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**THE SON OF MAN IN THE HOLY
GOSPELS**
**- a contribution to the development of
the New Testament Christology -**

PhD. Thesis

- Abstract -

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Summary

Abbreviations	5
Preliminaries	7
a. Research subject	8
b. Thesis argument	13
c. Paper's methodology and order	14
I. Old Testament's theological antecedents of the term	17
I.1. Theological duality meaning of the term	22
I.1.a. Messiah - King	26
I.1.b. Messiah - Servant and Ministrant of God	32
I.2. Bar-Enoş and Bar-Nasha – a prophetic vision	37
I.2.a. The Relationship between Enoch and the Messiah - „Son of Man” (I Enoh 37-71) ...	40
I.2.a.1. Divine representation	41
I.2.a.2. Messianic representation	45
I.2.b. The perspective developed in Daniel 7 and Iezechiel (Dan 7, 13; Iez 1; 3; 37)	65
I.3. Israel and „the Son of Man”	80
I.3.a. Messianic expectations	84
I.3.b. Apocalyptic vision	87
II. Ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου – an ambiguous perspective to the Evangelists? .	91
II.1. „Son of Man” – title that Jesus attributed it to Himself	95
II.1.a. Who did Jesus thought the the Son of Man is? (Mk 14, 61-62)	98
II.1.b. Man and Logos – awareness and consent	104
II.1.c. „Ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου” term and its assimilation by the Apostles (Mk 8, 27-30; Mat 16, 13-16)	109
II.2. „Son of Man” – in the Synoptic Gospels	111

II.2.a. „Kenosis” și „Messiahship” within Jesus and the Evangelists thought	117
II.2.b. The Son of Man’s ministry paradox	122
II.2.c. „Son of Man” as Judge – an eschatological perspective (Mat 13, 36-43; 25,31-46).125	
II.2.d. Jesus looked as Messiah and Son of God	130
II.3. „Son of Man” in the Fourth Gospel	135
II.3.a. Mystery meaning of the term (Jn 1, 14)	137
II.3.b. „Son of Man” pre-existent – The Johannine paradox of the Son of Man’s exaltation	141
II.3.c. Ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, in divine hypostasis (Jn 5, 19-47)	149
II.3.d. Father’s authority and the „Son of Man’s” authority - complementary?	153
II.3.e. „Son of Man” - as Judge. The relation with the Synoptics	157
II.4. The relationship between John and the Synoptics reflected to the contemporary exegesis	162
III. „Son of Man” - a contribution to the understanding of New Testament Christology	168
III.1. Human nature kenosis	171
III.1.a. Son of Man between contempt and suffering (Isa 53; Mk 8,31)	175
III.1.b. Ministry, redemption and sacrifice	177
III.2. „Eschatological greatness”	182
III.2.a. Judge and Paraclete (Jn 4, 23-26)	187
III.2.b. Son of Man and the Kingdom of God	192
III.2.c. Son of Man’s recognition	195
III.3. Son of Man’s divinity	202
III.3.a. The fullness of God in man and man’s sanctification	206
III.3.b. „The One who ascended and who descended” - a Fourth Gospel’s perspective	212
III.4. „Son of Man” – a pauline theological perspective	218
III.4.a. Fulfillment and redemption in Christ (Rom 3,22-24)	219
III.4.b. Pauline „eschatology” (2 Tes 1,6-10)	220
III.4.c. Son of Man, between Gospels and Epistles	221

IV. Theological developments regarding the „Son of Man’s” concept	223
IV.1. The dispute between the Church and Synagogue or the conflict among two Messianic concepts	226
IV.1.a. Jesus and the Jewish Temple	230
IV.1.b. Messiah-man and Messiah-Incarnated God	234
IV.2. „Son of Man” or the debate of an particular sociological situation	243
IV.2.a. The need of Son’s personal and universal sacrifice	245
IV.2.b. Man and Son of Man	248
IV.3. The theological function of the liturgical reality, on Son of Man’s presence and work	250
IV.3.a. The Covenant and the Eucharistic reason	252
IV.3.b. Remembering the Sacrifice seen as a reality and transfiguration	261
V. Conclusions	265
VI. Bibliography	269

Key Words: ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, Aramaic, Messiah, Synoptics, Johannine, Christology, Jews, suffering, worship, body and blood, Eucharist, Son of Man, Judge, apocalyptic, evangelist.

