

From Temple to Heavenly Court

JOSEPH BOURKE, O.P.

I. RECAPITULATION

In a series of articles,¹ of which this is the fourth, I have attempted to trace a particular theme of God's presence to Israel, and of Israel's encounter with God in his holiness, through the Old Testament into the New. The theme has its source in a vision—Moses' vision of the burning bush (Exod. 3). A blaze of mysterious fire, awful, yet irresistibly attractive, draws Moses towards itself, and the voice of God himself issues from the flame summoning him and miraculously empowering him to enter within the sphere of its numinous radiance. At Sinai (Exod. 19) the same encounter with holiness is repeated on a gigantic scale. Yahweh descends on the mountain in the midst of fire, amid earthquake, thunder and lightning and the sound of a terrible trumpet which grows louder and louder. Here the whole mountain becomes charged and glowing with holiness, and so constitutes the numinous sphere of mortal danger to all creaturehood. But here too Moses, together with the chosen representatives of the people, is rendered miraculously immune to the burning withering effects of the *numen*, and summoned to walk unscathed into its destroying flame. At the summit of the mountain he encounters Yahweh himself and enters into covenant with him on behalf of all the people. This is sealed by a covenant meal eaten in Yahweh's presence. This *pilgrimage, encounter and communion* on the sacred mountain are to be renewed year by year in the life of the Covenant People. In the particular tradition which we are considering they become the very articulations of the community's worship. The sacred mountain of the divine presence subsequently becomes Zion instead of Sinai; thither the Israelites are summoned on pilgrimage at the great pan-Israelite festivals to re-actualize their encounter with Yahweh the holy, to enter anew into the sacred sphere of his numinous presence, now represented by the temple and its precincts, and there, under the shadow of his wings, to share in a communion meal. In the message of the later prophets the theme expands

¹cf. *The Life of the Spirit* March, May, November 1961.

still further; the gentiles too are to come on pilgrimage to the world sanctuary at Jerusalem, and there to enter into communion with Yahweh in his *kabod*, the radiant cloud of fire in which his presence is manifested, and which occupies the innermost shrine of the temple.

Worship in this tradition is dominated by a sense of radiance and convergence. The sacred place of encounter between Yahweh and his people is transferred, in one 'pre-priestly' tradition, from the summit of the mountain to the 'tent of meeting', an 'oracle-tent' pitched outside the camp (cf. Exod. 34. 7-11). But in the priestly tradition proper (finally committed to writing during the exile), the shrine of the divine presence becomes the *mishkan* or dwelling, the tabernacle housing the ark-throne, which is placed at the centre of the camp. (cf. Nb. 1. 37-3. 39). Here Yahweh dwells continuously in the midst of his people. Around this shrine the whole of creaturehood is conceived to be ranged in a carefully graded hierarchy of concentric spheres. From the shrine of the *kabod* holiness radiates out through these spheres, Aaronites, Levites, Israelites, Abrahamites, Noachites, 'Adamites', touching and quickening each according to its degree. Simultaneously the worship of all creaturehood converges upon the shrine of the *kabod*, starting with the dumb inarticulate response of those most remote in space and time, and ending with the inspired ministry of the house of Aaron actually within the sanctuary itself.

This sense of radiance, convergence and concentricity is expressed in visual terms in the series of concentric courts, of which the temple, and its portable counterpart the tabernacle, are respectively said to have been constructed. At the same time the indigenous Hebrew tradition is enriched by borrowings from pagan mythology. The sacred mountain of Zion acquires the mystical attributes of the *arallu* mountain, the semitic Olympus, beneath which Sheol the semitic Hades lay. The mythological descriptions of the glories of this mountain, with its flashing jewels and precious metals, are now transferred to Zion. The equipment and decoration of the temple itself are expressive of the idea that it is a formal and artificial 'paradise', and a microcosm of the fertile earth. Here the supreme God dwells at the source of the cosmic rivers, surrounded by fruit-trees and plants, and attended by colossal winged beings, half beast, half man, known as cherubim. Chief among these, alike in beauty and power, and closest of all to Yahweh himself, is the guardian cherub of the mountain who 'walks in the midst of the stones of fire'. In the Jerusalem temple the significance of the High Priest's investiture in his jewelled robes is that it 'creates' him into such

a guardian 'cherub' of this artificial paradise.

