel (v. 31), but his greatness will rest on his political function as king of the people of Israel (v. 42). Heathen peoples will serve under his yoke (v. 30), and the charismatic gifts which he will enjoy are not so much those of a prophetic son of David as they are the lawful attributes of someone who is primarily a true political king of Israel, albeit much more than an ordinary king.

This raises the question whether Jesus could have called himself 'son of David' in the sense of the figure depicted in *Psalm of Solomon 17* without implying at the very least that he aspired to political kingship. I think not.

And if, as most researchers accept, Jesus did not have such ambitions, then in my opinion it is difficult to assume that he called himself the

son of David. And if he did not call himself the son of David, then the grounds on which de Jonge assumed that he spoke of himself as 'the anointed one' fall away.

I therefore come to suspect that it was not Jesus who applied the title of 'anointed one' to himself but some of his followers. My argument is that I find it hard to imagine that Jesus the prophet, teacher and exorcist characterised himself as the 'son of David'. That was too plain a reference to a ruler in the political sense.

For clarity I add a further remark. De Jonge can assume that Jesus called himself the 'son of David' because de Jonge on the one hand gives the concept the broad 'spiritual' content of a *prophetic* 'son of David', and on the other hand allows the traditional political meaning of the term to fade into the background. It was this broad and less political image of the son of David, according to de Jonge, which Jesus then applied to himself. I feel that, on the contrary, the political and royal element in the term was so inalienable and dominant, that it cannot be admitted that Jesus ever applied it to himself.

At this stage it is appropriate to ask whether any support can be found for my point of view in the fact that, as is known, the source Q does not use the term 'Christ' for Jesus at all. The reason for this may be that only some of Jesus' followers used the term 'anointed one' for him. If Jesus had proclaimed himself the anointed of the Lord, then this title would probably not have been missing from any of the early streams of tradition.

Now de Jonge will probably counter with the following questions, which I shall attempt to answer.

1. Does not Mark also make a connection between Jesus' functions as prophet, teacher and exorcist on the one hand, and the reference to Jesus as son of David and Christ on the other hand? For in 10.47 and 10.48 Mark notes Bartimaeus's call to Jesus as 'son of David', after not much more has been said of Jesus than that he acted as preacher, prophet, healer and exorcist. And if Mark does so, why could not Jesus already have made this connection himself?

My answer is that the title given to Jesus by Bartimaeus in Mk 10.47 and 10.48 must, in my view, be strictly understood on the literary level of Mark, in relation to the pericope which directly follows it, that of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. In the account of the entry, those who accompanied Jesus called out 'Blessed be the coming kingdom of...David' (11.10). Now Bartimaeus's call in 10.47-48 seems to be

above all Mark's preparation for the call on Palm Sunday in 11.10. It remains to account for that call in the scene of the entry.

In the entry, it is true that Jesus is not honoured literally as the son of David, but as the one with whom the kingdom of David comes. But that comes down to practically the same thing. I should explain the presentation of Jesus as a Davidic king in the entry to Jerusalem as follows: the account of the entry described, possibly before Mark had incorporated it (cf. Jn 12.12-19), a royal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. What Mark keeps implicit is made explicit by Matthew (21.5) and John (12.13, 15); Jesus entered Jerusalem as king of Israel in agreement with Zech. 9.9. Matthew even says 'so that the word of the prophet was fulfilled' (21.4). The account may well not have originated until after Jesus' death. In any case the origin of the account can in my opinion be adequately explained by the wish of some of Jesus' followers to provide 'legitimation' in 'historical events' for the recognition of Jesus as Messiah/Christ. The account of the entry offers that legitimation because it presents Jesus' actions as the fulfilment of Zech. 9.9. In this explanation, neither Mark nor Jesus need have seen a specific relationship between the prophetic-exorcist activity of Jesus and his being given the title of a future Davidic king. It is sufficient to assume that in Jesus' day, some of his followers saw in him (contrary to his intention) a potential political leader and liberator of Israel. They therefore spoke of him as 'son of David' and Messiah/Christ. They legitimated these functions, which they ascribed to Jesus, after a certain time, by the account of his royal entry into Jerusalem. And Mark in his turn could hardly place that account, perhaps with other subsequent material, at any other point in his narrative than that where he too related the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem.

The reconstruction of the state of affairs which is here offered makes it uncertain whether Mark in fact saw a connection between Jesus as prophet, teacher and exorcist on the one hand, and his title as 'son of David' on the other hand. And if it is uncertain whether Mark saw this connection, it is *a fortiori* uncertain whether Jesus could have been able to style himself 'son of David' on the grounds of his awareness of himself as a prophet.

