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An outline of St. John's Doctrine on the Divine Sonship of the Christian

One of the central efforts of catholic theology has always been to comprehend the mystery whereby we are made participants of the divine life and admitted into the society of the Father and of His Son Jesus Christ. To this effort of understanding Pope Pius XII has given new impetus by the famous Encyclical "*Mystici Corporis*" in 1943. Henceforth the mystery of our union with Christ in its various aspects has really fascinated theologians, being of actual interest not only for all speculative theology — dogmatic, ascetic and mystical — but also for the practical spiritual life of the ordinary Christian. And it seems to be beyond all doubt that no aspect of this problem deserves so much particular attention as that of the Christian's sonship in Christ to the Eternal Father.

This sentiment is indeed strongly rooted in the spirit of the Gospels and of the New Testament writings. For, that we may become sons of the heavenly Father is the supreme message of Christianity itself. The ineffable doctrine is — as it is well known — particularly familiar to St. John. But the Johannine view goes so far as to describe the Christian, "Son of God", as that who is "begotten of God". These expressions occur very often throughout the Johannine literature and, though in themselves simple enough, they carry on unfathomable implications.

This is precisely the purpose of the following dissertation, namely, to try to grasp — as far as possible — the real meaning of the Johannine phrases *tekna Theou*—*gennethenai ek Theou*. We hope that St. John's viewpoint on the divine sonship of the Christians will be thus brought out clearly enough.

I. A PHILOLOGICAL APPROACH

There can never be good exegesis without a sound philological preparation. A serious philological examination of the words and

phrases under consideration is indispensable. So much the more that the expressions "children of God" and "begotten of God" may be viewed from different standpoints and afford different meanings. In order to come to a more exact interpretation of the Johannine mind, we must therefore see which meanings may be implied in these words from the philological point of view.

1. "Children of God": *tekna* from the root *tekein*, *tiktein* (to beget, to engender, to procreate, to give birth to) points to the offspring, which results from such action with regard to either or to both parents. This is the proper sense of the word for which we say "child, children" without regard to sex (1). Less correct it is to translate *teknon* "son", which denotes the male child and for which the Greek has *hyios*. Hence, it is equally less precise in the Latin rendering "filius", as all the Latin versions have it (2). The corresponding Hebrew word is *ben* or, rather, *yeled* and is met with very often in the Old Testament with relation to both sexes (3).

The plural *tekna*, in a wider sense of the word, is used sometimes to denote posterity or descendants, as in Mt. 2.18; 3.9; 27.25; Acts 2.39; more emphatically, true children, genuine descendants, as Jn 8.39; I Pt. 3.6. This is after the Hebrew usage of denoting peoples and tribes by *benê* joined to the name of the progenitor (4).

The metaphorical meanings of *teknon* — and likewise of *hyios* — are quite many. In general, it denotes the reciprocal and intimate relationship formed between men by the bonds of love. Thus, a child or son is one who is the object of parental love and care, or who yields filial love and reverence towards others. It is in this sense that both in the Old and in the New Testament it is the familiar name attributed by an older man to a younger, not only with reference to the difference of age, but also on the ground of authority and of love (5). Upon this representation it is that the relation of the disciple of a church to its teacher or apostle is expressed by

1 Cf. I Pt. 3.6. (=female children).

2 Such words as *prolis*, *sobolis*, *natum* would be more appropriate.

3 Gen 3.16: 30.1; 33.6.7; Dt. 4.10, etc. — The LXX uses *teknon* chiefly for *ben* (as in Gen. 3.16), sometimes for *yeled* (Gen. 33.6.7); elsewhere it translates also by *hyios* (Dt. 4.10).

4 For example, the Israelites are *bene yisrael* or *bene yehudah*.

5 I Kings 3. 9. 16; Mt 9. 2; Mc 2.5; Lk 16, 25; Gal. 4.19. — This spiritual sense of *hyios* is familiar to the old Greek papyri, cf. P. Lond. V. 1658. ff. (edd. KENYON-BELL, *Greek Papyri in the British Museum*, London, 1893-1917) and R. GISS, I. 103, 2 (edd. EGERKORNEMANN-MEYER, *Griechische Papyri zu Giessen*, Leipzig, 1910-1912).

teknon. Thus the Apostles address as their "children" those to whom they taught the Gospel (6). This, again, corresponds to the Hebrew usage, by which disciples considered themselves as children of their teacher, whom they used to call "father" (7).

Much more interesting is the use of child or son, again after the Hebrew, to show that somebody bears a perfect likeness to some other person to whom, for the same reason, some relation of paternity is attributed. "The derivation of the person's nature and, as following therefrom, his character and belongings are implied in the expression, though sometimes the one and sometimes the other element is prominent" (8). In this connection *teknon* (or *hyios*) is always followed by a noun in the genitive, such as "sons of Abraham", "sons of the devil", "sons of God", etc. This goes so far as to join "son" even to inanimate or abstract things whenever any influence or belonging is meant (9).

Particularly noteworthy is the use of *teknon* or *hyios* with a genitive of quality or condition very commonly used in the Old and New Testament Books as a substitute for an adjective. The idiosyncrasy is due to the fact that Semitic languages are very poor in adjectives (10).

In our modern languages the word "son" may also be referred to an adopted child. We may therefore ask if such was the case also with New Testament writers. Legal adoption, such as practised by the Greeks and Romans, was unknown to the Hebrew world (11).

6 Cf. I Cor. 4. 14, 17; I Tim. 1. 2; Tit. 1. 4; Philm. 10; III Jn 4. — In this sense, John uses rather *teknia*, "little children", diminutive of *teknon* (I Jn 2.12, 28; 3.7, 18; 4.4; 5.21. The same word he puts also on the lips of Jesus, Jn 13.33). It is a term of keener affection. Sometimes also *paidia* is used (I Jn 2.14, 18 — cf. Jn 21.5). The latter emphasizes the idea of subordination and subsequent discipline; while *teknia* emphasizes the idea of kinship; (see M. R. VINCENT, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, II, London, 1887, p. 323).

7 Mt 23.9. — Peculiar to John is the use of referring *teknia* to members of particular churches (II Jn 1, 4, 13; — see also Gal. 4.31).

8 H. CREMER, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek* (eng. trans. by W. Urwick), Edinburgh, 1878, p. 554.

9 The use of *hyios* or *teknon* with the genitive is due to the more vivid imagination of the oriental, who looked upon any intimate relationship — whether of connection, origin or dependence — as a relation of sonship, even in the spiritual sphere. So B. DEISSMANN, *Bible Studies* (trans. by Grieve), Edinburgh, 1901, p. 161ff., who, however, shows also that the use is not at all un-Greek.

