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JESUS AS HEALER OF BROKEN FAMILIES: THE BEGINNINGS OF A PASTORAL THERAPEUTIC MODEL BASED ON THE MEANING OF THE "SON OF MAN".

AUTOD

By Ashok Chaudhari, MDIV, MA.

For the *Son of Man* is Lord of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:8)

A debate about the meaning of Jesus "the son of man" has taken place for centuries. The most recent history of this debate—there have been 66 surveys since 1725—is written by Delbert Burkett in 1994. The book covers a surprising number of different interpretations that have been put forth throughout history as to the meaning and derivation of the phrase "son of man"; at the conclusion of the book Burkett writes: "The son of man debate thus serves as a prime illustration of the limits of New Testament scholarship". In other words, there is no single theological interpretation that has cornered the market. More recently, Walter Wink wrote a book that approaches the topic in a way different from any number of theological interpretations covered by Burkett. Wink interprets the "son of man" primarily from a psychoanalytic—Jungian—point of view. This move opens up the possibility of understanding the spiritual significance of Jesus, the "son of man" in terms of a therapeutic model. In this paper I propose a combination of theological and psychological understandings of the phrase "son of man" as the basis for the beginnings of a family therapeutic model.

First it is important to be clear about the translation of "son of man". Many interpreters have erroneously relied solely on the translation from Greek to English. The most reliable translation, however, is from the original Aramaic to English and there is no advantage at all to translating solely from the Greek. In fact, much time and energy has been wasted on arguments regarding the Greek translation, probably due to an anti-Semitic bias in favor of Greek culture over Jewish culture. But what really matters here is what Jesus the Jew meant by the Aramaic "bar enasha". Literally translated this means "son of man". So the phrase is not "son of the man" as Wink would have it, following the Greek "ho huio tou anthropou." Staying

with the original Aramaic keeps one out of the many speculations there have been about the meaning of the Greek translation.

What then is the significance of Jesus' claim to be the "Son of man" from a therapeutic point of view?

It has certainly been said before that most of man's misery throughout history has had, and continues to have its source in broken family relations. This is true of father-son relations. Men have had more power and therefore could do more damage. The miracle of Jesus is that he brought into the world the possibility of having whole family relations, and healing broken ones. For the first time in history Jesus provided the power to make families whole.

How did Jesus achieve this? He started by calling himself the "son of man". At the time of Jesus it must have been customary to refer to oneself as the son of one's father. We can deduce this from the genealogy at the beginning of the Gospel according to Matthew. The genealogy begins with Jesus "the son of David", "the son of Abraham", and the list goes on. To the ears of the people at the time of Matthew this must have been familiar just as it is today in Eastern countries. Jesus' claim to be the "son of man" would effectively—if not dramatically—make the point that he did not want to be identified with his family; that his identity lay elsewhere. While there have been previous interpretations of the "son of man" based on genealogy, precisely this obvious and commonsensical connection has never before been made. What is less obvious is why in the case of Jesus he should be the son of "man" and not "David" or "Abraham" or "Joseph" for that matter. Many theories have been suggested. But again, if in fact it was common practice at the time of Christ to refer to people (and to oneself) as the son of one's father, then by calling himself the son of "man" Jesus is claiming a new identity.

It should be pointed out that the phrase the "son of man" was not entirely strange to the Jews at the time of Jesus. It is well known that the phrase "son of man" appears in Ezekiel, for example. Ezekiel too was a "son of man." So then how is this self-proclaimed title of Jesus particularly relevant to family healing?