

THE JOHANNINE SON OF MAN AND THE DESCENT-ASCENT MOTIF

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In the world of Johannine scholarship, consensus has been attained on few aspects of the evangelist's theology. But it is probably true to say that no one would care to dispute that John makes use of a descent-ascent Christology. It is also true that for many scholars this descent-ascent Christology is understood as being associated with the Johannine Son of Man terminology. While the link between Son of Man and descent-ascent is argued carefully by some,¹ it is assumed by others.² It is the burden of this paper that the presumed nexus between the Johannine Son of Man and a descent-ascent Christology is simply not there and that the Johannine Son of Man is not to be thought of as a heavenly descending-ascending figure. Our procedure will be simply to examine, mostly in sequence, the relevant evidence.

I. JOHN 1:51

The first appearance of the term "Son of Man" in the gospel also contains reference to ascending and descending. John 1:51 is a verse about which, quite apart from discussion in the commentaries, much has been written.³

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¹ Notably G. C. Nicholson, *Death as Departure: The Johannine Descent-Ascent Schema* (SBLDS 63; Missoula: Scholars, 1983) 60–62, 75–104; E. M. Sidebottom, "The Descent and Ascent of the Son of Man in the Gospel of St John," *ATR* 39/2 (1957) 115–122. W. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972) 52, assents to Sidebottom's thesis when he claims: "There is a curious close connection throughout the gospel between this title and the descent/ascent language."

² Cf. e.g. F. J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man* (Rome: LAS, 1978) 51–67. While the burden of his argument is that "Son of Man" is chosen to refer to the earthly revelatory role of Jesus in ministry and in death, Moloney also several times makes statements like "there is only one who can reveal the truth with ultimate authority, the one who descended, the Son of Man" (p. 56). See also S. Kim, *The "Son of Man" as the Son of God* (WUNT 30; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983) 5.

³ Cf. e.g. P. Borgen, "God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel," in *Logos Was the True Light* (Trondheim: Tapir, 1983) 128–131; S. Smalley, "Joh 1,51 und die Einleitung zum vierten Evangelium," in *Jesus und der Menschensohn* (ed. R. Pesch, R. Schnackenburg, O. Kaiser; Freiburg: Herder, 1975); S. Kim, *The Origins of Paul's Gospel* (WUNT 2/4; Tübingen: Mohr, 1981) 254–255; "Son of Man" 82–86; J. Neyrey, "The Jacob Allusions in John 1:51," *CBQ* 44/4 (1982) 586–605; C. Rowland, "John 1.51, Jewish Apocalyptic and Targumic Tradition," *NTS* 30/4 (1984) 498–507; J. Painter, *John, Witness and Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1975) 55–56; "Christ and the Church in John 1.49–51," in *L'Évangile de Jean* (ed. M. de Jonge; Louvain: Louvain University, 1977).

There is general agreement that the background to the verse is Gen 28:12 and its interpretation in contemporary Judaism. What is not certain is whether the vision promised Nathanael and the Johannine community (*op-sesthe*) is of a theophany on earth (Rowland) or of the glorified Son of Man in heaven (Painter, Neyrey). The strongest case can perhaps be made for the latter exegesis:

The disciples are certainly not seeing the pre-descended Son of Man, nor are they seeing the Son of Man on earth (as in Mark 2:10, 28) for they are looking into the "opened heavens"; nor are they evidently seeing the parousia return of Jesus, a tradition which is totally absent from John's Gospel. The vision would seem, then, to be an appearance of the re-ascended Son of Man who was crucified and returned to glory.⁴

For our purposes it needs to be noted that nothing here is being said of the descent-ascent of the Son of Man. It is the angels who are subject to movement, and that of a constant kind. And even in their case it is not to be seen as a movement between heaven and earth, for the sequence of the participles is out of order: With the heavens opened, for a heaven-earth movement we should have expected "descending and ascending."⁵ Rather, the opening of the heavens is so that the disciples may see in, to behold the theophany of the glorified Son of Man, the one whom the angels themselves long to look upon.⁶

In the light of this I believe it is a mistake to see in 1:51 the beginning of a descent-ascent Son of Man emphasis.⁷ A pointer to the glorified Son of Man there certainly is, but not to descent-ascent.