Just as the temple is the microcosm of the fertile earth, so conversely the earth, with its ordered hierarchy of living creatures, is conceived as a sort of macrocosmic temple-tower built by Yahweh himself in seven 'stories', and equipped with a living breathing image of himself, man.

All this points on irresistibly to the New Testament, where in the moment of our Lord's crucifixion, which is also his *glorification* (cf. Jn. 12. 23, etc.), his own body is revealed as the new temple, the shrine of the *kabod* (glory), with the life-giving waters flowing from its side to quicken all men into supernatural life. The worship of the Church, 'the new Israel of God', now becomes a *pilgrimage* out of the world to the mountain of the crucifixion, where we *encounter* God and seal a new covenant with him in the *communion* of the body and blood of his own Son. And always through and beyond this there is the further dimension, the heavenly dimension, represented for us in the Apocalypse. Here the new Jerusalem set on a high mountain has 'the *kabod* of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel . . . its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb' (Apoc. 21. 11, 22). The river of life flows from their throne; the light and life of the new Jerusalem radiate unceasingly from their presence (Apoc. 22. 1-2). Already we are making *pilgrimage* there. We have been summoned to an *encounter* with God's glory in which 'God himself will wipe away all tears . . .' (Apoc. 21. 4), in which we are to consummate an eternal *communion* in 'the marriage supper of the Lamb' (Apoc. 19. 9). Such, in fairly brief outline, is the theme as we have traced it so far.

Now it might seem to some that having reached the Apocalypse and stood, so to say, in the streets of the heavenly Jerusalem, there is nothing left to be said. Others may have noticed that in the later stages of this development we have been almost exclusively preoccupied with the form, decoration and equipment of the sanctuary as a visual expression of worship, and that we have been neglecting the *kabod* itself, the visible manifestation of Yahweh's holiness in the form of fire and cloud. Here too a brief recapitulation may be expedient.

2. THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SINAI THEOPHANY IN THE TEMPLE LITURGY

Let us return for a moment to the theophany of Sinai.

When the morning of the third day came there was thunder, lightning and thick cloud on the mountain, and the sound of a trumpet extremely loud, so that all the people who were in the camp

trembled. . . Then Mount Sinai smoked all over from the presence of Yahweh descending on it in fire, and the smoke of it rose up like the smoke of a furnace, while the whole mountain shuddered violently. And as the sound of the trumpet swelled louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him with a voice (Exod. 19. 16, 18-19).

What happens here is that for one terrible moment the *kabod*, the numinous penumbra of Yahweh, touches the world in its baseness. Without undue systematization, the ensuing phenomena can be divided into three broad categories: first, those which belong, so to say, to the 'outer fringe' of the penumbra: thick cloud and smoke, fire, lightning, thunder and the deafening sound of a trumpet swelling louder and louder; secondly, far more terrible in its holiness and issuing from the very heart of the fiery penumbra, the divine voice; thirdly, the impact of the penumbra on profane creaturehood manifested in the awful shuddering of the mountain.

Now these motifs recur so persistently and with such emphasis in the main theophany descriptions, especially in the psalms (cf. Pss. 18. 8-16; 1 2 ff.; 68. 2 ff.; 77. 17; 97. 3-6, etc.), that many commentators infer with growing confidence that they reflect cultic and liturgical usages.² The original theophany of Sinai was not only remembered, it was artificially reconstructed and re-actualized in the liturgy of the great festivals—above all in the Autumn festival of Tabernacles, when the people was summoned to make pilgrimage anew to the central shrine, there to encounter Yahweh once more and to renew their covenant with him. The fire, smoke and cloud of the original theophany are now reproduced in the holy fire upon the altar, and even more perhaps, in the smoking censers borne by the priests. In the liturgy of the Day of Atonement (Lv. 16) the High Priest actually penetrates behind the veil of the Holy of Holies with a censer of blazing coals and a 'double handful' of incense, and there makes a cloud of smoke actually over the *kapporet*, the ark-throne on which Yahweh is conceived to descend as once he had descended on Sinai enveloped in fire, cloud and smoke (cf. Lv. 16. 2, 3; 1 Kgs. 8. 10 ff.; Is. 6. 4, etc.).³ The