10 Cf. I Kings 18.17; Is. 5.1; Prov. 31.5; Eph. 2.3; 5.8; I Pt. 1.14.

11 But see Gen. 16.2; 48.5; Ex. 2.9ff., where some idea of adoption is implied.

Indeed, "son" (*hyios* or *teknon*) is nowhere found throughout the New Testament with reference to an adopted son. The Apostles, however, knew that the word could have carried on with it such a meaning. And, as a matter of fact, St. Paul conceives of our divine sonship as an "adoption" (*hyiothesia*) (12).

We note, lastly, that throughout the Johannine writings the word *teknon* recurs for fifteen times and — with the exception of Rev. 12.4f. — it is always in the plural. For five times it is followed by *theos* in the genitive thus indicating men's filial relation to God (13). *Tekna Theou*, then, naturally points to some kind of divine sonship, which, according to the many different meanings of *teknon*, may admit of various interpretations.

2. "Begotten of God": *gennasthai* or *gennethenai* is the favourite verb adopted by St. John when he speaks of our divine sonship. In this connection it is met with 16 times in both the Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle. From the philological viewpoint *gennao* is liable to different interpretations. The general idea is quite simple being, namely, that of begetting, generating, giving birth to, producing, etc. But this action may be thought of either as a natural and physical begetting or birth, or it may be said to bear a metaphorical meaning.

The LXX makes constant use of *gennao* to translate the Hebrew *yalad*, which in the active (Qal) means to "be get, to engender" (*gennan*, *gignere*) and "to give birth to, to bring forth" (*tiktein*, *parere*). It is therefore referred to both parents (14). So also in the New Testament *gennan* is said of the father and of the mother alike (15). But the basic idea is that of "begetting" and is used, as a rule, of the father though sometimes also of the mother. Hence, as regards translation, attention should be paid to the context. Thus, for example, to translate *gennethen* (Mt 1.20) by "born" (Vg. "natum") does not meet the situation. So also with regard to the Johannine

12 Rom. 8.15; Gal. 4.5.

13 Jn. 1.12; 11.52; I Jn 3.1, 2, 10. — Elsewhere men are called "children of the devil" (I Jn 3.10) or "children of Abraham" (Jn 8.39).

14 Of father only: Gen. 4.18; I Chron. 1.10; Ruth 4. 18ff.; of mother: Gen. 4.22; 48.15; I Sam. 4.19; of both parents: Gen. 20.17; Zach. 13. The verb commonly used is *yalad*: sometimes *hil* or *hul* (in the pi'el *hotel*, Gen. 35.4; Is. 66.7; 23.4) and, very rarely, also *qana'* (Gen. 4.1) is adopted. But the LXX corresponding verb is always *gennan*.

15 Of the father; Mt 1, 2-16; Acts 7. 8, 29; of the mother: Lk 1. 13, 57; 23. 29.

gennethenai ek Theou the meaning can hardly fail to mean "begotten". J. H. Bernard remarks on Jn. 3.5-6: "To translate 'born of the Spirit' suggests that the image is of the Spirit as the female parent of the spiritual child, whereas Johannine usage... shows that the image is that of the Spirit as the "Begetter (16).

Now, as *teknon* is sometimes taken in a metaphorical sense, so also *gennan* may point to a metaphorical begetting. Thus, St. Paul considers his faithful as those who were "begotten" of him (17). Paul's influence exerted on them, moulding their lives, is conceived as constituting the beginning of a new life and as establishing a filial relation. Here, the sense of *gennao* is evidently spiritual and metaphorical. The same must be said with regard to the Johannine expression "to be begotten of God". A divine origin by a generation from God cannot be attributed to men in the strict sense of the word, but only in a metaphorical sense.

When used in the passive — as nearly always with John — *gennan* asks naturally for an appropriate preposition followed by the name of the begetter. So, in connection with the divine generation of the Christians, *gennasthai* or *gennethenai* is always followed by *ek Theou*. The preposition *ek*, therefore, deserves particular consideration. And of its many and various meanings that which concerns us most is its idea of origin or source. This is, indeed, the general meaning of *ek* when it is joined to verbs indicating origin, such as *gennan*, *einai*, *ginesthai* etc. In this sense *ek* points to that from which anything proceeds or is derived (18). This is also, after all, the primary sense of the genitive case itself, which always follows *ek* and which, when used by itself, bears very often the same meaning (19).

But, even in its sense of origin or source, *ek* is not limited only to express such origin by a generation in the strict sense of the word. The meanings of the verb to which it is joined are also its own. Thus, in the expression "to be begotten of God" *ek* evidently bears a

16 *A critical and exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint John*, I Edinburgh, 1929, p. 105.

17 I Cor. 4.15. 17; Gal. 4.24; Philm. 10.

18 To denote origin sometimes also *apo* is used (cf. Hebr. 11.12). But, while *ek* marks the nearer and immediate source or cause, *apo* marks a remoter relation (Lk 2.4). Cf. E. ROBINSON, *Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament*, New York, 1872, p. 224.

19 II Cor. 4.7; I Tim. 5.8; Cf. also XENOPHON, *Cyr.*, Lib. I. Cap. II, 1, ed. A. F. Didot, Parisiis, 1847, p. 2.

metaphorical meaning. This expression may be made to approach the frequently recurring Johannine phrase *cinai ek Theou* (20). The two phrases have a kindred meaning, both indicating the idea of origin from God. But "to be of God" expresses the essential permanent relation; while "to be begotten of God" refers to the initial moment of the relation (21).

We have laid down the philological basis for a further and a deeper discussion of the Johannine expressions. Philology has proved that they admit of different interpretations and so we know what they could have meant in St. John's mind. We shall see in what is to follow what they really meant.

II. THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON

The idea of divine sonship is viewed by St. John in a twofold aspect whether it is referred to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, or to those who believe in His name. Both Christ and the Christians are said to have been begotten of God. It is obvious, however, that though divine generation is attributed by John both to the Logos and to men, it does not bear the very same meaning in either case. A quick glance at St. John's doctrine on the divine begetting of the Word will prove to be helpful for a better understanding of the Evangelist's conception of man's generation from God.

1. St. John expresses himself very definitely regarding the purpose of his Gospel. He tells his readers that it has been written "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God: and that believing you may have life in his name" (22). Faithful to this purpose the Apostle develops the doctrine of the divine Sonship of Jesus throughout the whole Gospel. Indeed, this testimony refers only to the Fourth Gospel. Nevertheless, the same doctrine is no less a characteristic theme of the remaining writings of John, especially of his First Epistle and of the Book of Revelation. Rightly enough, then, it may be said that "the first thing which strikes

20 Jn 8. 47; I Jn 3.10.

21 See B. F. WESTCOTT, *The Gospel according to St. John*. London, 1908, p. 61.

22 20.31. — References to the IV Gospel will be indicated in this way: when the Epistles of John are referred to, they will be marked by I, II, III (ex. gr. I 3.1). We may add also that passages from Holy Scripture will be quoted after the Douay Version.

one who reads the writings of John is the express and forcible emphasis placed on the divine sonship of Jesus" (23).