2. The second question which de Jonge will raise will, I expect, be this: although it may be difficult to accept that Jesus came to see himself as 'son of David' and 'anointed of the Lord' *solely* on the grounds of his self-image as a prophet, teacher and exorcist, is it not possible

that the impulse to do so may have originated in an already existing concept of himself as the 'Son of Man'?

My answer would be that this only shifts the problem to another plane, that is, did Jesus speak of himself as the 'Son of Man'? I shall discuss this question in section 3, but I state right away that my answer is in the negative, and that because he did not regard himself as the 'Son of Man', he cannot have come to see himself as the 'son of David'.

3. In the third place, de Jonge will no doubt ask whether the absence of the title 'Christ' for Jesus in Q does in fact point to the use of that title by only a part of Christ's following. Was Q, in any case, a theologically finished, complete work? Did it have an identifiable function and place in the life of an early Christian community? Was it ever more than a torso?

Although I cannot go into these questions here, I observe that Q has in fact been regarded by many researchers as theologically complete in itself and functional in the context of the community in which and for which it originated. But I should like to answer with a further question. Would one wish to call the whole of the extant epistles of Paul incomplete from a theological point of view and doubt that they were really functional either as a whole or individually, in certain contexts in the early church, *for the reason* that they never refer to Jesus as the 'Son of Man'?

Clearly certain titles were given to Jesus in some streams of tradition and not in others. And that may have been caused by the fact that these designations were used from the beginning in certain circles of Jesus' followers, and not in others. The absence of the title *Christos* for Jesus in Q may be the result of the fact that only a part of Jesus' following regarded him and referred to him as *Christos*, that is as the future ideal king of Israel, and Jesus did not do so himself.

3. *Did Jesus Ever Speak of Himself as the 'Son of Man'?*

This question is one of the most complicated and most often discussed puzzles of New Testament scholarship. It concerns the origin of the title given to Jesus, 'Son of Man'. The question can of course only be dealt with briefly and in outline here.

I agree with de Jonge that by reasoning back from Mark and Q one may assume that the historical Jesus spoke of the 'Son of Man', and

not only in the sense of 'one' or 'someone' as Aramaic usage permits. Jesus also referred to an eschatological person who would play a leading role in the coming judgment.

I differ, however, from de Jonge on the reasons for which it can be assumed that Jesus spoke of a 'Son of Man'. De Jonge states first that the term 'Son of Man' is highly unusual in Greek and must derive from a Semitic idiom and, secondly, that early Christians did not use the term in their own preaching except when they quoted Jesus' own words.¹ Early Christian preachers would not have introduced the term 'Son of Man'; consequently, it must have come from Jesus himself.

The second alleged reason appears less strong to me. If early Christians shaped or reshaped the words of Jesus in such a way that the term 'Son of Man' appeared in them, as in fact happened to a certain extent, then they used the term *eo ipso* in their own preaching as well, even if they only gave the term a place in the direct speech of Jesus. And then the term could indeed have been introduced by Christians, that is, by others than Christ.

The first reason cited by de Jonge, the linguistic argument, I too consider to be valid. But it only traces the term 'Son of Man' into Aramaic, and not back to the lips of Jesus. I should wish to urge another argument, which de Jonge prefers not to use. Besides Mark and Q, the 'Son of Man' as a future eschatological judge and saviour is also mentioned by *1 Enoch* 37–71 and *4 Ezra* 13, at least by *4 Ezra* 13 in an earlier textual form, underlying the Latin translation which has been preserved. Naturally, de Jonge knows of, and mentions the passages in *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra* in which the 'Son of Man' appears, yet he appears to prefer to treat Mark and Q separately from *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra*. Discussing the incomprehensibility of the term 'Son of Man' for a Greek-speaking audience, and pointing to the fact that Mark and Q clearly did not regard 'Son of Man' as a title readily understood, de Jonge observes: '(contrary to what is often thought) we do not find a proper titular use of the expression anywhere in contemporary Judaism'.² Now it is true that *4 Ezra* and perhaps *1 Enoch* 37–71 only originated at the end of the first century of our era, but they speak of the 'Son of Man' in a way which has so much in common with Mk 13.26 and 14.62 that the Christian use of the term and that in *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra* 13 must, in my opinion, go back to common pre-Christian,

1. De Jonge, *Jesus*, p. 53.

2. De Jonge, *Jesus*, p. 53.

Jewish tradition. What they have in common is located not only in the explicit reminiscences of Dan. 7.13-14, but also in the picture of the 'Son of Man' as an individual¹ and not as a collective. In that common, older, Jewish tradition there must have been reference, building on Dan. 7.13-14, to the 'Son of Man' as a heavenly adjutant of God who would appear in the future dawning of the eschaton to punish the godless and to save the righteous.