²cf. A. Weiser: 'Die Darstellung der Theophanie in den Psalmen und im Festkult: Zur Frage nach den Beziehungen der Psalmen zum Kult' in *Festschrift für Alfred Bertholet* Tübingen 1950 pp. 513-531; also W. Beyerlin: *Herkunft und Geschichte der Ältesten Sinaitraditionen*, Tübingen 1961, pp. 153-164.

³cf. H. Torczyner: *Die Bundeslade und die Anfänge der Religion Israels* 2 ed. Berlin 1930, p. 38 ff. and Weiser art. cit. p. 520.

lightning is now represented by the flaming coals in the censer. The terrible trumpet of Sinai is brought to life again in the solemn blowing of trumpets at the feast of Tabernacles, actually called 'a memorial of blowing of trumpets' (Lv. 23. 24; cf. Exod. 19. 16, 19; 20. 18; Ps. 47. 6, etc.). The thunder becomes the voice of the people themselves uttering the *teru'ah*, the terrible growling roar of Israel which is said to cause the earth to shudder (1 Sam. 4. 5; cf. Ps. 47. 6; Is. 6. 3 ff.; Pss. 66. 1; 89. 16; 98. 6; 50. 4 ff.; 68. 12, etc.). The Sinai theophany then is not only a memory, but a memory that is made to come true in these cultic observances. Its attendant portents are symbolically reproduced in the liturgy of this, the supreme feast of pilgrimage, encounter and communion, at which the experiences of the exodus are re-lived generation after generation, and the covenant is renewed.

These are the original and indigenous motifs of the theophany. But here, as in the decoration of tabernacle and temple, other motifs of Syro-Phoenician or Canaanite provenance have been introduced and blended with the older ones in such a way as to elaborate and enrich the whole conception of the theophany. The first of these is the idea of the cloud-chariot on which the Canaanite god Baal was thought to ride by his worshippers. One of his epithets, which recurs in Canaanite religious texts, is 'the rider of the clouds'.⁴ The Israelites transfer this idea to Yahweh, so that the cloud of the theophany is now thought of not only as a penumbra about him, but as a sort of heavenly chariot on which he rides. He descends in a cloud (Exod. 34. 5), 'makes the clouds his chariot, walks upon the wings of the wind' (Ps. 104. 3), 'rides upon a swift cloud' (Is. 19. 1); 'He bowed the heavens and came down, and thick darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub and did fly, yes, soared upon the wings of the wind' (Ps. 18. 10-11).

The mention of wings and cherubim in these passages serves to draw our attention to a further motif, also borrowed, as it seems, from Syro-Phoenician or Canaanite sources. It is the element of the golden cherubim's wings stretched out above and below the *kapporet*, the ark-throne, in the priestly descriptions (cf. Exod. 25. 18 ff.; 37. 7 ff.). A representation of two monstrous winged figures stretching out their wings in exactly this manner to protect and support the throne of the god Horus has been discovered in a group of Syro-Phoenician ivory carvings from Arslan Tash.⁵ The correspondence is so exact as hardly

⁴cf. G. R. Driver: *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, Edinburgh 1956, p. 81.

⁵cf. A. Parrot: *Le Temple de Jérusalem*, Paris, 1954, p. 21.

to leave room for doubt that the cherubim of the Israelite ark are inspired by some such Syro-Phoenician motif. Now it is unmistakable that the cherubim's wings here have exactly the same function and significance as that of the cloud chariot. They at once cover and veil, and at the same time carry, the throne on which Yahweh rests. Hence he is spoken of as 'enthroned on or between the cherubim' (Ps. 80. 2; 99. 1; Is. 37. 16, etc.). The golden cherubim's wings are in fact, neither more nor less than formalized representations of the fiery cloud of Sinai, now become not only Yahweh's penumbra but also his chariot. This symbolism becomes supremely important in the developments which we have next to consider.

