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**The Mystery of the Son of Man.  
Exegetical-theological Study of the Predictions of  
the Passions and Resurrection  
in the Synoptic Gospels**

(synopsis of the doctoral thesis)

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The systematic study of the three predictions of the Passions and Resurrection (*Mk* 8:31-33 || *Mt* 16:21-23 || *Lk* 9:21-22; *Mk* 9:30-32 || *Mt* 17:22-23 || *Lk* 9:43b-45; *Mk* 10:32-34 || *Mt* 20:17-19 || *Lk* 18:31-34) has been mostly ignored or avoided by biblical research, and when it was brought into question, it has led to several theological controversies. Most researchers consider these predictions as *vaticinia ex eventu*, a product of the Christian editing of the life of Jesus, through which the providential and redeeming role of His death was shown, in other words an intervention of the Church. The precision and exactness used in the presentation of the various moments of the passion of the Lord has led to some being convinced that these words could not have been written before the actual events took place.

Using this current situation as a starting point, this work attempts to investigate whether these discourses can or cannot be accepted in the actual manner in which they are presented in the Gospels, as private instructions by Jesus to His disciples, through which they were being prepared for the events soon to unfold, as well as for the missionary activity they were about to take on after the Ascension. Thus, it is the purpose of this work to understand these discourses in the actual original context in which they were spoken, through the reconstruction of the historical, theological and cultural environment of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Judaism, with its faiths, expectations and disappointments, explaining the mechanism through which such teachings were transmitted and the reactions experienced by the disciples. Then, the contents of these foreshadowing speeches is analyzed, without making use of the actual events of the Passion and Resurrection as factors in the transmission of such a message. Being rooted in the teaching activity of Jesus, these statements must have specific meanings which are not dependent upon the future events to which they point, even if their complete understanding came only after their fulfillment. Thus, an actual foreshadowing theology is searched for, which imposes itself as the hermeneutical key for the interpretation of the events of the Passions and Resurrection by the Christian community.

The thesis, structured in eight chapters, can be divided in two parts, considering the approach taken for the analysis of the texts. Thus, a first part offers an exegetical analysis of the different texts which foreshadow the Passions and Resurrection, especially by applying the

principles of the historical-critical method, but also through the use of other research methods, such as narratology. In the second part I shall attempt a thematically-oriented approach, which diachronically looks at the main elements identified in the texts in question which may lead us to an identification of a specific theology pertaining to these controversial passages of the Gospel tradition.

**The first three chapters** follow the main methodical steps of the historical-critical method, applied to each of the three main texts which foreshadow the Passions and Resurrection, in all synoptic variants. Thus, each of these chapters starts with an analysis of the different manuscripts of the texts in question, as found in the critical editions of the New Testament, in order to attempt the reconstruction of the text closest to the so-called “autograph” of the Gospel authors; this endeavor corresponds to the textual criticism (*critica textus*), which establishes the reference text to be analyzed in the next steps.

Next, a presentation of the way in which the texts of the different synoptic versions relate to each other on a literary level, underlining as clearly as possible the concordances and differences between them. The results of this investigation are then confronted with the main synoptic theories in existence today, with the purpose of drafting some hypotheses concerning the dynamics of the sources of these biblical fragments and the way in which each Gospel author has known or was unaware of the others’ writings. The solution proposed is the so-called “hypothesis of the two documents,” which affirms the priority of Mark over the other Gospel writers, which makes his work a source for the other synoptic Gospels. To this source, the supplemental material of a common source for Matthew and Luke may have been added, one which is independent of Mark, which could have passed on a tradition of foreshadowing. A certain reserve is, however, maintained in the imposing this theory as an unique solution in the synoptic problem of the foreshadowing of the Passions and Resurrection, thus not ruling out the possible existence of a more complex and fluid dynamics of the sources, which could not be determined precisely today. This aforementioned discussion correlates with the “literary criticism” phase.

The next section of each of the three chapters focuses on the problem of the historical authenticity and on the origin of the predictions of the Passions and Resurrection. A clear exposition of the detractions targeting the historic nature of the predictions is attempted, as well as of the answers given by the apologetics of their authenticity, of the hypothetical scenarios proposed for the origins of these fragments and the arguments in favor of their belonging to the preaching of the Lord. Then a synthetic reconstruction of what can be considered the original framework (*Sitz im Leben*) of the saying of foreshadowing is performed, as well as of the way in which the traditions of foreshadowing have circulated in the time before they were fixed in

writing within the Gospels. These endeavors are part of the “form criticism” and “tradition criticism” steps, as an application of the historical authentication criteria of biblical texts. The efforts of this chapter might seem useless for the Orthodox Christians, who start off by assuming the historicity of all Gospel data. Some tendencies must however be identified, even within Orthodoxy, from several exegetes, who use such discourses in their biblical analysis. Furthermore, the ever-increasing popularity enjoyed today by minimalist trends of biblical research makes such a discussion necessary even from an apologetic standpoint only.