One must therefore, I believe, assume that there was a pre-Christian, Jewish tradition, expressed in Aramaic, in which the Son of Man was spoken of as an individual, eschatological, heavenly intervener who will come forward at the last judgment, pronounce justice and rule thereafter.

I say 'individual' because this is the point at which the view of the 'Son of Man' in the common tradition behind Mark/Q, *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra* differs from that in Dan. 7.13-14, from which it was nonetheless derived. In the vision of Dan 7.13-14, the Aramaic *kebar enash* means nothing more than 'someone like a man'. But this man in the vision proves, in the exposition in Dan. 7.22, to be the symbol of the 'saints of the Most High', who will be rehabilitated and saved in the future, and will rule. The 'someone like a man' of Dan. 7.13 is thus a collective. The 'Son of Man' in Mark/Q, *1 Enoch* 4 and *Ezra* on the other hand is an individual.

In sum, I maintain that three stages can certainly be distinguished in speaking of the 'Son of Man'. The first is that of Daniel 7, in which the term is a symbol for the righteous ones of Israel who will be

1. I wrote this in January 1991. In July 1991, at the Bethel Meeting of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas, John J. Collins gave his lecture 'The Son of Man in First Century Judaism'. In it he enumerated the following four features which the 'son of man' concept of the *Similitudes of Enoch* and that of *4 Ezra* have in common: (1) both assume that the 'one like a son of man' in Daniel refers to an individual and is not a collective symbol; (2) this figure is identified in both works as the messiah; (3) he is pre-existent; (4) he takes a more active role in the destruction of the wicked than was explicit in Daniel. Collins did not go into the relationship between the 'son of man' concept in first-century Judaism and that in the Gospels. It is clear, however, that *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra* share the first of their common features mentioned by Collins with Mark and Q, the second also with Mark, and possibly the fourth with Q. In my opinion the correspondences at issue between *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra* and the Gospels are best accounted for by assuming common pre-Christian tradition. I wish to thank Dr Collins for sending me the text of his Bethel lecture before it was published in *NTS* 38 (1992), pp. 448-66.

vindicated in the coming judgment, and endowed with royal dominion. The second stage is the common tradition behind both the early Christian use of the 'Son of Man' in Mark and Q and the presentation of the 'Son of Man' in *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra*. In this stage, which is still pre-Christian, the 'Son of Man' is already an individual, someone who will act as judge and saviour in the coming judgment. The third stage is that in which this eschatological individual judge and saviour is identified with the person of Jesus. It follows from this that the title 'Son of Man', originally attached to a future person and to Jesus as a future eschatological intervener, was gradually extended to descriptions of the life of the earthly Jesus. The title is attached to the Jesus who suffered, died and rose again, to the Jesus who preached with authority, and to the Jesus who experienced resistance and rejection.

It should be clear that the history of tradition which is briefly sketched here proceeds from the assumption that the presentation of the 'Son of Man' in *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra* is related to that found in the oldest Christian witnesses to the title in question, Mark and Q. On this point, it appears to me, there is a difference between my appraisal and that of de Jonge. The relationship does not consist in the fact that the Christian witnesses, on the one hand, and *1 Enoch* and *4 Ezra*, on the other, go back separately to Daniel 7. Then one would have to assume that both groups, independently of each other, came to see the 'Son of Man' of Daniel 7 as an individual. But that is improbable. The common tradition in the two groups must, in my opinion, be explained by a common earlier tradition, and to be specific, by that identified above as the second, pre-Christian stage of tradition.

It appears to me that in terms of the history of tradition, it has now been made acceptable that in the two centuries between 165 BCE and 35 CE, that is from the book of Daniel to the death of Jesus, there existed in Jewish apocalyptic circles a concept of the future 'Son of Man' who would take part in the judgment and who was regarded as an individual. It is therefore not impossible that Jesus himself also spoke in this way of the coming of the 'Son of Man'. But for the moment that is only saying that he spoke of the 'Son of Man' as of someone other than himself, someone who would appear in the future, much as he does in Lk. 12.8-9; 12.40; Mk 8.38 (although here the evangelists will have meant that Jesus and the 'Son of Man' are one and the same person). We can also establish that at least some of Jesus'

followers went so far as to identify him with the eschatological 'Son of Man'.