The complexity of this topic but also the number of studies already existing, which did not entirely clarify the meaning of the „Son of Man” term, seems to be an impediment regarding the elaborate research of the concept itself. However, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is the only christological title derived from Jesus’ own usage. Also, the Son of Man christology is the earliest influential factor, in the sense that it developed out from an element of Jesus’ self proclamation. In other words, by using the title and the concept in christological sense, all the Son of Man exposures of the four Gospels ultimately owe their existence to it .

By perceiving the fact that Jesus himself was the Son of Man, the early Church intensified the usage of the term in the future references, by applying it even to the Saviour’s earthly ministry, sufferings and resurrection, although occasionally allocating him an unfit personal content.

Even though the genuine expressions regarding the Son of Man are limited to some few kernel sayings, this doesn’t mean that ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, as interpreted by Jesus, played a minor role in his thought. The future activity of the Son of Man appears to have occupied a significant place in his thoughts for the future. Just as the kingdom of God, already active in his words and works, was an earnest of the kingdom as it would be in its total fullness, so his earthly ministry would be followed by the transcendent activity of the Son of Man sharing in judgement and rule. Besides, we can affirm the fact that Jesus envisaged his mission as destined, and that was going to be validated and vindicated , in no very distant future, by the fact that he was given a status of exaltation in the presence of God, there to fulfill the functions of the „Son of Man”.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to expose the real and many-sided perception of the „Son of Man” term at an exegetical level, and the conception of the christological spectrum from the prospect of the present research, reported to the historical thought and understanding. As well, we refer to the sociological situations to determinate the intellectual conflicts among the messianic concepts. Further, by approaching the messianic sense bare-headed in the Old Testament in parallel with the prophetic visions, we can also refer to the apocalyptic demarche that maintains the Messiah-Man report, a theological duality proving the fact that the „Son of Man” is Christ Himself who descended and ascended to the Father.

Forwards, there is to consider the slideshow learning perspective of the „Son of Man” term by the Apostles and by Jesus Christ, revealing the kenotical and the eschatological mystery in different awareness and consent situations where the paradox of ministry, of sacrifice and of the Son of God worship idea is found .

Certainly the „Son of Man” is not only the Judge of the wicked, but at the same time he is the One that brings the salvation. A judge not only discharges or forgives but he also blames. Thus, the „Son of Man” will acknowledge those who acknowledged Jesus (Lk 12,8). The apparent intransigence and the severe harshness of the words found in Lk 11,31 and 17,26,28-30, does not exclude the possibility of forgiveness. In this regard, it appears the unexpressed but very suggestive statement: „*unless you repent*” (Lk 13,3,5). The burden of Christ message was the approach of the Kingdom, in all its power and fullness, but also the urgent need of repentance, in anticipation of its coming (Mk 1,15). Jesus’ choice of Son of Man terminology, in conjunction with the striking and dramatic imagery of the kernel sayings, served to awaken a sense of urgency and to reinforce and intensify his call to repentance.

In the first part of the paper I was trying to perceive the linguistic and historical elements of the „Son of Man” term, starting with the Old Testament exposures, but also by presenting an outlook of some apocryphal writings such as *The Book of Enoch Parables*. Although being written in greek for the greek speakers christians, the Holy Gospels used the *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* expression revealed in Jesus words, but undoubtedly, the authentic foundation of the notion was בר(א)נש(א). Maurice Casey believes that there are ample reasons to imply that Jesus spoke Aramaic. Also the *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* form, is not an ordinary greek monoglot and it can be perceived as a literal translation of the semitic expression. The greek *υἱὸς* naturally overlaps in the semantic area with the aramaic בר and the hebrew בן. It is used in extended mode in Septuaginta to reproduce בן in both sides, literally and figurative, including expressions that do not normally belong to the greek monoglot but to the literally translations.