Then, each synoptic version of the predictions of the Passions and Resurrection is analyzed, under all aspects which pertain to the specific mode in which they are presented by each Gospel author: evangelical context, structure, literary form and composition. The purpose is to underline the specific way of each evangelist to render the three predictions, as far as grammar and style is concerned, as well as the way in which he models his discourse in accordance with his own theological ideas. This analysis is dependent upon the result of literary criticism, moving however the focus from the relationships with the other synoptic Gospels towards the specificity of each evangelist. This endeavor is called, in the scientific methodology of the exegesis of the New Testament, the phase of “redaction criticism”.

In the last section of the first three chapters a exegetical-theological commentary of each of the predictions is presented, in which all the relevant data from the previous sections is synthesized, in order to present in the main theological aspects of these discourses of the Lord.

In **the fourth chapter** of this work, titled “Other predictions of the Passions and Resurrection,” the different declarations or symbolical gestures of the Lord are presented, which, outside the three main predictions of the Passions and Resurrection, are considered *expressis verbis vaticinia* – anticipating directly or indirectly the same final events of His earthly life and mission. These “secondary predictions” of the Passions and/or Resurrection, scattered all along the Gospels, are offering important perspectives concerning the way in which our Lord has known beforehand and transmitted different aspects of His Passions and Resurrection. Included here are: the allegory of the Bridegroom Who will leave His disciples (*Mt 9:14-15 / Mk 2:18-20 / Lk 5:33-35*), the sign of Jonah (*Mt 12:38-40 / Lk 11:29-30*), the discussion between Jesus and Moses and Elijah at the time of the Transfiguration (*Lk 9:30-32*), as well as the interdiction addressed to the disciples of not talking about these things “until the Resurrection” (*Mk 9:9-10 || Mt 17:9*), the dialogue about the coming of Elijah (*Mk 9:12 / Mt 17:12*), the references to the “Chalice” and the “Baptism” of Jesus (*Mt 20:20-28 / Mk 10:35-45; Lk 12:50*), the cryptic declaration concerning the death of Jesus as a prophet in Jerusalem (*Lk 13:31-33*) and about the passion to occur before “the day of the Son of Man” (*Lk 17:24-25*), the parable of the vineyard workers (*Mt 21:33-46 / Mk 12:1-12 / Lk 20:9-19*), the ointment of Bethany (*Mt 26:10-13 / Mk*

14:6-9), the different declarations of the Last Supper (*Mt* 26:17-29; *Mk* 14:12-25; *Lk* 22:7-38) and of the scene in Gethsemane (*Mt* 26:45 / *Mk* 14:41). To all these, observations are added on other possible predictions, such as the one about the destruction and rebuilding of the Temple in three days (*Mt* 26:61 || *Mk* 14:58; cf. *Jn* 2:18-22), as well as the predictions which are specific to the Gospel of John. The aim is to see the whole picture of the different ways of anticipation by Jesus of His Death and Resurrection, through sayings other than the three foreshadows of the Passions and Resurrection.

**The fifth chapter** concerns the “dynamics of the predictions of the Passions and Resurrection in the synoptic Gospels.” Each synoptic evangelist has his own highlights of the role of the fragments within the structure of his Gospel. It appears that a consensus exists that these texts are anchor points within the narrative composition of synoptic Gospels. This is especially affirmed of Mark, where the most conscientious effort can be seen to use the predictions of the Passions and Resurrection as progressive introductions to the events about to take place in Jerusalem. In each Gospel, an increasing intensity can be noted, from the first foreshadowing, which focuses on the rejection aspect, to the second, where the theme of the deliverance into the hands of men is treated, and ending with the third, where the focus is on humility and death. Also, we have a gradual presentation of Jesus as a healer and preacher, to aspects of His authority and power, up to His identification with Messiah Who suffers, is rejected and will be killed. All these bring about a certain coherence and rhythmicity to the evangelical texts. Thus, in this chapter, the starting point is a presentation of the texts within the general structure of the Gospels, followed by a comparison of the three incidences, in the specific way in which they occur in each of the Gospels, and some considerations concerning the relationship between the main predictions and the minor ones, as well as the relationship between the foreshadows and the actual texts describing the Passions and Resurrection, in order to reach some conclusions concerning the dynamics of these foreshadows within these writings.