Now it is not probable that followers of Jesus thought that the 'Son of Man' had already come in the earthly Jesus, whose ministry they experienced. That earthly activity would have borne too little resemblance to that of one who exercised God-given royal dominion (Daniel 7), condemned sinners as a heavenly judge (*1 Enoch* 69), crushed the heathen and saved the 'remnant' of Israel (*4 Ezra* 13).

But the followers of Jesus could have thought, and even said, during his activity on earth, that if the 'Son of Man' were to appear shortly, he would prove to be their leader Jesus. For there is continuity and identity between earthly persons and the future Son of Man in Daniel 7 and *1 Enoch* 71. According to Daniel 7, God's saints, and according to *1 Enoch* 71, Enoch himself acts as 'Son of Man' (although in Daniel 7 'Son of Man' is not yet a title). But they would have reached this conclusion before the death of Jesus, rather than after that disappointing end to his life.

The great question is, did Jesus himself say that he saw himself as the future 'Son of Man'? This difficult question has received various answers. Certainty on this point is, of course, unattainable. De Jonge's answer is positive. Both in his *Christology in Context*¹ and in his *Jesus, The Servant-Messiah*², he considers it probable that Jesus used the term 'Son of Man' of himself.

His arguments are (1) that the available sources all show the term being used exclusively by Jesus himself, that is, in direct speech, and (2) that in discussion with a non-Jewish audience 'Son of Man' was not a suitable designation to explain Jesus' dignity and his relationship to God and man.

But are these reasons strong enough to make it unlikely that the identification of Jesus with the 'Son of Man' was only brought about by his admirers? That the term 'Son of Man' only occurs in the Gospels in the direct speech of Jesus may also be due to narrators and redactors and, logically considered, need not have been caused by Jesus' use of the term 'Son of Man' to designate himself. Other explanations are possible. The term may well have been unsuitable for

1. M. De Jonge, *Christology in Context: The Earliest Christian Response to Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), p. 207.

2. De Jonge, *Jesus*, p. 53.

clarifying the authority of Jesus to a non-Jewish audience but, on the other hand, the evangelists repeatedly introduce the term 'Son of Man' where their source has 'I' or 'me' (for example in Mt. 16.13, cf. Mk 8.27). The term was certainly productive as a title of Jesus. I would incline to a negative answer for four reasons.

1. I think that the attention paid in the preaching of Jesus to the imminence of God's kingdom and to the consequent radical demand for obedience to God's will is so strong that, in comparison with it, the identity of the person of the 'Son of Man' will have been of little or no importance for Jesus. For the preaching of the kingdom the identity of the 'Son of Man' was irrelevant and the identification of the 'Son of Man' with Jesus was therefore superfluous. This identification would only have distracted attention from what really mattered to Jesus—the imminent coming of the kingdom of God and the conversion of humankind which it called for.

2. If one assumes that Jesus did identify himself with the 'Son of Man', why is no trace of this preserved in the epistles of Paul? Cannot one of the reasons for the complete absence of the term 'Son of Man' in Paul be that the identification of Jesus as the 'Son of Man' was only familiar to *part* of Jesus' following and therefore probably did not derive from Jesus himself?

3. There is also an argument of a more theoretical nature. Reasoning back from Mark and Q, one may assume that the followers of Jesus saw him as the coming 'Son of Man'. We can form a good historical picture of how they came to do so. Followers of Jesus must have been so impressed by his activities that they came to believe that Jesus would soon reveal himself as the eschatological 'Son of Man'. In this way the origin of the identification of Jesus with the 'Son of Man' can be satisfactorily explained. It is easy to imagine a *Sitz im Leben* for the origin of this identification, but to build a second hypothesis on top of this hypothesis, namely, that Jesus himself already spoke of himself as the 'Son of Man' is undesirable in principle. The explanation based on the fewest assumptions is the best. Occam's razor has to be wielded here. In other words, the question is not whether Jesus could have spoken of himself as the 'Son of Man', but whether it is necessary to assume that he did so. In my opinion the answer is no.