In the semantic area the aramaic term בר(א)נש(א) considerably overlaps with the greek ἀνθρώπος. The hebrew בן אדם, philological equivalent of the aramaic exposure בר(א)נש(א), is commonly translated with υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου in Septuaginta by some translators. At that time certainly ,the Gospel expression *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* did not cause difficulties of understanding , furthermore, it must have represented a naturally aramaic understanding instead of an unused one; besides a requirement satisfied by בר(א)נש(א). On the other hand, it can be observed that some passages in the Gospels (notable Mk 13,26; 14,62), use the idea from Daniel 7,13 where בר אנש is definitely the fundamental aramaic expression.

I've presented some landmark items in order to support these thesis :

a) - Jesus mostly used the terminology and the imagery from Daniel 7 in the description of the Son of Man sufferings. He combined the Son of Man concept with the one of the Suffering Servant, thus opening the way to the future descriptions having this subject as a foundation .

b) - The messiahship idea is converted by its understanding in the Son of Man terms, which is deprived of all the earthly concerns, characteristic to a davidic Messiah, excepting the fact that his mission objective is the complete man, soul and body.

c) - The Daniel's Son of Man, is none other than the suffering „servant” of Yahwe, foretold by Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 52,13-53,12).

d) – Identifying or not the Son of Man with Enoch, *The Book of Parables* proves a considerable evolution of the messianic tradition, as far as the word „messiah” is unambiguously used with reference to a heavenly judge.

e) - Messiah and his historical activity are not presented in the Old Testament as two separate concepts from the people of Israel, because his history, institutions and prophecies, are associated to it. (nu inteleg fraza nici in varianta romana).

f) - The hope of Yahwe's return is largely related to other two aspects of the kingdom's expectation, ie the return from the exile and the victory over evil.

All this lead to the conclusion that the „Son of Man” title has a very broad interpretation spectrum, as far as the Old Testament vision and the apocryphal one are concerned.

Then, after analyzing the possible identification of certain biblical characters, such as the prophets Daniel, Ezekiel and Enoch, with this „Son of Man” concept, it was necessary to appeal to the reason of this vision, where the transcendental reality goes beyond our power of interpretation. Although these divine visual perceptions may inspire an absolute credibility, however is required that their understanding to be congruent with the faith of the transmitter, and especially with the devotion of the one who appropriates them.

In conclusion, although marked by their relationship with God-Yahwe, and by their awaiting of a saviour Messiah, the jews's messianic expectations have been limited to a venereal and ephemeral action, namely the abolition of slavery. Therefore , their entire thinking was shattered by the real „Son of Man” concept, that exceeded any human reality only by it's mere humble presence, raising the human thinking to the divine sphere by the soul salvation for the eternity reason .

In the second part of the paper I opted for an exegetical analysis of the „Son of Man” term, appealing to the New Testament passages, where from we choose the most important connection moments, that have in the foreground the self description of Jesus, as being himself the *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*. The secret that Jesus forbids his disciples to disclose, is that He, who called himself the Son of Man, He is in fact the Son of God; that of course until the proleptically reveal made to His three disciples at the time of Transfiguration, and then by His appearance to all through sufferings and resurrection.

Thereby, all four Gospels identify the Son of Man with the Son of God. Perhaps naturally, because Jesus’s divine sonship character is a stable and concrete information for the evangelists. Also it is supposed that the identification has been made by a double equation of the early church, ie Jesus is the Son of Man and the Son of God, thus the „Son of Man” is the Son of God. However it is suggestive that nowhere in the Synoptic Gospels appears a specific status that directly express the reason for the Son of Man is the Son of God. Namely, the identification is indirect in all stages; even John is indirect except the only case from Jn 5,26-27.