II. JOHN 6:62; 13:31

Of the other Son of Man sayings, two make explicit reference to ascent: 6:62 and 13:31. This is not in dispute. But it is simply false logic to claim, as G. Nicholson seems to,⁸ that since ascent implies descent these verses lend weight to a descending-ascending son of Man Christology. Of course it is the claim of John that Jesus descended/was sent/came/came forth.⁹ But it is surely significant that, apart from 3:13, not one of the Son of Man verses is in immediate contact with any of these verbs. This is disputed by Nicholson, who claims that 6:27, 53; 9:35 are connected with descent. But let us look more closely.

⁴ Neyrey, "Allusions" 600.

⁵ Rowland, "John 1.51" 500.

⁶ Ibid. 505; Painter, *John* 56; Neyrey, "Allusions" 589-594.

⁷ Meeks, "Man" 51-52. Nicholson writes: "We therefore understand 1:51 as a general statement to the readers as to what they will see in the Gospel, viz. ascent and descent associated with the Son of Man" (*Death* 61). There is simply no justification for such a claim.

⁸ Nicholson, *Death* 60-62.

⁹ See table 5 in *ibid.* 52.

III. JOHN 6

John 6:25–65 contains not only three Son of Man sayings (vv. 27, 53, 62) but also seven instances of *katabainō* (“descend”; vv. 33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 52, 58). There are other statistics, however, that also must be taken into account. “Sent” is found in vv. 29, 38, 39, 44, 57 (both *apostellō* and *pempō* are used); “the Father” or “my Father” is found in vv. 27, 32, 37, 40, 43, 45, 46, 57; and “Son” is referred to in v. 53. The work of the Son of Man is to give eternal life (v. 27) to those who eat his flesh and drink his blood (v. 53), and to ascend to where he was before (v. 62). It is true that he who ascends and who gives life to those who eat of him is the one who came down and was sent by the Father. But it is not said that the “Son of Man” came down. The focus of attention in these Son of Man sayings has been the subject of debate. F. Moloney, consistent with his overall thesis, would have them direct our minds to the earthly Jesus, particularly in his dying on the cross. Of 6:27 he says, “The Son of Man is the giver of the revelation which will have its supreme moment at Calvary.”¹⁰ Even 6:62 is to be taken not as a reference to the ascending of the Son of Man but as a reproof to the disciples who seem to need Jesus to ascend and return, rather than to believe in the Son of Man in their midst.¹¹ Far from being a Son of Man who ascends, Son of Man in chap. 6 is regarded by Moloney as he who descends in order to feed with his revelation, particularly on the cross.¹²

But a more appropriate way into John 6 is to begin with vv. 62, 63, interpreted in terms of the Spirit and of the ascension of the Son of Man. Dodd’s remark on these verses still obtains: “This is the clue that the reader must hold fast in attempting to understand the discourse.”¹³ Against the background of nascent docetism¹⁴ John proclaims that while Christian faith is belief in the incarnate Jesus who really died for the life of the world,¹⁵ the eating of the flesh of that incarnate Jesus as the only means of life is no crude dwelling on his humanity, nor a mere participation in the eucharist, but is faith in the exalted Son of Man who gives his

¹⁰ Moloney, *Son of Man* 113.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 120–123.

¹² *Ibid.* 112, 119, who claims C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel of John* (London: SPCK, 1955) 246, as support for the descent of the heavenly Son of Man. But Barrett’s second edition (1978) 298–299 omits such a reference; cf. also R. Schnackenburg, *Gospel of John* (New York: 1980–82), 2. 61; O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1963) 186. B. Lindars’ view (*Jesus Son of Man* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983] 151–153) is similar to that of Moloney, except that 6:62 is seen as referring to the ascension, which would confirm the saving significance of the death of Jesus. The spiritual person, however, should not need this proof to perceive the significance of Jesus’ saving act.

¹³ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1953) 341.

¹⁴ J. D. G. Dunn, “John VI: A Eucharistic Discourse?”, *NTS* 17 (1970–71) 328–338; G. Burge, *The Anointed Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 178–188.