Very often throughout his writings John attributes to Jesus the title "Son of God" or, rather, "the Son of God" (*ho hyios tou Theou*). Very often also the simple word *ho hyios* is used as a denomination of Christ as the Son of God. In the Gospel it is generally Jesus who is represented as speaking of Himself as "the Son of God" (24). Sometimes He is so called by someone of His disciples (25). But it is John who delights most in using this title as a substitute for or as an opposition to the name of Jesus (26).

The implication of this title by itself does not necessarily exceed that of a mere synonym for the Messiah. In the Old Testament the future Messiah is also viewed as the Son of God. As a matter of fact Johannine passages bearing this sense are not totally missing. But this seems to occur only when Jesus is addressed as Son of God by others (27). When the expression is thus used by Jesus or by John it carries on with it a much more significant meaning than the simple designation of the Messiah. Jesus is not called the Son of God because He is the Messiah, but on the contrary, He is the Messiah just because He is the Son of God (28). For John by the attribution of this title to Christ means precisely to state that He is really the natural Son of God, and consequently He is equal to God, He is Himself God.

A cursory glance at the christological doctrine of the Fourth Gospel and of the other Johannine writings would suffice to give a clear idea of this. To John's mind, Jesus is truly God. This belief of his is expressed in many various forms, ascending gradually from a lower to a higher conception of the Divinity of Jesus. In the Gospel John represents Jesus proclaiming continually the truth of His divine Sonship in a constantly ascending degree and with ever increasing

23 H. FELDER. *Jesus of Nazareth* (engl. trans. by B. Bittle). London, 1938, p. 352.

24 3.16-18; 5.19-26; 6.40; 8.36; 10.36; 11.4; 14.13; 17.1. Comp. 19.7 and Rev. 2.18

25 By Nathanael (1.49); by Peter (6.69); by Martha (11.27); by John the Baptist (1.34).

26 1.18; 3.16f. (?), 35f. (?); I 1.3.7; 2.22f.; 3.8-23; 4.9f., 14f.; 5.5, 12, 20; II 3.9.

27 Cf. 1.49 and 11.27.

28 1.1-18; 30-31, 34; 3.16ff.; 11.3.7; 4.9; 5.20. — See L. VENARD *Jean*, DThC, VIII 1, Paris 1924, col. 568. •

emphasis. His mission from God forms the ever recurring subject of His conversations with the disciples and of His public discourses to the people (29). Having thus given His hearers a flashing glimpse of His supernatural nature, He explains to them His close relation to the Father: He had personal existence in God before He came into this world or, rather, He pre-exists before any other being from all eternity (30); He is alike in nature to the Father, He is God like Him (31). On the unity of being and nature of Father and Son is grounded the divine origin and character of His teaching: what He Himself has heard and seen when in the bosom of the Father, that He speaks and proclaims to the world (32). From the same unity of being and nature of Father and Son proceeds also the unity of operation (33). The Son does nothing that the Father does not, just as He, on the other hand, performs all the work of the Father (34). And it is precisely by these works, which Jesus performs in the name of the Father, that the decisive proof to the utterances of Jesus regarding His relation to the Father as His natural Son is given (35).

From the very testimony of Jesus, therefore, as related by John in his Gospel, we may clearly grasp the real meaning of the title *ho hyios tou Theou*: Jesus declares that He is the Son of God in the stricter sense of the word, that is, He is the natural Son of God and strictly equal to God.

2. But to the testimony of Jesus John adds also his own. The Beloved Disciple further declares that the divine Sonship of Jesus is true and natural just because it is based on the fact that He comes

- 29 5.38, 43; 6.28, 57; 7.16, 29; 8.42; 10.36; 12.49; 17.8, 25; 20.21. The same teaching is implied in such passages where Jesus says of Himself that He is "of the Father" or "comes forth from the Father" (16.27-28; 5.42; 8.42; 17.8 etc.). That in such passages it is a question of the temporal mission of the Son is clear enough from the fact that the "coming forth of the Father" is sometimes put in opposite parallelism to the "going back to the Father." See J. KNABENBAUER, *Commentarium in Evangelium secundum Joannem*, ed altera, Parisiis, 1906, p. 482; M. J. LAGRANGE, *Evangile selon Saint Jean*, 7me ed., Paris, 1947, p. 431.
- 30 6.46, 62; 8.56-58; 17.24. John the Baptist had proclaimed from the beginning the pre-existence of Jesus together with the Father (1.15, 27, 30). This is also the doctrine of the Prologue; cf. especially the expression *en arkhē* (1.1) and its interpretation by exegetes.
- 31 10.30-36; 17.11; 20.28. Comp. 5.18 (the Evangelist's remark).
- 32 3.11; 8.26; 15.15.
- 33 10.30, 38; 14. 9-11; 17.21.
- 34 5.17, 19, 20.
- 35 5.36; 10.38.

from God the Father in virtue of a natural and physical begetting. It is, indeed, rather strange to remark that while so many Johannine passages deal clearly and explicitly with man's generation from God, with regard to the eternal and natural divine generation of the Logos there is not a single text throughout the Johannine literature, which could be quoted as certain. The only passage wherein Jesus would be explicitly called "the begotten of God" would be I 5.18. However, it is critically very uncertain. Critics do not agree whether the words *ho gennethis ek tou Theou* should be referred to Christ or rather to the Christian, who is "begotten of God" *ho gegenemenos ek tou Theou*. A good solution depends on whether *auton* or *heauton* be chosen as the original reading (36). If the latter is adopted, the meaning must be that he who has experienced the new birth *keeps himself* from the evil one. In the case of *auton*, *ho gennethis* is most naturally referred to Christ, who keeps him (*auton*), who has been begotten of God, far from sinning (37). Then, I 5.18 would be the only clear Johannine passage referring to Christ's generation from God.

Whatever might be said of I 5.18, the idea of the divine generation of the Word Incarnate is no less emphatically implied in the title *monogenes*, which John several times attributes to Christ (38). The eminently Johannine word has been rendered by some Latin translators by "unigenitus", "the only begotten", thus implying the conception of Christ's Sonship in virtue of a generation

36 'Auton' is attested by cod. B A° Vg Hier. It is adopted by Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort, Nestle, etc. *Heauton* is found in S Acorr K L P. See G. B. STEVENS, *The Johannine Theology*, London, 1894, pp. 246f.; R. LAW, *The Tests of Life. A Study of the First Epistle of St. John*, Edinburgh, 1909, pp. 408f.

