

Borsch, Frederick Houk, *The Son of Man in Myth and History*. "The New Testament Library." Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967. 431 pp. \$ 8.50.

The derivation of the expression "Son of Man" in the Gospels has intrigued and plagued scholars through the years. To the question of derivation is related the question of the authenticity of the Son of Man sayings in the mouth of Jesus. These two problems have been attacked anew, the latter by Tödt and the former by Borsch, Assistant Professor of NT Literature and Languages at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary.

What Borsch has accomplished had to be done sooner or later. OT scholars had explored the influence of Near Eastern kingship ideology on the OT, especially the Psalms, and had found many references which they thought could be explained only by this influence. In the royal rites the king battles against the forces of darkness and evil. He at first suffers defeat but cries for help and is saved. He then overcomes the powers of evil, is adopted as a divine son and is enthroned. Borsch identifies the king of this myth in a sweeping manner with the First Man, the Messiah, the Suffering Servant, the Heavenly Man, and the Son of Man, and utilizes this general mythical-ritual background as the derivation for the expression "Son of Man" in the Gospels.

Therefore, while others find the derivation of the expression in Ezekiel, Daniel, or Enoch, Borsch finds it in a wider background of ideas current and alive in Jesus' day, and he insists that these three books themselves are dependent on this background.

In the face of major catastrophes such as the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Babylonian captivity of Judah, the periodic renewal obtained through the annual ritual could no longer make sense. These catastrophes led to the idea of a renewal at the end of time or the "eschatologizing of the myth." The circle was stretched out into a line. With this linear perspective, the royal First Man became more important.

The actual background of the Son of Man in the Gospels is not normative Judaism, since there was no suffering messianic figure in its theology. Instead Borsch finds his evidence for this idea in a "number of Jewish-oriented sects which practiced forms of baptism as an ordination/coronation rite and which were likely open to at least a measure of *foreign* (or simply indigenous but non-Jewish) influences" (p. 218). His explanation for the disuse of the expression is interesting if not entirely convincing. The baptizing sectarian movement existed on the northern and eastern fringes of Palestine while the Church was centered in Jerusalem, and the NT is a record of the western thought of Christianity. Since the movement was not in the mainstream of the Church as it developed, its influence was curtailed in the later NT period. Later on he adds as a further explanation, that the myth had become reality, and therefore had no meaning in itself

apart from the reality. More meaningful expressions were substituted. Paul is an example of one who has refashioned the Son of Man idea into that of the Second Adam.

With this as the background for the Son of Man sayings, Borsch sees Jesus consciously fulfilling the role of the mythical Son of Man. Inspired by the myth, he became "involved in demythologization"; that is, by the actions of his own life, he sought to "seek to penetrate to the reality which the myth had always been striving to enshrine" (p. 404). But why is this myth, prevalent in Near Eastern societies, so important, almost prophetic and archetypal? Borsch considers the myth as something God-inspired, not simply accidental but providential, revealing the true aspirations and hopes of the human race.

Borsch's biggest problem is to make the Son of Man myth so dominating in the thinking of Jesus when the evidence seems so scant. Where other scholars have to go to an isolated expression in Daniel, or passages of questionable authenticity in Enoch, or a somewhat general address in Ezekiel, Borsch finds this myth so general that it forms the background for all these books and for the sayings of Jesus. Throughout Borsch argues carefully and adroitly for his thesis, but one cannot help noticing the following expressions at the crucial moments of his arguments: "We shall not claim that we can fully bridge this gap in time [4th cent. B.C.-1st cent. A.D.] (though it ought to be remembered that lacunae in our knowledge are not necessarily equivalent with gaps in this historical knowledge)" (pp. 134, 135). Speaking of the Son of Man setting in the time of Jesus, he says, "Obviously, too, it is hardly likely that this should be a well-known and well documented context" (p. 176), and again, "Yet it is to be admitted that this question cannot be answered to our complete satisfaction" (p. 177). Speaking of the Fourth Evangelist, he writes "Perhaps he knew of a tradition which spoke of the food given by the Son of Man and conducive to new life or of the offering of the flesh and blood (life or self) of the Son of Man which he then interpreted in the light of the contemporary practice" (p. 299). Regarding the bringing in of the story of David in Mk 2: 27, he says, "It is possible to guess that there may once have been a profound relationship in the context of the Man speculations" (p. 323). "Doubtless some will find this kind of an approach to an answer to be unsatisfactory, and we ourselves admit to having been tempted to opt for a theory which would be more definitive" (p. 360).

Considering the evidence that Borsch had to work with, he has made a remarkable case for his point of view. Perhaps the necessary documents will be discovered (see p. 400) which will sustain his position, but this is highly unlikely. Until such a time, his thesis must be considered as an interesting possibility.