¹⁵ H. Schürmann, “Joh 6:51c—ein Schlüssel zur johanneische Brotrede,” *BZ* 2 (1958) 244–262, establishes that *sarx* in 6:51c points not to eucharistic flesh but to sacrifice and death. This is established particularly by the theologically loaded preposition *hyper*.

Spirit. The final Son of Man saying in the chapter, v. 62, directs our attention to the end result of the ministry of Jesus and the focus of attention for the Johannine Christians: he who, having died for them, is now the exalted Son of Man who feeds them with the true bread of heaven, his life, by the outpouring of his Spirit (20:22).¹⁶

And such a reading of 6:62–63 can now help our understanding of the other Son of Man sayings in the chapter. In 6:27 the force of the future *dōsei* (“will give”)¹⁷ now becomes apparent: What the Son of Man will give is not the revelation of God in his own ministry and culminating in his death (as Moloney suggested) but life through the Spirit as a result of his death and ascension to glory. Jesus points forward to the future, such that the feeding with the bread and fish has been but a symbolic foreshadowing.¹⁸ The use of “Son of Man” in 6:53 also makes sense in this framework. The terminology of the verse may derive from the eucharist in the Johannine community, as scholars frequently acknowledge; the reference to the blood of Jesus “necessarily implies that his blood be spilt,” which makes this an “explicit reference to the death of Jesus,”¹⁹ and the use of *sarx* takes us back to 1:14 and “the whole point and scandal of the Incarnation” that the *logos* really became man—*sarx* (“flesh”).²⁰ But in the light of 6:63–64 the presence of “Son of Man” in 6:53 makes it quite clear that the eating of the flesh of Jesus is not a belief concentrating on his earthly ministry, nor is it focused in an exclusive way in the eucharistic elements, but it is essentially faith in the incarnate *logos*, crucified and now exalted to heaven as glorified Son of Man. Dunn is correct when he says, “The life-giving consumption of the Son of Man really refers to the reception of the Spirit of the exalted Jesus.”²¹ “Son of Man” is chosen in 6:53 not because of its associations with descent, earthly ministry, and crucifixion,²² nor because it is the Johannine form of a traditional, rejected Son of Man saying,²³ but because John wants to direct his readers’ attention to the true nature and final state of the crucified one.

Contrary, then, to Nicholson’s position,²⁴ the choice of Son of Man in John 6 is not to be ascribed to a descent-ascend motif. It is in the ascension and glorification that Jesus is to be thought of as Son of Man. This, of

¹⁶ Burge, *Anointed* 114–149.

¹⁷ The textual support for *dōsei*—early Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine—is far too strong for *didōsin*, supported by D, some early Latin mss and Syr^c,^{pal}. It is probably an assimilation to v. 32 (so *TCGNT*).

¹⁸ Barrett, *Gospel* 287; Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 2. 36; L. Morris, *Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 359 n. 70; *pace* R. E. Brown, *Gospel According to John* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1966–70), 1. 264: “These heavenly realities are realized in the ministry of Jesus.”

¹⁹ Moloney, *Son of Man* 116.

²⁰ Dunn, “John” 331.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Moloney, *Son of Man* 115–120; Lindars, *Jesus* 151–153.

²³ S. Smalley, “The Johannine Son of Man Sayings,” *NTS* 15 (1969) 293.

²⁴ Nicholson is not alone in speaking of a descending-ascending Son of Man Christology in John. It is held to be axiomatic and is given unquestioned status by many scholars.