In this regard, I approached some current exegetical perspectives, trying a patristic and contemporary theological-exegetical analysis of each passage where the „Son of Man” term is found, according to the following pattern:

- 1) *The contextual structure of the term*
- 2) *The term’s exegesis*
- 3) *The theological interpretation*

Finally, I found that the Jesus’ teaching principle is characterized in that, the attitude as it concerns the Son of Man found in God’s presence, it depends on Jesus’ acceptance or rejection by man. In Jesus’ teaching, the Son of Man is more a counsel than a judge. In Jesus’ thinking, the Son of Man is none other than the Son of God. The Son of Man idea, was a Jesus’ adaptation to first show himself as a Son of God, a sure thing for him, and then sitting on his heavenly throne. The Son of Man is the Son of God, exercising his mediatrix or judicial functions. This idea is firmly kept in the Fourth Gospel, where the Son is the one that exercise the judgment, with his abilities as the Son of Man of course (Jn 5,22. 27).

Although he has not called himself „Son” or „Son of God”, as the Church called him later, Jesus had an unique consciousness of his sonship. Knowing that he is the Son of God, in this humble life on earth, he conscientiously fulfilled his suffering Servant role, especially by his death for many (Mk 10,45; 14,24). He confirmed the active presence of the Kingdom by his words and ministry, as well as by his coming with great power. The dissociation of the

kingdom with the „Son of Man”, is not due either to the disuse of the „Son of Man” title or to the indirect connection of his mission with the kingdom coming.

Some interpreters regard this title as intentionally hidden but used by Jesus to hide his self-consciousness. They associate this usage to the „messianic secret”, namely Jesus knew that he is the messianic Son of Man, but since he did not want to identify himself openly, he used the third person language to mask his identity. This explanation depends of course on the messianic secret historicity and assumes that the pre-Christian Judaism waited a messianic figure named „Son of Man”. Other biblical scholars consider this title as proleptically, ie Jesus used the third person language not to refer to himself in his present earthly role, but to what He will become in the future, namely the „Son of Man”.

In this chapter, I've tried ,using some examples, to present the „Son of Man” concept, as it appears in the Gospels :

a) - Both Mark and Luke the Evangelists are keeping the mystery of the relationship between Jesus and the Son of Man.

b) - According to the textual and exegetical analysis, it can be affirmed that the section Mk 14,62 occupies an unique place among the marcan expressions about the Son of Man. It is also the most important and crucial one among all others, and it is the only one who urged the audience, not exactly as expected to be, to represent an information source for the christians.

c) - The sayings that consider the present activity of the Son of Man, match in the context of Jesus' earthly life. The speech about forgiving the sins (Mk 2,10), the one about violating the Sabbath commandment (Mk 2,28), Jesus' status comparison with that of foxes and birds (Mat 8,20), Jesus' prosecution that He would be gluttonous and liquorish (Mat 11,9), the moment when Jesus reminds of the sign of Jonah (Mat 11,30), the comparison of Jesus' days with Noah's days, because people live without thinking about the future and do not take into account the Son of Man's calling (Lk 17,22.26).

d) - John The Evangelist , is not interested in a speculation about the pre-temporal existence of Jesus. He only speaks about this „beginning” in close connection with what he says about Jesus' future mission . The One that „*was with God at the beginning*” (Jn 1,2), is the same that is foretold by the Gospel, whose „flesh life” is the center of divine revelation and salvation history. This living person that flesh and blood fulfilled the decisive act of revelation was active in Israel's history and continues to work in the Church after his death too.

A clarification of the „Son of Man” term was brought by an analysis of the historical exegetical topics considering the New Testament's paragraphs image .The pattern of the Son

of Man 's term usage established by Mark, was also inherited and continued by Luke the Evangelist with certain developments that significantly differ from the matthean ones. Just like Matthew the Evangelist, Luke took two authentic speeches from Mark, without any significant change (Mk 2,10 in Lk 5,24 and Mk 2,28 in Lk 6,5 except 2,27). Besides we have seen that, just like Matthew the Evangelist, Luke inherited some non-marcian testimonies, some of them being even the authentic words of Jesus. He puts these expressions' version in a premature speech. Thus, Jesus begins by clarifying the fact that the end was not imminent when these sayings were uttered, Luke including his own remarks about the „Son of Man”, alongside with a different prediction version of Jesus' passions (Lk 17,20-22.24-27). This proves that the Evangelist forwarded the authentic testimonies of Jesus, exposing them only when he considered that was the right moment, and especially to clarify the fact that Messiah's second coming should not be expected during or soon after historical ministry period.