3. THE APOCALYPTIC VISIONS OF THE THEOPHANY

So far we have seen how certain elements in the temple-cult and in the form of the ark-throne of Yahweh artificially and symbolically reproduce the portents of the theophany. Now it is precisely this formalized cultic version of the theophany that lies immediately behind the prophet's vision of the *kabod* theophany in Is. 6. In the moment of his prophetic vocation Isaiah's vision pierces mysteriously through these theophanic symbols and penetrates to the celestial exemplar that lies beyond. The temple itself swells to gigantic dimensions and is revealed for what it really is, the throne-room of Yahweh, where he sits attended by heavenly beings. The ark-throne itself, now immensely magnified and lofty, is enveloped in the cloud and smoke of the divine presence (6. 1, 4). The golden cherubim too have grown vast and come to life, and their appearance as they stand above the throne is even more monstrous and terrifying (6. 2). They are seraphim, 'burning ones' (there may be some idea of personified lightning-flashes here), fiery serpents with six wings and apparently with human features and hands (cf. 6. 2, 6). Only one pair of wings is used to fly. With a second pair the cherubim cover their faces for even they, if they saw the face of Yahweh, would die. The third pair covers their nakedness (for which the narrator employs the characteristic Hebrew euphemism, 'feet') for they, in common with all other creatures, are sexually differentiated. This detail recalls the laws prescribing that the Israelite priests must always cover their nakedness in Yahweh's presence (Exod. 20. 26; 28. 42, etc.). The thunder of the original theophany, reproduced in the *teru'ah*, the roar of the assembled worshippers in the cult, now resounds in the trisagion of praise cried out from one to another of these terrible creatures: 'Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh Sebaot; the whole

earth is filled with his *kabod*!. As once the mountain trembled and shuddered at the impact of Yahweh's numinous holiness, so here the pillars of the threshold tremble 'at the voice of him that cried' (6. 4). The fire of the theophany, symbolized in the cult by the blazing coals upon the altar, is here tended by the seraphim in place of the priests (6. 6). It can be seen here that not only has the symbolic theophany of the temple liturgy been magnified and brought to life, but the theophanic elements themselves have in some sense become personal and living. The fiery *kabod* embodies itself in the heavenly beings. The fire and lightning become the 'burning ones', the seraphim. The thunder becomes their cry of adoration that shakes the temple.

The next major development in *kabod* theology occurs in Ezekiel. In his vision of the theophany (1-3. 14) he is miraculously allowed to see into the *kabod*, and to gaze on the divine form at its centre. He describes his vision with perceptible hesitancy, and the obscurity of his language is increased by the fact that the Hebrew text is very ill-preserved at this point. The following translation, in which secondary additions have been omitted, may serve to clarify the passage in question.

Above the firmament which was over their (the living creatures') heads was what looked like a stone of lapis-lazuli in the form of a throne; and on that throne-like shape was the form of what looked like a man; . . . from what seemed to be his loins upwards I had the impression of flashing metal, while from what seemed to be his loins downwards I had the impression of fire, and all round was radiant light. It seemed like the bow which appears in the clouds on rainy days, that radiant light all round him. That was what the form of Yahweh's *kabod* looked like. (Ezek. 1. 26-28).

This passage marks a moment of extraordinary significance in the development of *kabod* theology as a whole. It is the point at which a prophet is inspired to perceive that the *kabod* is identified at its centre and source with a divine figure in human form. The figure is manlike from its loins and upwards. This should be compared with the passage in Gen. 1. 27 (in the same Priestly tradition) where man is said to be in the image and likeness of God—but precisely with this difference, which he shares with the beasts, that he is created male and female.⁶ The appearance of fire from the loins and downwards in Ezekiel's divine figure is a negation of this sexual differentiation, a visual ex-