37 Cf. A. E. BROOKE, *A critical and exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, Edinburgh, 1912, pp. 148f.; B. F. WESTCOTT, *The Epistles of St. John*, London, 1905, p. 194; J. BONSIRVEN, *Epîtres de Saint Jean* (Verbum Salutis. IX), 9me ed., Paris, 1935, p. 273. — The opinion of these authors, who refer *ho gennethis* to Christ is much more reliable. The change of tense from perfect to aorist could not be explained if both were referred to the same person, i.e., to the man who has experienced the new birth. After all, the reading of B and A° (*Auton*), apparently far more difficult than *heauton*, has strong claims to be regarded as original. Another variant reads the substantive *he genesis* (2138/1852), cf. Vg "generatio Dei". It is accepted by Harnack (*Studien zur Geschichte des Neue Testament und der alten Kirche*, I, Berlin, 1931, pp. 105-114).

38 1.14, 18; 3.16, 18; I 4.9.

from God (39). Earlier Latin translations, however, such as the Roman rendering of the Apostolic Creed, yield "*unicus*" (40). As a matter of fact "*unicus*" is much more apt than "*unigenitus*" to translate the Hebrew or Aramaic *yahid*, which is supposed to be the underlying word for *monogenes* (41). If so, then, the radical meaning of *monogenes* is rather that of "*the One only Son*", — a meaning adopted also by the New Testament writers (42). The LXX rendering of *yahid* by *monogenes* does not constantly yield the same meaning. Some passages bear the simple sense of "only, single, alone" (43); others, with reference to sons or daughters, that of "the only son" (44). Elsewhere the usual *monogenes* is substituted by *agapetos* which carries on with it also the notion of "an only child" (45). The two expressions have a kindred meaning and both include the notion of "the only begotten son", with the difference that in *agapetos* stress is laid on the notion of affection rather than on that of origin (46).

The Synoptics, too, choose rather *agapetos* as corresponding to *yahid* (47). But to John's mind *monogenes* was much more significant as involving more clearly the idea of origin. No doubt, the affection of the Father for the Son is not neglected by John and it is even included in the very expression *monogenes* in 3.16 and in I 4.9. In these and in other parallel passages, however, — and especially in 1.18 — the conception of *monogenes* goes far beyond the limits

39 Cf. the Latin Version of the Nicæan Creed, Denz. 54. — Nevertheless, *monogenes* is not derived from the root *gennao*, but from *genestai*. MOULTON-MILLIGAN (*The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament illustrated from the proprii and other non literary sources*, London, 1929, p. 416) and LIDDEL-SCOTT (*A Greek-English Lexicon*, 8th ed., Oxford, 1901, p. 1144) point to *genos* as the root of *monogenes*. The sense then would be that of "the only member of a kin or kind: hence generally: only, single" (Liddel-Scott, *ib.*). This opinion is rejected by A. J. SURJANSKY (*De Mystero Verbi Incarnati ad mentem B. Johannis Apostoli*, Romae, 1941, pp. 106-128).

40 Denz. 2, 6.

41 C. F. BURNEY, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*, Oxford, 1922, p. 39f.

42 Lk 7.12; 8.42; 9.39; Hebr. 11.17.

43 Ps. 21.21; 24.16; 34.17 (LXX).

44 Judges 11.34; Tob. 3.15; 6.11 (cod. A); 8.17.

45 Gen. 22.2, 12. 16; Jer. 6.26; Amos 8.10; Zach. 12.10. In Judges 11.34 both *monogenes* and *agapetos* are put together.

46 Also in profane Greek literature *agapetos* is a substitute for *monogenes*. — So POLLUX: *Kaloito d'an hyios agapetos ho monos ou patri e metri* (*Onomasticon*, III, 19, ed. E. Bethe, Vol. I, Lipsiae, 1900, p. 160. See also HOMER, *Od.* 2, 356, ed V. Bérard, I, 4me ed., Paris, 1947, p. 49).

47 Mt 3.17; 17.5; Mk 1.11; 9.7; 12.6; Lk 3.22; 20.13.

of simple affection and states, rather preferably, the singular and exceptional relation of the Son to the Father. The Johannine conception, therefore, far from being simply that of particular affection, states rather the fundamental reason of God's fatherly affection towards Christ. Jesus is "the Beloved by the Father" just because He is His "Only-begotten Son". Some authors, however, still maintain that the Johannine *monogenes* does not imply any idea of begetting and bears simply the same meaning of the Synoptic *agapetos* (48). But it should be remarked that the divine Sonship and the divine generation of the Logos, being a characteristically Johannine argument, could hardly be excluded from the full meaning of *monogenes*. The idea, if not explicitly included, is at least suggested and may easily be inferred from such an expressive word, especially when it is joined to *hyios* (3.16, 18; I 4.9) or is put in opposition to *pater* (1.14, 18) (49).

Moreover, Jn 1.18 can, indeed, afford a very sound argument for our interpretation. The Word Incarnate is the *monogenes Theos*. Jesus Christ is not only said to be the unique Son, the Only-begotten of God, but He is Himself God. He strictly shares with God the Father the divine essence and being. He, therefore, owes His origin to a natural divine begetting from the Father. He has His being from God and in virtue of His unique origin or generation He is a true God.

Against this reading, however, stands the objection of the variant *monogenes hyios* attested by many Greek codices. But evidences, both external and internal, are strong enough in favour of the reading we have here adopted (50). After all, the idea of the real Divinity of Jesus dominates the whole Prologue from the first verse up to v. 18.

Hence, if St. John thinks of a divine begetting of the Word Incarnate, he cannot but mean a strictly natural generation from God. The Father, namely, imparts His very divine being to His

48 WESTCOTT, *Epistles*, pp. 169-172; ID., *Gospel*, p. 12; BONSIRVEN, *Epîtres*, pp. 35, 225; F. M. BRAUN, *S. Jean* (La Sainte Bible X), Paris, 1946, p. 317; J. LEBRETON, *Les Origines du Dogme de la Trinité*, I. Paris, 1919, pp. 308, 365.

49 Comp. 5.18; 14.10.

50 The reading *Theos* is strenuously defended by J. A. HORT, *Two Dissertations* (I. *On Monogenes Theos in Scripture and Tradition*), Cambridge and London, 1876, pp. 1-72. See also LAGRANGE, *Saint Jean*, pp. 26f.

only true Son by a natural begetting. Jesus Christ is, therefore, the only natural Son of God. He is the *monogenes hyios*.