We can certainly conclude with the statement that all the synoptic's present work is the result of a complex process of development. Through his historical character, Jesus used the term בר (א)נש(א) „son of man”, in various speeches, in which he presented significant aspects of his life and teaching. In these, the term בר (א)נש(א) was a common aramaic mark for „man”, used in a particular idiom, where the speaker talks about himself, or himself and other persons that indirectly stand out from the context. Of course in greek there was no such idiom, but Jesus' sayings translators have promoted a strategy. They used ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, „Son of Man” in greek, when the original aramaic term was בר (א)נש(א), reaching to be transformed in a christological title. (Maurice Casey).

In John's Gospel we meet two reflection circumstances, such as „the synoptic Son of Man” intertwined in various forms with „the non-synoptic Son of Man”. Namely, the johannine ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου has similarities and differences from the synoptic one. But this is not due only to the interpretative element presented by John, but more likely, to the use of different sources. Of course we can not certainly support the existence of clear evidence regarding the Evangelist's inspiration from any of the synoptic exposures concerning the Son of Man.

The fourth Gospel presents the Incarnation described as a descent of the Son of Man (3,13), death as a raising (ὑψοῦν 3,14; 8,28; 12,34), or worship (δοξάζειν 12,23; 13,31), and the ascent as a return or a lift to heaven (3,13, 6,62), where the verbs ὑψοῦν and δοξάζειν, used to determine the Passion have a dual role and finally, He exercise the judgment as „Son of Man” (5,27). Of course, the absence of any reference to the earthly activity of the Son of

Man, in his humble status of a man among men, is remarkable, but corresponds to the absence of any such statement from the synoptic tradition, and that can be fully accepted as genuine in present the form, as an expression of the Son of Man.

Finally, it can be observed that the johannine Son of Man fundamentally differs from the synoptic one, and the difference is in the definition of this representation. In the synoptic Gospels, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is the eschatological Judge, while at John, the judge's role is rather a „function” of this. In the fourth Gospel, the Son of Man repeatedly insist that he will not manifest his role as a judge (Jn 5,27-47; 12,23), but the savior function (3,16-17).

In the third part of the paper we mention from the beginning that there are different types of Christology in the New Testament, and these are not always complementary. For example, it is difficult to put in agreement the synoptic presentation of the Son of Man, who will come at the end of time, with the johannine representation of the Son of Man which descends and ascends and then reveals what he saw and heard in the presence of the Father. In the same way, there are differences between the Gospels of Matthew and Luke on the one hand, portraying the davidic origins of Jesus' messiahship, and on the other hand, the Gospels of Mark and John, barely showing the genealogy. But behind all these differences and tensions, there is a profound unity of the New Testament claims, regarding Jesus, in the stories and prophecies He tells . (Frank J. Matera).

So, there is a constant testimony of the New Testament on the concept that God sent Christ to release, to rescue and save the humanity from the curse of sin, and from the uncontrollable slavery's powers. So, the New Covenant establishes a direct relationship, between Christ and human helplessness, so that an analysis of these failure to be decisive for the christology, as christology is decisive for the analysis of human weakness.