⁶So for example W. Zimmerli: *Die Urgeschichte* (I Mose—1-11) 2 ed. Zürich, Stuttgart 1957 *ad loc.*

pression of its unique sexlessness. For Ezekiel, as for Isaiah, even the 'living creatures' are sexually differentiated, for they are equipped with a special pair of wings to cover their nakedness (Ezek. 1. 23). Though this need not be taken absolutely literally, it does seem to be intended as an indication of their limitation as creatures. But in his fiery unicity, the divine form at the centre of the *kabod* is revealed as utterly transcending all creatures, and utterly unlike the pagan gods of Babylon with their goddesses. It has been necessary to dwell on this point because it has an important bearing on the priestly form of worship. In the priestly vision, as we have seen, the whole camp, the whole land, and ultimately the whole world is ranged about the sanctuary of Yahweh, constituting a sphere of numinous holiness about its radiant centre. Within that sphere every form of human activity becomes an expression of worship except one—that of sex. Sexual activity, even in its perfectly legitimate forms, is conceived to debar the Israelite for a specified period of purification from the immediate presence of this unique and sexless God. This again is to be contrasted with pagan worship which so often took sexual forms such as ritual prostitution, in response to a god conceived to be sexual in character and to bestow life through the exercise of his sexual powers. The form of worship is a direct reflection of and response to the idea of God which initially inspires it. The faculty by which man is fruitful and multiplies is indeed given by God and blessed by him. But in the Priestly tradition of the Old Testament it is not this faculty which makes him God-like, and it is not by this faculty that God is worshipped. Only in other traditions, notably in that represented by Gen. 2. 20-25, as re-interpreted by Christ, does the faculty of reproduction acquire this positive meaning as a part of Christian worship.

We may now turn to the other elements in Ezekiel's vision. Immediately surrounding the man-like apparition at the centre of the *kabod* plays the light of the rainbow, which in this Priestly tradition is the sign of God's covenant with mankind—the *noachic* covenant. (cf. Gen. 9. 12-17).⁷ He is enthroned on a throne of lapis-lazuli (this rendering seems more probable than the more usual 'sapphire'), a feature which clearly recalls the lapis-lazuli pavement of the Sinai theophany (Exod. 24. 10). The throne in turn is supported by a chariot upheld by and indeed composed of 'living creatures' (Ezek. 1. 5 ff.). So closely are these associated with the theophanic elements of fire and lightning in Ezekiel's vision, that they seem, even more clearly than Isaiah's sera-

⁷cf. W. Eichrodt: *Der Prophet Hesekiel* 1-18 ATD Gottingen 1959, p. 8.

phim, to be in some sense personifications of the fiery *kabod*. 'Now in appearance the living creatures looked like blazing coals of fire . . . and the fire was bright with lightning-flashes coming out of the fire, and the living creatures, darting to and fro, looked like flashes of lightning'. (Ezek. I. 13, 14). A most striking analogy to Ezekiel's cherubim-chariot is to be found in the account of the wheeled water-carriers of Solomon's temple. The bases of these are described in detail in 1 Kgs. 7. 27-37. The upper part consists of panels decorated with lions, bulls and cherubs, and surmounted by a pedestal (29). Each base is equipped with four bronze wheels set in a framework of moulded bronze on which the lion-bull-cherub motif appears to be repeated (vv. 30-36). It can scarcely be doubted that Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim-chariot and its wheels is in some sense inspired by the form of these wheeled water-carriers, and conceived to be a celestial exemplar of them. Once more the formalized representations of the temple cult have their vaster *living* counterparts in heaven. The gigantic wheels of the heavenly chariot are *alive* with the same spirit as that of their attendant living creatures (Ezek. I. 20), and their rims are full of eyes (I. 17), for they are keeping watch throughout Yahweh's dominion of heaven and earth. One set of wheels, oriented north and south, contains another, concentric with but at right angles to it, that is oriented east and west (I. 16-17). The chariot can move on its north-south or east-west axis according to the will of the inspiring spirit, without turning. To change direction it simply runs sideways in relation to its previous course on its alternate set of wheels. This feature, which Ezekiel is at such pains to explain, is an expression of the universal dominion of Yahweh enthroned on the chariot. North, south, east, west, the four quarters of heaven belong to him, and his chariot moves straight forward unimpeded in whatever direction he wills.