course, leaves unanswered the question of the Christological framework within which the many descent verses in 6:27–63 are to be fitted. It is noteworthy that apart from *katabainō* in vv. 50, 51 all other instances of the verb in the discourse are to be found in close proximity to “Father” references (v. 33 to v. 32; v. 38 to v. 37 [and the “sending” references in vv. 38, 39 also need to be noted]; v. 58 to v. 57). That these contacts are not simply coincidental is indicated by the connecting particles or words: *gar* (“for”) in v. 33, *hoti* (“because”) in v. 38, *houtos* (“this”) in v. 58. Verses 41 and 42 take up what is said in v. 38 and so do not disturb the argument. In the light of this I believe a strong case can be made for suggesting that the descent terminology, which is used elsewhere only in 3:13 (see below), is a variant of the *pempō-apostellō* terminology of John (and early Christianity in general). It does not derive from a Christology of a heavenly Son of Man who descends.²⁵ As a variant of the *pempō-apostellō-(ex)erchomai* (“come [from]”) verbs, *katabainō* appears not to be a major frame of reference for John but rather that part of that aspect of John’s Sonship Christology that has to do with the role of the Son as one sent by the Father.²⁶ The choice of *katabainō* in chap. 6 can very plausibly be argued as owing its inspiration to contemporary Jewish traditions about the manna in the wilderness. P. Borgen has shown the similarity of wording between the *katabainō* phrases in John 6 and some of the later haggadic fragments. Thus *Mek. Exod.* 16:4 has *hallehem yōrēd min haššamayim* (“the bread coming from heaven”), and *Exod. Rab.* 25 has *wēhōrīd . . . min haššamayim* (“and it comes from heaven”).²⁷ The *katabainō* terminology, then, is not part of John’s overall Christology of the preexistent *logos* who is sent by the Father as revealer and Savior, who dies and ascends as glorified Son of Man. This is indeed his schema, but he is not in the habit of using *katabainō* in the expression of it. In the only chapter where it is found (apart from 3:13) it is called forth by the Jewish traditions and theology with which he is working.

IV. JOHN 9:35

This verse will not delay us. It is the most intriguing of the Johannine Son of Man references, with the direct claim of Jesus for faith in the Son of Man and with the blind man’s subsequent worship of him. In spite of my reluctance to subscribe to many aspects of his thesis, the general thrust of J. L. Martyn’s explanation of the incident seems the most satisfying: Here John speaks to his own community of the call to worship the exalted Son of Man in spite of the threats to their security.²⁸ In any case

²⁵ So Cullmann, *Christology* 184–188.

²⁶ For the background to this in the wisdom-*logos* thinking of hellenistic Judaism cf. E. Schweizer, “Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Hintergrund der ‘Sendungsformel’ Gal 4.4f, Röm 8.3f, Joh 3.16f, 1 Joh 4.9,” in *Beiträge zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Zürich: Zwingli, 1970); C. H. Talbert, “The Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity,” *NTS* 22 (1976) 418–440.

²⁷ P. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven* (NovTSup 10; Leiden: Brill, 1965) chap. 1.

²⁸ J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979) 140–143.

the only justification for a link with a descent motif is Jesus' statement in v. 39: "For judgment I came (*ēlthon*) into the world." That John has not left behind his Son of Man category is evidenced by *eis krīma* ("for judgment," cf. 5:27), but the use of *ēlthon* is hardly justification for claiming a descent presence. We agreed with Nicholson that *katabainō* is a subset of a group of words associated with the coming of Jesus, one of which is *erchomai*. But the logic does not follow that every instance of the words of the larger grouping bears the connotation of descent. If John had wanted to convey the sense of descent he could well have said, "For judgment I came down."

We sum up our findings thus far. In spite of its widespread sanction, evidence for the idea that John works with the schema of a descending-ascending Son of Man Christology is quite lacking, apart from 3:13. Indeed the very terminology of descent in the verb form and applied to Jesus is confined almost exclusively to the bread of life discourse, and in that case there is strong evidence to believe it is circumstantially conditioned. That Jesus as Son came from and was sent by the Father is a prominent Johannine concept, but not that of the Son of Man who descended in order to ascend.

V. JOHN 3:13

When we turn to John 3:13, however, our conclusion so far reached looks in danger of being upset, for here there can be no denying that John has used "Son of Man" in the context of speaking of one who descends and ascends. But at this point we ought not to be satisfied with such a superficial observation but ask ourselves what it was that motivated the evangelist to use the title. The sentence is constructed carefully and has a three-part chiasm that hinges on *ei mē*:

<i>kai</i>	
A <i>oudeis</i>	A' <i>ho huios tou anthrōpou</i>
B <i>anabebēken</i>	B' <i>katabas</i>
C <i>eis ton ouranon</i>	C' <i>ho ek tou ouranou</i>
<i>ei mē</i>	
("and	
no one	the Son of Man"
has ascended	descended,
into heaven	he who from heaven
except)	

Moloney outlines this structure in order to claim that with the subsequent contrast between "no one" and "the Son of Man" John wants to say that "there is only one who can reveal the truth with ultimate authority, the

one who descended, the Son of Man."²⁹ With the spirit of this statement we are in broad agreement, but not with the precise wording. And the question still remains: Why is it that John has chosen the title "Son of Man"? In answer, the following possibilities may be mooted.