Developing the christology theme and analyzing the „Son of Man” expression, we reached on some prominent considerations:

a) - By defining the relationship of Christ with God, the significance of Christ toward other issues is determined. So, in most hypostases where divine interrelating appears , we find Christ identified with the „Son” of God quality. Due to this condition, his ministry and work have redeeming value.

b) - Jesus' humanity, is the subject of self-emptying as far as his humility is concerned. Such humility clearly indicates the adoption of a humble attitude in his humanity, becoming obedient; obedience that he took to the extreme death. This death was of course a summary of self denial, up to the torture and then to the body crucifixion.

c) - We can see that the whole Saviour's kenosis reason was the salvation of man, although „He was just like God” (Lk 23,34; Philip 2,6). In His kenosis, the incarnated God allows Himself the direct suffering being willing to forgive, by clearing Himself from the others accusation right. Moreover, he promises the Kingdom of heaven to the sinners with whom he was likened and mocked : „*today you will be with me in paradise*” (Lk 23,43).

d) - Early on, the New Testament christology, has a profound eschatological character, centered on Christ's resurrection and His glorious coming, namely the Parusia (1 Tes 4,15-17). Also, Christ's royal authority is closely related to His resurrection (Facts 2,33-34).

e) - The Son of Man's coming refers to something that transcends Jerusalem's historical destruction. Its description and of the fearful events that will precede it, considerably formulates the illustration of the hebrew Scriptures and of the intertestamental apocalyptic tradition. The appeal to the traditional cosmic methaphors belonging to the apocalyptic literature, emphasises the meaning of the judgment coming; of course it is impossible to establish a precise date in this regard.

f) - The historical and concrete interpretation of the Son of God status, refers to the fact that Jesus' divine sonship is understood, not only as an over-history essence, but also as a reality that becomes effective in and through the history and faith in the Son of Man. In this regard, I can explain why in the New Testament's substrate, is not mentioned from the beginning the reason why Jesus is the Son of God, but he „*was ordained Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness, through His resurrection from the dead*” (Rom 1,4).

Finally, it is necessary to conclude that the Son of God becomes the Son of Man, to fulfill in His own person the human converting to Himself, by his rising from the depths of iniquity and the consequent suffering, to be released from the sinful being and to achieve the holiness. Besides, by participating to the holiness of Jesus Christ, the human holiness that was acquired in Him is attested, because he is Holy. Those who receive the Saviour and those who were given the power to become children of God and believe in His name, they are not born from blood or lust or man's will, but by the will of God (Jn 1,12).

Thus, the Son of Man's requirement is that the man can offer Him and therefore to God, a genuine faith, serious and especially absolute. This step made towards faith in Christ, as an act of obedience to Him, distinguishes itself from any other step that man can do, by the fact that in relation to the entire previous life, thinking and judgement, it implies a return, a full break and a new beginning.

Of course, it's needed to be mentioned that the christian theaching must start with the assertion's reality: „*Christ the one of you*” (Col 1,27). The sanctification is God's holy

character, inherent in the Holy One, Jesus Christ - Son of Man through the Holy Spirit, to be dwelt into the spirit of the believer, and that will allow to such a holy character to be revealed in the christian behavior. Thus, he will be motivated to move away from sin and impurity, focusing on the function the Father intended. It is God who makes „the difference”, under His holy and sanctifying character, by the dynamics of His greatness.

The last part of the paper includes some reflections that have as a foundation the theological developments on the „Son of Man” concept. Of course, it is necessary to present some main features, to highlight the role of the sociological and liturgical reality according to contemporary exegesis:

a) - There is no doubt that in the Gospels, in their present form, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is a title, and as particular individual is the person of Jesus. It is also impossible to challenge the significant influence of Daniel 7's fragment, on the synoptic references, regarding the Son of Man. However, it appears the question of the New Testament testimonies presence regarding a premature establishing of the concept located in the penumbra of Jesus' identification with the Son of Man, or with any particular individual whose existence was already present in heaven, previously deduced from Daniel 7,13.

b) - It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the christian tradition would not have acquaintance about the Son of Man's existence in heaven, in which the risen Christ to be recognized. Furthermore, the complete silence of the tradition regarding this situation, suggests that such identification has not ever been made .Especially, if we oppose the complete silence and the clear evidence of the fact that first christians were anxious to equate Jesus to other representations portrayed in jewish's eschatological hope. Equally important is the consideration that there is no other evidence in the Savior's words, that He would look out for another eschatological savior, to follow His ministry, or for someone to take a decisive role as far as the last judgment is concerned.