III. THE CHILDREN OF GOD

By the present section we come to a closer approach to St. John's mind on our divine sonship and generation from God. What does John mean by calling the Christians "Children of God" and by stating much more emphatically that they are "begotten of God"? Do these expressions imply any reality or are they a mere figure of speech?

In order to grasp better the Johannine conception, such passages where these words or their equivalent recur will be constantly referred to. In the following chapter, therefore, the Johannine doctrine on man's divine childhood and its fuller development in both Gospel and I Epistle will be taken under consideration. Thus, the Evangelist himself will help to get an authentic interpretation of his favourite assertion.

A. THE JOHANNINE PHRASEOLOGY

1. The first time those who believe in Christ are called by John *tekna Theou* is precisely in 1.12. This title is once more attributed to them in the Gospel (11.52) and four times again in the First Epistle (3. 1, 2, 10, 5.2). No doubt, John does not mean to say thereby that the believers are the natural children of God. The Evangelist, who delights in speaking of divine sonship both with regard to the Word Incarnate and with regard to men, is on the other hand careful enough to give a clear deliberation of the unfathomable distinction between them. Jesus alone is the natural Son of God, the Only-begotten of the Father. It is only of Jesus, the *Monogenes Theos* that it may be said that the divine Nature was really communicated to Him by virtue of a strictly natural generation. Jesus did not need to "become" the Son of God. He was such from the very beginning. Men, on the contrary, are not by nature children of God and still need to become such. Their divine

childhood is a gift due only to the love of God toward them (51).

If then the expression *tekna Theou* cannot be taken in its stricter sense as indicating natural childhood, naturally enough it should bear a metaphorical meaning. But, again, is it a mere metaphor, some kind of form of speech, not implying any reality at all? The fact that the title "children of God" is not literally applicable to men does not necessarily mean that it can by no means carry with it some deeper significance than that of a mere figure of speech. The very term *teknon* or *hyios* whatever be the sense in which it is used, indicates by itself the idea of source or origin. Some relation of origin is naturally included in the word. But, as we have seen in the philological examination, the idea of origin implied hereby admits of various interpretations, including that of any kind of dependence or even of mere likeness. Such is the case with many Old Testament expressions in which the word *ben* occurs.

The fact that John makes use of this word to denote some kind of belonging to on the mere ground of likeness of character would rather suggest to take the phrase *tekna Theou* as bearing the very same meaning. Thus in I 3.10 wicked people are called *ta tekna tou diabolou* simply because they are not righteous and hate the brethren. The case is much more complicated here since the expression is put in perfect antithetic parallelism with the corresponding phrase *ta tekna tou Theou*. Moreover, the expression recalls Jn 8.44 where the devil is represented as the father of the Jews just because they act perfectly according to his will. The whole context in these passages clearly shows that the filial relation spoken of is based on the simple fact of likeness of character (52). If then the wicked are the children of the devil in the sense that they imitate his moral character so also it should be said of the children of God, namely, that they are such in as much as they are like Him righteous and good in

51 St. Augustine, based on Jn 1.12, nicely traces the difference between Christ's Sonship and ours on the occasion of his comment on Ps. 49.2: "*Homines dixit deos, ex gratia sua deificatos, non de substantia sua natos ... Dedit enim eis potestatem filios Dei fieri. Si filii Dei facti sumus, et dii facti sumus; sed gratiae est adoptantis, non naturae generantis. Unicus enim Dei Filius ... Verbum Deus. Coeteri qui fiunt dii, gratia ipsius fiunt, non de substantia eius nascuntur ut hoc sint quod ille, sed ut per beneficium perveniunt ad eum, ut sint cohaeredes Christi*" — *Enarratio in Ps. 49, n. 2, P/L 36, 565.*

52 Comp. also 8.39, "If you be the children of Abraham, do the works of Abraham".

opposition to sinners, who are the children of the devil because of their wickedness. The expression therefore *tekna Theou* does not by itself afford any peculiar meaning.

2. We may, however, still see whether the phrase might be more clearly illustrated by some other equivalent expression. We already remarked that the very frequently occurring phrase *einai ek* throughout the Johannine writings includes the idea of dependence or origin just as the word *teknon*. But again, even this expression, wherever it occurs, does not yield by itself any more profound sense than that of a mere belonging to, likeness of character, imitation or any other such meaning. "The phrase expressing a moral connexion is characteristic of St. John. It includes the idea of derivation and independence and therefore of a moral correspondence between the offspring (issue) and the source" (53). Thus, according to the essential affinity of their character, men are said to be "of the world" (54) or "of the earth" (55), the idea of moral derivation being hereby likewise indicated. Such is, for example, Jn 3. 31 (with its parallel I 4, 5): "He who is of the earth, of the earth he is, and of the earth he speaketh", that is, since he draws his origin from the world he draws likewise thereof the form and manner of his life and speaks after the manner of the world. Evidently the idea of origin included here is far from being that of the birth from the world, or if it might be called so, it would merely be a metaphor. Similarly, in the same sense as wicked men are called *tekna tou diabolou* they are also said to be *ek tou diabolou* (56). It is clear enough from the passages where this phrase occurs that the derivation from the evil one attributed to evil doers is based on the fact of this moral affinity and likeness to him. Or it may even be said that in this case something more than this is signified: the devil is an active influence to which there is a corresponding receptivity in the life of the world (I 5. 19); he gave the first impulse to human *sinning* (8.44) and still gives fresh impulse to it (13.2); so directly or indirectly, all human evil may be described as the work of the devil (I 3.8); and thus he is the father of all who act wickedly (8.44). If, therefore, some kind of filial relation to the devil is asserted of those who do evil, it implies

53 WESTCOTT, *Gospel*, p. 61; *Epistle*, p. 123.

54 8.23; 15.19; 17.14, 16; 18.36; I 2.16; 4.5.

55 3.31; 8.23.

56 8. 44; I 3.8, 12.

simply a wider sense of the word, in as much as they depend upon him with regard to their manner of thinking and acting.

Now, the same expression is also very often used of men as denoting their personal relation to God. Thus the "children of God" are those who "are of God" (*ek tou Theou*) (57). The two expressions are equal in meaning, both denoting the idea of filial relationship of the righteous man to God, established by some kind of derivation from him. But again, divine childhood included in this expression does not seem to go beyond the ordinary meaning of moral likeness of character. As we have seen from the examples just adduced, the phrase by itself does not imply anything more than this simple interpretation of ethical kinship. The same thing, it seems should be stated of the phrase *einai ek Theou*. Wherever it occurs with reference to men stress is rather put on the fact that all who do righteousness are "of God" exactly as those who do wickedness are "of the devil". The terms in which the relation of human sinning to diabolic influence and those in which the relation of human righteousness to divine influence are expressed are strikingly parallel (58). Moreover, such an idea of derivation from God as is implied in the phrase *einai ek* is not only attributed to men, but also to inanimate things, such as the doctrine of Jesus (7.17), love (I 4,7) and, negatively, the things that are in the world (I 2, 16). In which cases the wider significance of simple derivation or belonging to, — and nothing more significant — is included. It may then be stated that in all such instances the common and ordinary conception is, that every *teknon* or everyone and everything which is of another must reproduce the works and character of its source.