4. Finally, a traditional argument used for the same purpose by,

among others, Bultmann.¹ It is precisely in the synoptic sayings where he speaks of the 'Son of Man' and his parousia (e.g. Mk 8.38; Lk. 12.8-9 par. Mt. 10.23, 19.28) that Jesus does not identify himself with the 'Son of Man', although the evangelists in the context of their gospels and on their redactional level will have had this identification in view. But contrary to what happens in the sayings concerning the actions of the 'Son of Man' on earth and those concerning his passion, in which the identification of Jesus and the 'Son of Man' is abundantly clear, Jesus speaks in the first group of sayings of the 'Son of Man' as if of someone else. Now transmitters and redactors of Christian tradition will also have tended to make the identification more explicit in the parousia sayings. That these sayings have resisted this tendency could indicate that there was nothing in this group of words of Jesus to point to an identification of him with the 'Son of Man'.

My conclusion is that the historical Jesus probably did *not* call himself the 'Son of Man'. At the end of this section, however, it is necessary to observe that when I refer to Jesus' *view* of himself and of his mission I am speaking exclusively of the vision that Jesus explicitly made known. What silent thoughts he had of himself, what calling or responsibility, perhaps also what ambition he felt but did not express (and who expresses all his motives?) cannot be the object of historical study.

4. *Jesus' View of Himself and of his Mission*

The way is now to some extent clear to answer the question how the historical Jesus regarded himself and his mission. There can be no doubt that Jesus primarily saw his task as proclaiming that God's kingdom was at hand and, as the immediate consequence of this, calling his audience to turn away from wrong conduct, to change their lives, and to obey God's will without compromise. Jesus thus saw himself as a prophet more or less in the style of earlier prophets of Israel who had called for repentance and conversion and who had threatened those who did not obey God's will. Certainly Jesus regarded his prophetic work as being imposed upon him by God.

But Jesus thought that God's kingdom was so imminent that he saw his own prophetic preaching, accompanied by his exorcisms and

1. R. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 5th edn, 1965), pp. 31-32.

healing, as the approach or the first beginning of the coming dominion of God and described it in these terms. Lk. 11.20 par. Mt. 12.28 and Lk. 16.16 par. Mt. 11.12 rightly preserve, as do other passages, the recollection that Jesus saw his own actions as the beginning of the kingdom of God.

If, as one may assume, Jesus did not see himself as just another prophet, then it was not because he regarded himself as 'the anointed of the Lord' or as 'the Son of Man', but simply because he thought God's kingdom was so close at hand that there was no more time left for further prophets. The time was 'full'; Jesus regarded himself as God's definitive prophet only because the time was 'up'.

When he was confronted by scorn and rejection and finally had to take into account his violent death, Jesus trusted that after his death he would be vindicated and rehabilitated; he counted on his speedy exaltation to heaven. Jesus viewed that exaltation or resurrection as the vindication of a suffering, righteous individual and not as part of the eschatological resurrection.

Jesus himself, I believe, did not think that he would be playing a leading part, as the 'Son of Man' for example, in the imminent acute coming-to-pass of God's dominion. Since his aspirations did not run in the direction of kingship over Israel, he did not call himself 'the anointed of the Lord' (Messiah/Christ). Under the influence of the authority and charisma with which he acted, some followers saw in him a future ideal king of Israel and therefore called him son of David and Christ. Others saw in him the future Son of Man, who according to Jewish apocalyptic traditions, would appear as judge and saviour as this aeon turned to the future aeon.

In separate parts of later tradition these terms for Jesus established themselves, but after Jesus' death they soon lost their original meaning. They became names for Jesus or, if they were still used functionally, they acquired a different significance.

Finally a few words which go beyond the bounds of historical writing. For faith, church and theology, the historical reconstruction offered here is not only harmless but even salutary, even more salutary than that in which the titles Messiah/Christ and Son of Man were applied by Jesus to himself.

It is harmless because it does not make any difference whether the question of a positive reaction to Jesus' message derived from the historical Jesus himself or from his followers. The good reaction, in

both cases, can only be expressed in trust and self-surrender. The 'leap' is the same in both cases.

It is salutary for the following reason. It is more natural to recognise the special significance of Jesus on the grounds of the judgment and witness of those who knew him than on the grounds of claims Jesus made of himself. Even if contemporaries of Jesus characterised him inadequately with such titles as 'the anointed one' and 'Son of Man', it says a great deal that Jesus could have provoked these reactions. It makes him more worthy of belief if others recognised, from their own observation and experience, that he was worthy of those titles, than if he had applied them to himself.

Let me conclude with a question, which also includes a suggestion. Would theology and the church not do better, when putting into words the meaning of Jesus for a present-day audience, to refrain from using such unclear, misleading functional terms as 'Christ', 'Messiah' and 'Son of Man'? Jesus' message and the message about Jesus could be well communicated without those obscure and ambiguous terms. He himself had no need of them to describe his own role. That at least is what I have argued here.