The same conception of universal dominion is expressed by the feature that the living creatures upholding his throne are four-faced (I. 6). They look out to the four corners of the universe, thereby manifesting and imposing his absolute dominion in every direction at once. But why does each have the face of a man, a lion, a bull, and an eagle? This appears to be an adaptation and elaboration of certain pagan mythological representations. The Assyrian eagle-headed god represented, for example, in the sculptures of Assur-bani-pal's palace, appears to have inspired the man-eagle motif. To this has been added the motif of the lion and the bull so as to make up the number four, expressive of Yahweh's universal dominion. The last two kinds of cherub are, of

course, found in the decoration of Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 7. 25, 29, 44, etc.), where they are of Phoenician, or possibly Egyptian provenance. In so far as we can assign a meaning to them, the bull probably represents life-force and fertility, and the lion destruction. But Ezekiel had the more immediate spectacle of the winged lion and bull colossi which guarded the entrances of Babylonian temples to stimulate his imagination. The background of his thought appears to be: 'The Babylonians have their graven images of colossal winged bulls and lions and eagle-headed gods, but Yahweh's throne is upheld by much vaster and more terrible creatures in which all these fearful and potent elements are combined, and which are, above all, *alive* with fiery spirit'.

Here, even more clearly than in Isaiah, it seems that the fierce mysterious energy of the *kabod* has entered into these unearthly figures. It is no longer merely fire and cloud and thunder. In them it acquires a concrete and personal existence, while still continuing to be the numinous penumbra which envelops and supports Yahweh's immediate presence. The thunder of the theophany becomes the beating of their wings in flight '... like the sound of mighty waters, like the voice of the Almighty, as they advanced the noise of a tempest, like the noise of a host' (Ezek. 1. 24). The death-dealing impact of the *numen* upon the profane and sinful world now evolves into the personal act of destruction performed by these personifications of the numinous *kabod*, carried out at Yahweh's command. They stretch out human hands from beneath their wings to take blazing coals from between them to be cast down upon the sinners (10. 7). And this, of course, is exactly the function and significance of the destroying angels of the Apocalypse. Their acts of destruction embody and represent the awful impact of God's holiness upon the profane and the sinful at his final advent.

The development of ideas then is fairly clear. Fire, smoke, cloud, thunder, lightning, earthquake, the voice of Yahweh and the sound of a terrible trumpet—these are the chief manifestations of the *kabod* at Sinai. In the temple cult they are symbolically 're-actualized'. In particular the numinous penumbra is represented by the outspread wings of the cherubim above and below the ark-throne. In the vision of the prophets this artificial temple-theophany comes to life and achieves a celestial dimension. As we notice the stages of this development and consider the demonstrable continuity between them, *kabod* theology seems to grow into *kabod* apocalyptic before our eyes. For apocalyptic precisely means being allowed to penetrate into the fiery cloud and to gaze on the throne of Yahweh at its centre and source. It is to see the

cosmic portents as living creatures and persons, vaster and more awful in their holiness than the most terrible conceptions of pagan mythology. It is to be accorded an 'angel's eye view' of heaven and earth; to look out from the vantage-point of the heavenly court upon the whole course of history evolving under the control of Yahweh's creatures and now, according to the terms of his predestined plan, nearing its consummation. Apocalypse is the message, proclaimed with fiery lips, of one who has been caught up for a single moment into the radiant *kabod* of Yahweh's presence.

4. THE FINAL PERSONIFICATION OF THE KABOD IN DANIEL'S VISION OF THE SON OF MAN

So far we have traced *kabod* theology from the burning bush and Sinai to the tent of meeting; thence to the tabernacle and the throne of the ark and so on to the temple of Solomon; finally to its eschatological and apocalyptic developments in Isaiah and Ezekiel. The final developments are to be found in the apocalyptic vision of Dan. 7. 9 ff.

Thrones were set up, and an Ancient of Days took his seat; his raiment was white as snow, the hair of his head like pure wool. His throne was flames of fire, its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire was flowing, issuing from before him. A thousand thousands served him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. . . . Then behold with the clouds of heaven came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, tongues should serve him. His dominion is an eternal dominion, which shall not pass away; and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7. 9-10, 13-14).