3. But, it may still be asked: "From the fact that both the relation of men to God and to the devil are identically expressed, is it to be inferred that they are identical in fact?" (59). True, the Johannine phraseology might bear such an interpretation, namely, that of mere ethical kinship. But it does not absolutely demand

57 8.47; I 3.10; 4.1-6; 5.19; III 11.

58 Comp. "The children of God" (I 3.10) with "the children of the devil" (I 3.10); "He that sinneth is of the devil" (I 3.8 — cf. v. 12 and Jn 8.44), while "He that doeth good, is of God" (III 11 — cf. 8.47; I 4.2, 4, 6; 5.19).

59 ROTHE, *Der erste Brief Johannes*, Wittenberg, 1878, draws this inference: "It is an appalling thought that man may enter into the same relation to the devil in which he originally stands to God" (Quoted by R. LAW, *o.c.*, p. 143).

it. The phrase *tekna Theou* as well as *Einai ek Theou* might admit of a deeper significance, which could by no means be ever included in *tekna tou diabolou*. For, with regard to God, the idea of origin—and origin by some kind of birth or generation — cannot meet any objection. Of course, it may rightly be objected that the same word is used to indicate the relationship of the wicked men to the devil. What then, could it be ever justified to say that the life that animates the sinner emanates from the devil as from the immanent and direct source of all sin? That this cannot be maintained even as being against the mind of St. John will soon be displayed. Suffice it here to note simply that *teknon* or *einai ek* with regard to the devil can never bear the idea of an impartation of life, such as it might imply when used with regard to God. God can give life, the devil cannot. But, again, it must be recognised that such a deeper meaning cannot be inferred only and simply in virtue of the words, which, considered in themselves and in reference to their constant use by John, do not exceed the mere idea of moral affinity. Stronger evidence is therefore needed, and it might be afforded by examining the next kindred expression *ek Theou gennethenai*.

The “Children of God” are said to have been “begotten of God”. Therefore we have here not only the idea of a divine filiation, but also of a divine generation. From the philological analysis of the verb *gennao* it may again be inferred that the phraseology *gennasthai* or *gennethenai ek Theou* if not used to denote the natural eternal generation of the Only-begotten Son from the Father, does not by itself carry on with it anything more than a mere metaphor. Men may be said to be “begotten of God” in the same sense as they may be said “to be of God” or to be “the children of God” on the ground of their moral likeness to Him. However, with the Johanne use of this phrase it does not seem to be the case. For it is really interesting to note that while John makes constant use of the other two expressions to denote both the relation of men to God and to the devil alike, he shrinks from asserting that those who do wickedness are “begotten of the devil”. The conception of a generation of the wicked by the devil, is thoroughly extraneous to the mind of John. On the contrary, the verb *gennan* or, rather, *gennethenai* wherever it occurs throughout the Johannine writings, as denoting some kind of spiritual generation, it is always and

exclusively said of God, who is thereby considered to be the Begetter of the faithful. In 1. 13 it occurs for the first time and for five times more in the Gospel (60). In the First Epistle, then, where the divine childhood of men is a fundamental theme, the frequent use of this verb nearly always with reference to the Christian's generation from God, is truly characteristic (61). But, with regard to Satan, even though his direct intervention upon the sinner is not excluded, John never says that the sinner is "born of him". The communication of the sin to the world by the devil is not a generation which makes the gift of life. The devil is indeed the source of sin, as he is a sinner from the beginning (I 3.8); he can therefore give death to the world, but he cannot impart life and beget children. Hence St. Augustine comments: "*Neminem fecit diabolus, neminem genuit, neminem creavit; sed quicumque fuerit imitatus diabolum, quasi de illo natus, fit filius diaboli imitando, non proprie nascendo* (62).

But, the children of God are not only such on account of their moral affinity to their heavenly Father, but also because they are "begotten of God". And this seems to the mind of John the more cogent reason of their divine childhood. The fact that they have God as their Begetter entitles them to the dignity of being His Children (1. 12-13). This higher conception, then, — we say it again — is exclusively adopted by John when he deals with the children of God. Does not this curious remark suggest the thought that St. John does not precisely mean by the phrase *tekna Theou* what he means to say by *tekna tou diabolou*? May we not suspect that some other more significant and more profound implication

60 Always in chapter 3, vv. 3, 5, 6, 7, 8. It is to be remarked that in 1.13 an interesting variant reads the singular (*egennethe*), being thus referred to the divine origin of the Logos (codd. b, syrc. Ep. Apost., Iren., Tert.). But the ordinary reading in the plural is far better attested by weighty documents and displays an expression very much familiar to St. John with regard to his doctrine on the divine sonship Christian. See LAGRANGE, *Saint Jean*, pp. 16-19. The singular reading is defended by M. E. BOISMARD, *Critique Textuelle et Citations Patristiques*, Rev. Bibl., 57 (1950) 401-408.

61 I 2.29; 3.9bis; 4.7; 5.1bis, 4; 5.18.

62 *In Epist. Jo., Tract.* IV, 10, PL 35, 2007. Luke of Bruges (*Commentarium in Evangelium secundum Joannem*, Antwerpiae, 1606, p. 62) brings forth the same thought: "*Diabolus reddit homines filios suos, sibi similes, non infundendo sed suggerendo et persuadendo malitiam: Spiritus autem Sanctus efficit filios suos ac Dei, infundendo in hominum animas gratiam qua renouentur*".

might be brought forth from the phraseology *gennethenai ek Theou*? A more accurate examination of this expression as it recurs throughout the Johannine writings would prompt the conclusion that the expression *tekna Theou* is not a matter of a merely metaphorical title, but implies a reality. Christians are really children of God; really — though in a way thoroughly peculiar to this wonderful filiation — “begotten of God”.