c) - Since the separation between Church and Synagogue became increasingly obvious, the jews and the christians had to reach to a concordance, in terms of the relationship with Judaism. Being banished from the synagogue and temple, meant the loss of the inheritance, the spiritual center and the homeland, the claim to the covenant's promises, also of the national identity. Therefore, we take into account the quality of being God's people, but for the judeo-christians is a matter of continuity. In this regard the question arising, is if they are still in succession with Israel, heritors of tradition and promises, or they are a completely new group?

d) - Most biblical scholars confirm two fundamental points regarding the Savior's activity, meaning that Jesus fulfilled a dramatic action in the Temple, and this action was one of the key reasons that led to his execution. But now, question marks on the intention and symbolism of his appearance in the Temple also appear, especially on the consequences reason of this presence.

e) - In so far as the messiahship was the normative category for the eschatological savior and the messenger of God in the biblical history of salvation, the „Son of Man” title election made by Jesus, must be understood as an expression of His own understanding of His messiahship, in order to highlight what kind of Messiah He was. Moreover, any interpretation of his self description which claims to be correct, must correspond with his own messianic conscience expressed by other means than his own designation. Namely, it is necessary to correspond with that particular conception of his messiahship.

f) - The Church celebrates the eucharistic ritual until the present, according to Christ's commandment, that he bequeathed to his disciples at the Last Supper: „*you should do this in remembrance of me*” (Lk 22,19; 1 Cor 11,24). This urge has a double meaning, ie it assumes an action and a commemoration, or more precisely, a commemoration involved in and by an action. The celebration of the act itself, consists of imitating a model initiated and established by Lord Himself. The christological foundation of the Eucharist was revealed to us in almost identical narratives from the first three Gospels (Mk 14,22-24; Mat 26,26-28; Lk 22,19-20), and very close to them is the pauline testimony (1 Cor 11,23-25), assumed as a legacy received from Christ.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, Jesus' testimony involves the identification with God, to that point that He chooses, by His own authority, the people who will be partekers to the communion with Himself, at His table, and those that He will reject. Going beyond the traditional standard of the future participation in salvation, beyond the law, by interpreting the words of the law, under His own authority, also by taking the sinners with him in the communion of the eschatological Supper, Jesus made Himself equal with God. The Savior knew that he was entrusted to make the latest decision on the people he met, in the name of God Himself. This was actually the ministry of Jesus, since he was confirmed in this regard, by the resurrection from the dead.

By the paschal event, Jesus' followers and those who accepted the proclamation of this episode, recognized Jesus as Himself identical with the eschatological judge, the Son of Man. I tried of course to prove as far as possible, the fact that a collective and corporate comprehension of the expression *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, mainly as far as the synoptic Gospels,

are concerned ,can make possible the using perception by Jesus, but also to identify him in early christianity, personally, with the Son of Man attribute. However, it is possible that certain statements about the Son of Man may have the origin in an universal use of the aramaic בר נשא, although this idea does not ease the explanation of the transition from Jesus to the early Church.

As a conclusion of the fourth chapter, according to the Gospels, I can affirm that Jesus Christ is the Man for the people, because his nature represents dedication and love. In this love for man, He is the concrete model of God's love existence for us. The solidarity shown to the people, is also the epiphany form of his divine sonship quality. In his relationship with God, Christ is the complete expression of obedience, and in his relationship with the man, He is the full complete expression of devotion and intercession. Jesus is the mediator between God and man in this dual transcendence. He takes upon Himself our fault, but through his voluntary obedience and personal ministry, he offers to this obscure history a new quality, by setting a new beginning. Moreover, in the suffering and death on the cross, when the obedience and ministry reach their ultimate perfection, all the powers of injustice were removed and pushed towards extinction. By not answering to their challenge, he „repressed” them in his death.