The continuity of this scene with the vision of Ezekiel is fairly clear. At the centre of the heavenly court Yahweh himself is enthroned. His throne is composed of flames, its wheels burning fire, and from it flows a stream of fire. Evidently this is Ezekiel's throne-chariot, more summarily described, and with certain new features added. But where Ezekiel describes the figure of Yahweh in vague and hesitant outline, Daniel looks boldly at him and describes his features. He is an 'Ancient of Days', a relatively ordinary idiom for 'old man' in Aramaic (an almost equivalent expression is to be found in the story of Susanna: Dan. 13. Vulgate; cf. also Wisdom 2. 10, Eccclus. 25. 5). His garments are white as snow, his hair like unspotted wool. The significance of this feature is, I believe, that the shining radiance of the penumbra now

becomes the actual features of Yahweh himself, his raiment and the hair and beard which surrounds his countenance. Astonishingly bold and vivid as this conception is, the description amounts to nothing less. The portrayal of Yahweh as aged is probably derived in part from one more mythological borrowing. Similar descriptions of 'high' or 'supreme' gods as aged are relatively frequent in pagan mythology. In particular, El, the 'high' god of the Ugaritic pantheon, is conventionally described as hoar-headed and grey-bearded. It seems to be this conventional description of the mythological 'high-god' which has been taken over and transformed by Daniel into an expression of the numinous penumbra surrounding Yahweh's face. But probably too he means to express the timelessness of Yahweh; he is eternal. He has lived through the whole of history now on the point of reaching its consummation. References to the age of the 'high-god' in pagan myths are especially frequent in situations in which the figure so described is handing over his executive powers to a younger and more active god.⁸ This, of course, is not what Daniel means, but the figure does have a certain accidental appropriateness to the scene which he sees, in which Yahweh is handing over the eternal kingdom and dominion to one of his heavenly beings.

The theme of 'Yahweh enthroned amid his heavenly court' is an interesting and important one.⁹ Probably the earliest instance of it occurs in 1 Kgs 22. 19-23, in the vision of Micaiah. 'I saw Yahweh sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left'. Elements of this scene are reproduced almost *verbatim* in the vision of Isaiah 6, which we have already examined from a different point of view. The heavenly court scene in Job 1-2 is clearly a further instance. More fragmentary references are to be found in the Psalms (cf. Ps. 89. 6, 8, etc.). There can be no doubt that the scene in Daniel represents a further development of this theme. An element which recurs in nearly all its instances is that after consultation with the assembly of angelic beings, Yahweh sends an emissary from the celestial court to earth to implement his decision. In Micaiah's vision the emissary is the spirit who is to go out and 'be a lying spirit' in the mouth of the prophets (1 Kgs 22. 22); in Is. 6. 8 it is the prophet himself who is sent to say 'Hear and hear but do not understand . . .'

⁸cf. J. A. Emerton: 'The Origin of the Son of Man Imagery' in *The Journal of Theological Studies* IX/2 October 1958 pp. 225-242.

⁹On this form of vocation scene cf. W. Zimmerli: *Ezechiel, Biblischer Kommentar XIII/1* Moers 1955, pp. 16-21.

etc.; in Job it is Satan sent to test the righteous man with suffering. Less obviously, but still quite surely, the prophet of Is. 40. 1-8 who is told to 'cry' and asks 'What shall I cry?' (v. 6), is such an emissary sent from the heavenly court to console Jerusalem. And now in Daniel the figure of 'one like a Son of Man' is seen coming upon the clouds of heaven towards the throne on which the Ancient of Days is seated. Who is he and what mission does he receive? This is one of the most disputed questions in the whole of Old Testament scholarship.