B. THE PHRASES AND THEIR CONTEXT IN THE IV GOSPEL

1. The first thing to attract our attention is the fact that this Johannine doctrine of men's divine childhood occurs for the first time in the very Prologue of the Gospel. This is indeed significant. The Prologue, in fact, is a most solemn introduction to the Gospel, announcing with wonderful clarity the principal themes dealt with therein. At the first quick reading its general subject is soon grasped: the Word contemplated both in Himself and as He is the life and light of the world. And this is exactly what the Fourth Gospel teaches, namely, that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, who gives eternal life to all those who believe in Him. Rightly enough, therefore, the Prologue has been defined as the anticipation of the doctrine contained in the Fourth Gospel (63). Now, verses 12-13 play undoubtedly an important part in comparison with the rest of the doctrine of the Prologue. They state in fact which were the privileges of those who received the Logos, thus indicating at the same time the beneficent influence of the Logos himself upon the world. If, therefore, the doctrine on divine childhood has deserved such a prominent place in the Prologue, it must have been one of the most important themes to St. John. Things being so, could we ever be justified to think that he did not mean to state more than a mere figure of speech by the words “children of God, who are begotten of God”?

But, again, let us consider these verses in connection with the

63 So F. TILLMANN. *Das Johannevangelium*, Berlin, 1914, p. 47: “Eine glückliche Antizipation der Motive und der Stimmungen des Evangeliums” Cf. also J. REVILLIE. *Le Quatrième Evangile, son origine et sa valeur historique*, 2me ed., Paris, 1902, pp. 110-129; A. LOISY. *Le Quatrième Evangile*, Paris, 1903, pp. 97f., 153f., 199.

other themes of the Prologue. All of these are not only realities but historical events, as the verbs in the past tense clearly show. The Evangelist, having hinted at the eternal preexistence of Christ as the Word of God, soon passes on to trace briefly the rôle of his historical existence in the world. For clarity's sake, we may divide the Prologue into three sections, following a quite reasonable opinion (64). 1) The Word considered in himself before the Incarnation (1-5); 2) His coming into the world (6-13); 3) His Incarnation and the benefits received thereby (14-18). Again, each of these sections develops real dogmatic and historical truths: v. 1-2; the eternal generation of the Logos and His preexistence with the Father; v. 3-5: the Logos' relation to created things, both to creation in general (v. 3) and to men in particular (v. 4-5); v. 6-8; the mission and testimony of the Baptist regarding the work of the Word as the light of men (65); 9-13: the unhappy distinction between those who received the Word Incarnate and those who did not; 14: the Word, full of grace and truth, becomes man and dwells amongst men in this world; 15: the Baptist's testimony about Jesus; 16-18: the Evangelist himself, as an eye witness of such ineffable events, adds his own testimony.

Now, all these items, which are developed at length throughout the Gospel, are beyond all doubt true and real facts. Jesus is really the Son of God, full of grace and truth, to whom the Baptist gave testimony. It is a matter of history. Similarly, it is true that some believed in Jesus and others did not. Those who believed are said to have become children of God, as even by being begotten of God. Is this simply a figure? If so, it would indeed be strange enough and quite inconvenient that a mere metaphor would be mixed up with many other truths, which, according to the Evangelist, are of primary importance to every believer. It would be the only thing *not real*, attested by him or, in other words, he would have given a strong testimony to a thing which does not imply any reality at all. Indeed, if believers were said to become children of God on ac-

64 Cf. J.-M. VOSTE, *De Prologo Joanneo et Logo*, Romae, 1925, p. 7f.; SIMON-DORADO, *Praelectiones Biblicae, Novum Testamentum I*, Taurini, 1950, p. 244f. So also Plummer, Tillmann, Loisy, Crampon, Sales, and others.

65 LAGRANGE, *Saint Jean.*, p. 9: "*Jo. a cru devoir l'annoncer (le temoignage de Jean) dans le Prologue, au moment où il va developper l'action historique du verbe, identifié avec la lumière*".

count of the change of their moral habits, which would take place in them after that they would have received the Logos, some real facts would have been also stated. But, this would not be in accord with the mind of the Evangelist. It is, of course, also true and is not excluded by John, but, as we shall see, it is rather conceived by him as being the effect of divine childhood itself. His thought here is rather directed to this remoter cause, from which holiness of character naturally follows.

The passage in the Vulgate version runs as follows: "*Quotquot autem receperunt eum, dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri*". A more exact translation of the words *exousia* and *genesthai* will render the sense more easily understandable. The ordinary notion of *ginomai* is that of "becoming" (to become, to come into existence). As such it is the opposite of *einai*, which points to a definite, actual state. But, as it stands in Jn 1. 12, *genesthai* may quite easily be said to bear the same meaning of the verb "to be". To denote the state of sonship John uses *tekna Theou*, which is sometimes followed either by *genesthai* or by *einai*. The former, with reference to the past, is referred back to the initial moment, to the beginning to be, in virtue of which the new state of being (*einai*) results. Thus, when men "become" or "begin to be" the children of God, they "are" really and actually such (66).

The term *exousia* has been translated by interpreters in many different ways. As a matter of fact it admits of various interpretations (67). True, the original idea included in this word is that of "freedom", rightly rendered by the Vulgate by "*potestas*" (*facultas*). Some, relying on this meaning, have seen man's free-will as a co-operative agent to the grace of divine sonship (68). Of course,

- 66 Such as in Jn 1. 14 (*ho logos sarx egeneto*); comp Jn 12. 36; Lk 23. 12. Note that missing or obsolete forms of *einai* are sometimes substituted by *ginomai*, especially when the verb is followed by a predicate and refers to the past (cf. Mt 6. 16; Lk 6. 36; 13. 2; Jn 20. 27; etc.) See F. ZORELL, *Lexicon Graecum Novi Testamenti*, ed. 2a, Parisiis, 1931, col. 252; LIDDELL-SCOTT, *o. c.*, p. 349 and MOULTON-MILLIGAN *O. c.*, p. 126, where such other examples from old Greek papyri are quoted.
- 67 For example, that of freedom or right to do anything. Jn 10.18; Acts. 5. 4; Rom. 9. 21; Rev. 13. 5); that of power or might (Mt 10. 11; Mk 6. 7; Lk 9. 1; 10. 19; Rev. 11. 6); that of authority, both with regard to men (Mt 9. 8; Lk 7. 8; Jn 19. 10f.; Rev. 17. 12f.) and with regard to God (Lk 12. 5; Acts 1. 7; Rev. 16. 9) or to Christ (Mt 28. 18; Mk 11. 28; Jn 5. 27; 17. 2; Rev. 12. 10).
- 68 So SIMON-DORADO, *O. c.*, p. 254; LAGRANGE, *O. c.*, p. 15.