1. *It suits the structure.* Such a suggestion would affirm that there is no particular significance in the choice of the term save the (perhaps unconsciously) felt need to balance the sentence according to the chiasm presented. Now it is true that there are scholars who, to a greater or lesser degree, claim that the terms "Son," "Son of God" and "Son of Man" are interconnected in John.³⁰ But it is one thing to claim that there is interconnection and overlap in the Johannine Christologies; it is quite a different matter to suggest that it was of no consequence to John which term he used on a particular occasion. Such, however, is the contention of E. D. Freed, who makes specific reference to the variations of title in 3:13–18 to support his case.³¹ It is Freed's belief that "the various titles [in the fourth gospel] are all used as variations for each other and for the name, Jesus."³²

This attitude to the Johannine titles is quite distinctive and is certainly not shared by others. As a procedure for enquiry in 3:13, we are quite justified in saying that it should only be adopted as a last resort—that is, only if we are unable to give any other reason for the choice of "Son of Man" should we return to the Freed hypothesis.

2. *On the lips of Jesus, only "Son of Man" is appropriate.* Such a claim would be supported on two grounds: (1) "Son of Man" in the fourth gospel, as in the gospel tradition as a whole, is found only on the lips of Jesus (12:34 is hardly an exception to this rule); (2) Jesus does not tend, in direct speech with others, to use "Son" as a self-reference. But the second point is only a tendency, which John does not hold to rigidly. Thus in 6:40 Jesus uses "Son" as a self-reference before the crowds. The close parallelism with 6:39 confirms this. The one verse looks at the salvific work of Jesus from the perspective of a divinely sovereign will, the other verse from the perspective of the human response of faith.³³ Other examples are 8:36, 10:36, 11:4, 14:13, and of course 5:19–26. It follows, then, that if we grant

²⁹ Moloney, *Son of Man* 56. A chiastic structure for the verse is also presented independently by G. Mlakuzhyil, *The Christocentric Literary Structure of the Fourth Gospel* (AnBib 117; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1987).

³⁰ Especially E. D. Freed, "The Son of Man in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 86 (1967) 402–404; cf. also R. Schnackenburg, "Der Menschensohn im Johannesevangelium," *NTS* 11 (1964–65) 123–137; *Gospel*, 1. 529–542. He does not so much argue for interchangeability, however, as does Freed, but for the term's subservience to the more dominant Son Christology. Other scholars listed by Moloney who deny an explicit Son of Man Christology are Cullmann, Colpe, Dion, Vergote, Braun, de Beus, Bousset, Jeremias. See Moloney, *Son of Man* chap. 1.

³¹ Freed, "Son of Man" 403–404.

³² *Ibid.* 409.

³³ D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (London: MMS, 1981) 184–185.

Moloney's premise—namely, that vv. 31–32 are part of the evangelist's theological comment and not seen as spoken by the Johannine Jesus (and in a later edition placed at the end of the chapter)—then in these verses, which are a repetition of the concepts of vv. 11–13, John could not have used "Son of Man" because of his desire to remain "faithful to the tradition [which] could not use the title in a reflection which did not come from the mouth of Jesus himself."³⁴ But it does not necessarily follow from this that "Son of Man" rather than "Son" is the appropriate self-designation in v. 13. The constraint of self-reference does not dictate the choice of that term in 3:13.

3. *John is presenting a Christology of a preexisting, heavenly Son of Man who descends.* Within the structure of 3:13 *ho huios tou anthrōpou* is a phrase in apposition to *ho . . . katabas*, but this neither logically demands that the descent idea be the cause of the Son of Man usage nor is it the reason claimed. For some, the notion of a descending Son of Man figure is associated with the gnostic worldview of the author, who presents Jesus as a descending-ascending redeemer.³⁵ This theory has not been widely received, for (1) it demands a complex literary and social relationship between the Johannine Christians, the disciples of John the Baptist, and gnostic groupings, and (2) it presumes as the typical gnostic myth what in fact can be found at the one time only in the fourth gospel.³⁶ The debate need not detain us now, except to conclude that a far more fruitful area of enquiry for the background of the early Christian idea of a descending-ascending redeemer can be claimed for hellenistic Judaism. C. H. Talbert concludes a helpful enquiry: "A myth of a heavenly redeemer who descended and ascended in the course of his/her saving work existed in pre-Christian Judaism and alongside first and second century Christianity."³⁷

