

# Reviews

**SON OF MAN, The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7, by Maurice Casey. SPCK, London, 1980. pp xvi + 272 £12.50.**

An author who claims to offer us "a complete solution to the Son of man problem" (p 3) must have something very significant indeed to say if he is to make good his claim. Whether or not Dr Casey succeeds in his aim is a matter of judgement, but it must be acknowledged straight away that he certainly has something significant to say.

The present impasse in explaining the origin of the use of the phrase in the gospels leads him to begin with an analysis of all ancient interpretations of Dan. 7. This immediately raises two important questions of method. The first is that of dating: in view of the paucity of evidence, Dr Casey includes material which is later than the time of Jesus, since this may include earlier tradition. The second is that of literary dependence: how do we know when an author is consciously using Dan. 7? The criteria which Casey adopts are those of verbal similarity and consistency of thought. The reviewer, who argued for similar criteria in assessing the influence of Isa. 53 on later documents, can hardly object.

Dr Casey first analyses Dan. 7 itself, and in the process many scholarly heads go rolling. He dismisses attempts to uncover a written source behind Dan. 7, the suggestion that the judgement scene takes place in heaven and that the man-like figure therefore travels heavenward, all interpretations of the "one like a Son of man" apart from that offered in the text, which interprets him as the symbol of "the people of the Saints of the Most High", and finally the popular interpretation of these "Saints" as being in fact angels. Among the theories he rejects is the one that since the one like a Son of man represents Israel, he cannot be dissociated from her sufferings. Casey dismisses this view on the grounds that "the man-like figure is a pure symbol"; he has "no experiences at all, other than the symbolic ones in vv 13-14" (p 39). Casey elsewhere

accuses others of the "rigid application" of criteria (p 16), but his own rigorous logic seems to lead him here into a similar trap. Of course "the one like a Son of man" is "pure symbol"; of course he symbolizes "Israel in triumph". But the triumph is over the enemies who have been persecuting Israel, and the reason why the Saints will triumph is their faithfulness to God. To quote Casey himself: "The author's hope of deliverance by God ... was based on his faith in a reliable God who would deliver his people" (p 39). The symbol of the one like a Son of man belongs within the context of Israel's experiences, or it makes no sense at all.

Twentieth century logic is not always a good guide to the understanding of ancient writers – a fact which Casey himself illustrates when he turns to ancient exegesis of Dan. 7 and describes one patristic interpretation as "muddle-headed" (p 55). Of another exegete he writes that "though incisive by patristic standards, he belongs to the pre-critical era" and says of his interpretation that "it is not a refuge that is open to the critical scholar" (p 67). These examples should, however, warn us against looking for too much consistency, either in ancient exegetes or in the traditions used by New Testament authors or even perhaps in the text of Daniel itself.

An analysis of the use of Dan. 7 in Jewish apocrypha and pseudepigrapha leads to the conclusions (a) that the chapter is surprisingly rarely used, and (b) "that there was no Son of man concept in Judaism" (p 137); here Casey gives strong support to those who have been arguing in recent years that "the Son of man concept in Judaism is a product of modern scholarship" (p 139). Let us hope that we have seen the end of it.

Turning to the New Testament evidence, Casey continues his ruthless analysis. Surprisingly few of the Son of man sayings are considered, and most of these are dismissed, the reason being that, in

order to pass his stringent tests as to what is influenced by Dan. 7, Casey demands more than the occurrence of the phrase "the Son of man". This means that it is really only the "eschatological" sayings that are even in the running – though clearly some of these, at least, do betray the influence of Dan. 7.13, notably the sayings about the future coming of the Son of man. Casey concludes: "Dan. 7 was not an exceptionally important chapter for the early Church, and it was not an important formative influence on the thought of Jesus" (p 202). Inevitably, this leads to the further conclusion that Dan. 7 is not the origin of the use of the phrase "the Son of man" in the gospels.

Granted the criteria which Casey uses, his conclusions are not surprising. In his view, scholars have read Dan. 7 into the Son of man sayings in much the same way as they have read Isa. 53 into the sayings about suffering. Yet there is one significant difference which Casey does not note, and that is the fact that in the former case we have a clear verbal link between Dan. 7.13 and the gospel tradition in the phrase "the Son of man". Finally, however, Casey considers the view that the phrase itself does derive from Dan. 7, and that Jesus then used it "as a self-reference without continually referring to the text with which he began" (p 207). This, too, he rejects, for familiar enough reasons. He concludes that the sayings which do clearly reflect Dan. 7.13 have their *Sitz im Leben* in the early Church, and that we must look elsewhere for the origin of the phrase in the mouth of Jesus.

But where? Casey's answer is an adaptation of Vermes' well-known theory. The original Aramaic phrase means simply "man" in general, but the context makes it plain that the speaker is referring to himself. The nucleus of authentic sayings consists of twelve passages; the rest are later developments.

It is impossible in a review to do justice to Casey's analysis, or to enter into detailed

discussion. We must be content with raising just three questions about his "complete solution".

(i) In analysing Daniel, he insists that the man-like figure is "pure symbol", but in the gospels he refuses to allow that the phrase can be derived from Daniel and still used in a symbolic way: it has become a title, and must be taken literally. Perhaps this is true for the gospel writers – but what of Jesus? Is it not possible that in the pre-literary tradition, the phrase still functioned, not as a title, but as a symbol of the future triumph of God's holy one?

(ii) Casey's "complete solution" still leaves us with a large gap between Jesus and the early Church, who interpreted the phrase as a title. If the meaning of the phrase was so clear in Aramaic, why was it translated as "I"? Did the creation of inappropriate Son of man sayings begin only in the Greek-speaking Church?

(iii) Casey refuses to allow that the phrase "the Son of man" can owe anything to Dan. 7 in the first stage of the gospel tradition. This is strangely inconsistent with his interpretation of I Enoch, where he argues that the phrase "the Son of man", though meaning "man", was chosen deliberately as a reference to Dan. 7; yet none of the Son of man sayings in I Enoch satisfies the criteria which he lays down for deciding which sayings in the gospels can reflect Dan. 7! Can the use of the phrase in I Enoch perhaps supply, after all, the key to the gospel sayings – not, indeed, as the source of the term "the Son of man", but as an example of a parallel-development?

Such questions lead us to wonder whether Casey has indeed produced a "complete solution". Certainly it must be said that he has produced a work of fine scholarship and a persuasive argumentation of his case. For that, everyone who is concerned with the debate about the Son of man will be grateful to him, even though they will all need to rethink their own pet theories, and some may need to revise them.

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**CENTRED ON CHRIST. An Introduction to Monastic Profession by A. Roberts.**  
*Still River, 1979.*

This is a guide book for aspirants to monastic life. It grew out of conferences given by the author in his capacity as nov-

ice msater in a Cistercian monastery in South America. It betrays its origins. The subject matter is arranged around the three