**In the sixth chapter**, titled “The biblical substrate of the predictions of the Passions and Resurrection of the Son of Man,” the problem of the relation between the three incidences and the Judaic scriptures is addressed, an essential theme for the understanding of the theological meanings of these declarations of Jesus. The Savior presents several times His Passions and Resurrection in direct relationship with the Holy Scriptures and traditions of the Jewish people, which makes a discussion about these relationships mandatory. The following steps are used for the different texts and biblical traditions: after a short description of the meaning of these texts within the literary context of the Old Testament, a series of considerations are put forwards concerning their reception in the Judaism contemporary to Jesus Christ, in order to understand the way in which they are used in connection with the predictions of the Passions and

Resurrection. The degree to which the meaning given to some concepts concerning Jesus Christ is on par with the meaning of the original texts from which they were extracted. Also, it is shown to which degree the analysis of these Old Testament texts can lead to a better understanding of the meanings of the predictions. Finally, some clarifications are made concerning the relationship prophecy – fulfillment in connection to several texts considered “messianic” by the Judaic or Christian traditions. A careful attention is given to the tradition of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah and the seventh chapter of Daniel, which seems to justify the way in which the Lord Jesus, in these predictions, presents the Passions and Resurrection as a “fulfillment” of the Scriptures. However, a general presentation of other texts in the Old Testament and the Judaic inter-testaments period which could be relevant for this discussion.

In **the last two chapters** a presentation of the main reasons – historical or theological – which can be found in the predictions of the Passions and Resurrection. Thus, I have allotted a whole chapter (the seventh) for the discussion on the title “the Son of Man,” which represents one of the most discussed and controversial subjects in current biblical research. Especially due to the lack of uniformity and agreement in the analysis of this subject, I was forced to discuss it in more depth, because its conclusions have a decisive influence over the way in which the message of the predictions is to be understood. As such, the different incidences of the “Son of Man” formula in the pre-Christian Judaism are discussed, after which the main opinions on its meaning in the preaching of Jesus Christ are presented. After a classification of the different contexts in which this title is used, several considerations are noted concerning its role in the predictions of the Passions and Resurrection, in connection with messianic sufferings.

In the last chapter the other significant elements found in the text of the predictions are presented, more precisely the ones which are pertaining to the actual message of our Savior, especially of the Passions and Resurrection. Thus, the following subsections of this chapter are present: “the attitude of Jesus towards His own Passions and Resurrection”; “the necessity and imminence of the Passions and Resurrection”; “the Passion of the Son of Man”; “the rejection of the Son of Man”; “the deliverance of the Son of Man”; “the condemnation of the Son of Man”; “the mocking of the Son of Man”; “the spitting of the Son of Man”; “the flogging of the Son of Man”; “the killing of the Son of Man”; “the Resurrection of the Son of Man”; “the agents of the Passions and Resurrection of the Son of Man”. Each of these elements is analyzed in relation with the scriptural and conceptual tradition of pre-Christian Judaism, which shines more light on the way of their use within the predictions. What is of interest is not as much the way in which these acts have happened within the final events in the earthly life of Jesus Christ, but rather their implications on the rendering of these predictions, in front of the disciples who had entirely different expectations of their Teacher and who had not yet witnessed their fulfillment.

What can be said, following this study, is that the predictions of the Passions and Resurrection are an essential component of the message of our Savior Jesus Christ, as their historical authenticity is hard to dismiss, as well as the integrity of the way in which they are presented by the three synoptic evangelists. The Lord offers to the disciples a special kind of instruction, which was to ready them not only for the coming and understanding of the final events of His earthly life and activity, soon to come, but more than that, to ready them for the upcoming task of being true witnesses of Christ in the world. Jesus offers them the most pertinent and comprising interpretation of the event of the Cross, which starts from the study of the Judaic Scriptures, which fixed and transmitted the absolute will of God for the salvation of the world. He makes them understand that His death and Resurrection are not mere “accidents,” events determined by hostile circumstances, but are rather envisioned in the eternal salvation plan of God, which includes these events centered around Jesus – the Son of Man. Thus, the disciples were capable, after Resurrection, following later confirmations by the Lord, during His appearances before them, to understand the meaning of redemption, in order to preach to the whole world that which would be later called “the madness of the Cross.” The evangelists, in their turn, aware of the importance of this message, have transmitted it in a very accurate manner, integrating it within the whole of their writings, but also offering some interpretative elements, which were meant to underline some particularities they considered more important. The uniformity displayed by the synoptic Gospels in the transmission of the three predictions of the Passions and Resurrection proves the major importance played by these declarations of Jesus within the whole of His activity. Furthermore, their capturing in writing offers a correspondent to this fact in the way in which the biblical authors set this message at the foundation of the theological structure of their writings.

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