Nevertheless, whatever the religious background, that John makes use of a descending-ascending Christology is not to be denied. The point at issue is whether descent-ascent (and especially descent) is particularly tied to "Son of Man." In view of the fact that we have concluded that this is not the case elsewhere in John's gospel, it is worth considering the possibility that John's choice of "Son of Man" can be otherwise explained in this instance. Such, I believe, is the case.

³⁴ Moloney, *Son of Man* 66. In actual fact we will argue that though vv. 31–32 parallel vv. 11–13 they do not reflect Son of Man thinking, for the descent motif is not part of John's Son of Man Christology.

³⁵ R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) 146–153, esp. 149 n. 4, 150 n. 1; S. Schulz, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1972) 58–59; *Untersuchungen zur Menschensohn-Christologie im Johannesevangelium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1957) 105–106.

³⁶ W. Meeks, "Man" 44–46, lists the above problems for the gnostic myth theory, in spite of the fact that he elsewhere says that the descent-ascent motif in 3:13 "remains the strongest support for the hypothesis that the Johannine christology is connected with gnostic mythology" (*The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* [NovTSup 14; Leiden: Brill, 1967] 297).

³⁷ Talbert, "Myth" 430.

4. *I believe that it is the reference to ascending to heaven (v. 13a) that calls forth the Son of Man title at the end of the verse.* In other words, in spite of the fact that *ho huios tou anthrōpou* is in apposition to *ho . . . katabas*, the real point of the statement is to claim that only the Son of Man has ascended to heaven, and he is the same as the one who descended in order to bring the revelation of God, bearing witness to what he has seen (3:11). What appears to be confirmation of a descending-ascending Son of Man schema is in fact an affirmation of something quite new: He who came with the revelation of God—namely, the Son sent by the Father (3:16–17, 31–36)—is the only one worthy of praise and the only one capable of giving a true revelation, for he is the ascended, glorified Son of Man.

The significance of this exclusive claim to ascension, against the background of contemporary Judaism and of the self-understanding of the Johannine community, will not detain us now. But that it is the ascension motif, and not the descent, that draws out the Son of Man terminology is indicated by the *anabainō* terminology in the gospel. The verb *anabainō* is used thirteen times in John: In seven instances it refers to going up to Jerusalem (2:13; 5:1; 7:8, 10, 14; 11:55; 12:20), twice it carries the meaning of getting up or climbing over (10:1; 21:11). On only four occasions does it bear any theological meaning related to Jesus, and since we have already discounted 1:51 as having any real bearing on the question we are left with 3:13; 6:62; 20:17. In 6:62, a verse already discussed, *anabainō* and *huios tou anthrōpou* are in close association. Not so in 20:17, where not only is “Son-of Man” absent but also the reference to “Father” may be felt to exclude all possibility of Son of Man associations, since the Son-Father and Son of Man Christologies are often assumed to be quite distinct.³⁸ We would contend, however, that this position is in fact indefensible and that John does not maintain such an absolute distinction. The clearest example of this is to be seen in 17:2–3 where the influence of Dan 7:14 (LXX) is particularly strong in a prayer where Jesus as Son addresses his Father.³⁹ Nor is this interplay of the two traditions confined to the fourth gospel, for the synoptic traditions reveal the same interplay. In Mark 8:38/Matt 16:27/Luke 9:26 the Son of Man will come in the glory of “his” Father (“the” Father in Luke); and in Matt 25:31, 34, as he sits on his throne of glory at his coming, the Son of Man will declare of some that they are the “blessed of my Father.” In the light of these, it might also be possible to argue that the Son in Mark 13:32 is understood by Mark to be the Son of Man of v. 26. The Son of Man has at his disposal the angels, and v. 32 could be read to say that not only are the angels ignorant of that day (when the Son of Man will come) but so also is the Son (of Man)

³⁸ We have already noted that Moloney argues strongly for such a distinction, and in more general studies on Christological titles in the gospel tradition and early Christianity the two are never brought together. Cf. e.g. Cullmann, *Christology*; R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London: Lutterworth, 1965); F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology* (London: Lutterworth, 1969). But cf. Kim, “*Son of Man*,” commented on below.

