

Preface

The "son of the man" is the expression Jesus most often used to describe himself. For two thousand years it has resisted deciphering. In Hebrew, the phrase simply means "a human being." The implication seems to be that Jesus intentionally avoided honorific titles, and preferred to be known simply as "the Man," or "the human being." Apparently he saw his task as helping people become more truly human.

All of the ancient texts that refer to "the son of the man" come packaged in male language. This places on the reader the burden of having to translate that language into gender inclusive terms. I have tried to keep male language at a bare minimum, substituting other terms as often as possible, while still identifying the original language. If I have failed to find the happy medium, please accept my apologies in advance. The gold of ancient wisdom is often buried in such mud as this, and those who refuse to get dirty may forfeit the treasure.

This study may strike some who have read my earlier works on the biblical "principalities and powers" as a major departure from the concerns that animated that inquiry.* While the current book explores new territory, it is by no means discontinuous with that earlier effort. In studying the Powers I attempted to understand what were the forces that *prevented* people from becoming more human. Here, in studying the "son of the man," I have attempted to gain some idea of what it *means* to become more human. In a more accessible sequel will search for clues about *how* to become more human.

The work on the Powers began in 1964. Research on the "son of the man" began in 1971, when I first attended a seminar given by the Guild for Psychological Studies in San Francisco, California. Those two research themes have been running on parallel tracks ever since. I must acknowledge my profound debt to the Guild, and especially to its founder and presiding genius, Elizabeth Boyden Howes, for insights that not only informed me but in part transformed me, and are transforming me still. I will attempt to acknowledge my use of material that came out of almost twenty summers of seminars with the Guild, but I no longer can be sure where the Guild's insights stop and mine begin. Please regard this book, then, as a community enterprise of which I am a scribe.

In another way I have written this book for myself. I do not mean to suggest that the reader must agree with my findings. I have many friends who think quite differently from me, who are wonderful human beings, and who can get along quite well without this book. But I have also encountered many people for whom this approach represents an exciting alternative to an orthodoxy they feel has lost its vitality.

*The Powers trilogy consists of *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); and *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). There is a summary of the trilogy, focusing on the third volume, titled *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1998). I have, in addition, written several books that apply the Powers analysis to practical issues: *Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987); *When the Powers Fall: Reconciliation in the Healing of Nations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998); and *Peace is the Way: Writings on Nonviolence from the Fellowship of Reconciliation*, editor (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000).