Let us begin by briefly considering the references to heavenly attendants on Yahweh which occur elsewhere in Daniel. In a single secondary passage (3. 25, Vulg. 3. 92) we find one such being described as a 'son of God' or of the gods, expressing his nearness to Yahweh in heaven. Actually this expression is widespread and occurs fairly early in biblical texts as an appellation of angelic beings. Others in Daniel are called 'the Watchers', and one of these descends to earth, and decrees humiliation and punishment for the king of Babylon (4. 13 ff.). The 'Watchers' have been compared to similar figures in Persian mythology, but the similarity is, in my opinion, rather vague. It will be remembered that the wheels of Ezekiel's chariot are described as full of eyes, and that the faces of the living creatures look out in all directions at once to impose the dominion of Yahweh on the four quarters of the universe. This seems a more significant analogy. In Daniel, as in Ezekiel, the function of the heavenly beings is to keep watch over Yahweh's dominion. The 'holy ones of the Most High' (7. 18, 21, 22, 25, 27) is a much-disputed epithet. Until recently it was widely thought that this was a description of the just but persecuted Israel. But in an important article M. Noth has shown convincingly that this is only a secondary application. Originally and primarily it signifies the heavenly figures ranged about Yahweh's throne. Taking these descriptions as a whole, 'Son of God', 'Holy one of the Most High', 'Watcher', one would say that these figures live in the immediate sphere of Yahweh's glory, his *kabod*, and that, once more, its numinous radiance is somehow embodied or concretized in them.

Three passages in particular introduce figures described as 'what looked like a Son of Man' (10. 16), or 'what looked like a man' (10. 18), or 'one like a Son of Man' (7. 13). Now one of the things we are told about Ezekiel's living creatures is precisely that they 'had the likeness of a man' (Ezek. 1. 5). These more than all the rest, it seems, are intimately associated with Yahweh who assumes the 'appearance of a man' (Ezek. 1. 26; Dan. 7. 9). They are formed in his image and charged with his holiness. In 10. 20, 21 it is revealed to Daniel that the figure 'who

looked like a man' is none other than 'Michael, your leader', and that he is returning to fight the prince of the Persians and, on the outcome of this combat, to meet the leader of the Greeks. He is, then, a warrior figure, charged to implement Yahweh's decisions by descending to earth to overthrow the forces of evil represented by these heathen powers. But the 'one like a Son of Man' in 7. 13 is more glorious than all the rest. He comes to the throne of the Most High riding upon the cloud chariot. In some seventy references to this mode of conveyance in the Old Testament it appears as Yahweh's exclusive prerogative.¹⁰ This is the only passage in which the cloud-chariot is occupied by a figure other than that of Yahweh himself. It seems then that the Son of Man has in some sense been admitted to a share in Yahweh's prerogatives. This impression is confirmed by what follows. 'To him were given glory and dominion and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and tongues should serve him. His dominion is an eternal dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one which shall not be destroyed' (7. 14). Elsewhere in Daniel these and similar expressions are used to express the plenitude of Yahweh's own dominion (cf. Dan. 2. 44; 4. 2, 16; 4. 25, 33; 5. 21; 6. 26) for 'God Most High rules over the kingdom of men and he gives it to whom he pleases' (4. 21). Here then the 'one like a Son of Man' is more than a Watcher charged to pass a sentence of destruction on Babylon (4. 13 ff.), more than a warrior leader charged to lead the hosts of Yahweh against the powers of evil (10. 18, 20). He is the vizier of Yahweh, as Joseph was the vizier of Pharaoh 'in all things save only in the throne' (cf. Gen. 41. 40). To him Yahweh hands over the plenitude of his dominion to administer all things on his behalf for ever. In him, more than in any other Old Testament figure, the holiness, the power, the glory, the *kabod* of Yahweh is invested. More than any other of the celestial beings he embodies and personifies the *kabod* itself. As W. Eichrodt says, 'The mode in which Yahweh reveals himself when as royal Overlord he intervenes in his work to judge or bless, assumes in the final consummation of his divine Kingship in history the form of a man'.¹¹

Only when we have traced *kabod* theology from Moses' vision of the burning bush to Daniel's vision of the court of heaven can we even begin to realize what it means to apply the title 'Son of Man', the most sublime of all Old Testament titles, to the dying Jesus on the Cross.

¹⁰cf. A. Feuillet: 'Le Fils de l'Homme de Daniel et la Tradition Biblique' in *Revue Biblique* lx 1953, pp. 173 ff., 321 ff.

¹¹W. Eichrodt: *Theologie des Alten Testaments II* Berlin 1948, p. 11.