³⁹ I have argued this case more fully in a forthcoming article, “The Great Thanksgiving in the Gospel of John.”

himself, the one who will be the agent of God for final salvation or judgment.⁴⁰ The claim that "Son of Man" and "Son of God" ought not to be so sharply distinguished has been taken further by Seeyoon Kim.⁴¹ He elicits support for the view that by his use of the term "Son of Man" Jesus thought of himself as the heavenly Son of God in the apocalyptic traditions of postexilic Judaism.

The point of all this for 20:17 is abundantly clear: While *anabainō* here is not explicitly joined to a Son of Man expression, the references to "Father" cannot *ipso facto* be held to exclude Son of Man thinking or to be inconsistent with it.

The case can be taken further. The verb *anabainō* may be said to be part of a field of verbs associated with the departure of Jesus (*erchomai*, *metabainō*, *hypagō*, *poreuomai*, *aperchomai*).⁴² But since the other verbs are explicit only in the matter of departure or movement and merely imply ascent, the verb closest to *anabainō* can be said to be *hypoō* ("lift up"), which in all five of its occurrences (3:14 [twice]; 8:28; 12:32, 34) is linked with the Son of Man. Any charge that 12:32 breaks this rule is soon dispelled when one bears in mind that (1) it draws the puzzled response from the crowd concerning the lifting up of the Son of Man (8:34), and (2) *dei hypsothēnai ton huion tou anthrōpou* ("the Son of Man must be lifted up") in v. 34, though it responds to v. 32, is so framed that it takes us back to 8:28 and in particular to 3:14.⁴³ Irrespective of the precise nuance in John's use of *hypoō*, whether it refers to the lifting up to heaven in glorification that also involves the crucifixion or whether it refers primarily to the crucifixion (which is also his glorification to heaven),⁴⁴ it is clear that it includes the lifting up of the Son of Man in glory. It is noteworthy, then, that both verbs in the Johannine vocabulary that speak of the lifting up/ascending of Jesus are framed almost exclusively in terms of Son of Man thinking. It is the Son of Man who ascends or is lifted up, never the Son.

VI. CONCLUSION

We conclude that in his use of "Son of Man" in 3:13 John is being consistent with his program enunciated in 1:51 and pursued throughout the

⁴⁰ R. H. Fuller, *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus* (SBT 12; London: SCM, 1954) 83, went so far as to suggest that Jesus himself intended not the Son of God but the heavenly Son of Man. Following E. Lohmeyer he suggested that the original may have expressed a trinity of God—Son of Man—angels, an "apocalyptic trinity" that he finds also in *1 Enoch* 39:5–7; 51:3–4, 61:8–10.

⁴¹ Kim, "Son of Man."

⁴² See table 6 in Nicholson, *Death* 58.

⁴³ Brown, *Gospel*, 1. 478; Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, 2. 395. Bultmann, *Gospel* 354–355, has attempted to smooth out what he takes to be a problem by having 12:34 follow immediately after 8:28, an attempt roundly criticized by Brown and Schnackenburg. There is much good sense in Schnackenburg's view that in v. 34 we have a response to v. 32 framed in the light both of the opening sentences in the section (8:23) and of the earlier Son of Man saying in 3:14.

⁴⁴ The question is well studied by W. Thüsing in *Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu im Johannesevangelium* (NTAbh 21; Münster: Aschendorff, 1970) pt. 1; cf. also Nicholson, *Death* chap. 3.

gospel. The Son of Man is he who ascends in glory, via the cross, to the Father. John does not use the term to refer to the descent of the preexistent one or to his revealing activity on earth. In 3:13 the title is used not because of the mention of descent even though the phrase is syntactically in apposition to *ho . . . katabas* but because of the claim in v. 13a: Only the revealer who descended can claim to have ascended. And that he did—not to receive revelation, but to be enthroned as heavenly Son of Man.