this is a truth of Sacred Scripture and of the teaching of the Church (69) and, therefore, this verse cannot be against it. But the Evangelist did not have in mind the question of free-will in writing this verse. That men must co-operate by the use of their free-will has already been sufficiently indicated by the sharp distinction between those who did not receive the Word (v. 11) and those who did (v. 12). This naturally presupposes that men are completely free. Hence, a better meaning should be given to the word *exousia*. It may be said in general that with John "*exousia*" does not describe mere ability, but legitimate, rightful authority, derived from a competent source which includes the idea of power" (70). Of course, with regard to 1.12, there cannot be included the idea of strict right or authority, for the matter dealt with is rather that of a gift on the part of God. It seems, in fact, to be more accurate to translate it as being some kind of "right" implying with it the idea of "privilege" and "dignity" (71). John, really, has in mind rather the great dignity of sonship conferred on man as an effect of the Incarnation. In this sense then *exousia* may also be taken as denoting the gift of God bestowed upon the believers, that is, the divine sonship itself. Thus, *exousia* is equivalent to *tekna Theou genesthai* in the sense that the latter only explains more fully what does this *exousia* consist in, namely, "the privilege, which consists in being the children of God" (72). In other words, therefore, it might be said: "He gave them the gift of divine childhood". Thus, divine childhood would be considered not as a mere privilege or title, but as a concrete and real gift of God. The verb *edoken*, connoting the divine action, is very apt to point to something really "given" (73).

69 Conc. Trid., *Sess. VI, De Iustificatione*, can 4, Denz. 814.

70 WESTCOTT, *Gospel*, p. 9; See M. E. BOISMARD, *Le Prologue de Saint Jean*, Paris, 1953, p. 61.

71 In this sense it is used in Hebr. 13.10 and Rev. 22.14. Many authors follow this interpretation. — cf. 'VOSTE', *o.c.*, p. 25; ZORELL, *O.c.*, col. 458; G.B. STEVENS, *O.c.*, p. 251.

72 So we may translate: "But as many as received him, he gave them the privilege of being children of God". For this kind of infinitive limiting nouns (with abstract nouns of ability, authority, need, hope, etc.) cf. Mt 9.6; Mk 3.15; Jn 19.10; — Mt 3.14 ("I have need to be baptised by thee"). See E. De WITT BURTON, *Syntax of the moods and tenses in New Testament Greek*, Edinburgh, 1898, p. 151.

73 So WESTCOTT, *ib.*, "This right is not inherent to man, but 'given' by God to him".

This thought is again developed more fully by the Evangelist in the following verses. The Word, who became man and dwelt amongst men, is "full of grace and truth". (v. 14). Whatever be the more exact meaning of these profound words, they undoubtedly denote the fullness of the divinity of the Word Incarnate (74). Now, in v. 16-17 John says that we have received something from the fullness of grace and truth of the Logos. We too have received through Jesus Christ "grace and truth" (v. 17), being thus allowed to share in some way the fullness of his divinity. May we not easily perceive in these passages an allusion to the gift of divine childhood spoken of in v. 12? (75). The Logos has appeared amongst us as the Son of God, full of grace and truth. As the Only-begotten Son, He is the exemplar of the divine childhood granted to men. The fullness of the divinity, His natural divine Sonship, is the source from where the grace of supernatural childhood granted to the faithful comes forth. Again, the strict parallelism between the Law, given (*edothē*) through Moses, and the grace which came (*egeneto*) through Jesus Christ shows that as the Law was a real thing, so also is the grace which is produced in us through Jesus (76). Therefore, we are truly and really granted to participate in the fullness of the divine Sonship of Jesus. Our noble title of *tekna Theou* does not simply imply an outward reformation or change of moral character from bad to good, thus becoming in some way like unto God, but it presupposes the direct action of God by which we are inwardly changed and made His true children.

2. What kind of divine action is this? Its nature is described in v. 13 as being a generation from God. This wonderful imparting of divine childhood is rightly enough conceived by John as a

74 Cf. A. AUGUSTINOVIC, *Aletheia nel IV Vangelo*, Studii Biblici Franciscani, I 1950-51) 163f.; BOISMARD, *ib.*, pp. 74-79; 82f. So also St. Thomas: "*Fuit ergo plenus gratia, in quantum non accepit a Deo aliquod donum gratuitum speciale, sed quod esset ipse Deus ... plenus veritatis ... scilicet quod ille homo esset ipsa divina veritas*" — *Comm. in Evang. sec. Jo.*, Cap. I, Lectio VIII, 3, ed. Taurinensis, 1925, p. 45.

75 Truly, John does not seem to indicate any particular grace here, such as the Gospel (CALMES, *Evangile selon Saint Jean*, Paris, 1912, p. 7) or the grace of faith (St. AUGUSTINE, *In Evang. Jo.*, Tract. III, 10, PL 35, 1401), but he refers rather to New Testament grace in general.

76 "*La Divinité (grâce et fidélité réside en plénitude dans le Verbe incarné, et nous recevons tous de sa plénitude, de sorte que la grâce et la fidélité de Dieu, sont venues en nous, elles ont été 'faites' en nous par Jésus-Christ, elles sont devenues nôtres bien propre, des qualités de notre cœur*" — BOISMARD, *ib.*, p. 87.

divine begetting. John does not shrink from drawing the metaphor of generation or birth to show the divine origin of the children of God. Here in 1.13 he strictly compares this divine generation with the common ordinary one, which takes place amongst human beings. The comparison is taken up again in Chapter 3. 3-8, where Jesus is introduced addressing Nicodemus about new birth from above (77). Much stronger is the thought expressed in I 3-9 by the word *sperma Theou* — the seed of God is in that who is begotten of Him: an idea borrowed from the part the male parent plays in natural begetting. The process, therefore, of the birth of a child according to the ordinary course of nature by the will of its parents and especially by the father is that upon which the Johannine thought of divine generation is based.

This is what is commonly called the metaphor of generation (78). For the very reason that it is a metaphor, then, this idea of generation would naturally state that its application to God is not literal. This is quite true so far as it eliminates from the notion of divine begetting the elements of materiality included in animal generation. But it does not imply that even in this case of its application to God there is no truth contained. In other words, the fact that believers are said to be begotten of God after the metaphorical comparison with human begetting, does not exclude that they are not really and truly begotten of him, though, of course, in a way much more different (79). Difference between the two generations regards rather the way in which they are carried on, the one being material and the other thoroughly spiritual. Jesus' words to Nicodemus, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit" (3.6), clearly indicate what this exceeding difference consists in, namely, in the material character

77 Stevens may be right in remarking (o.c., pp. 243, 248) that the thought included in 3.3-8 is slightly different from that of 1.13. The latter refers to the first origin of life, while in the former "the form of thought seems to be that of birth rather than a begetting".

78 E. C. HOSKYNS, *The Fourth Gospel*, London, 1947 p. 146, calls this figure of speech "a parable". But this is not the word to be used in this case; a parable, at least in the New Testament sense, is a short fictitious narrative typifying some supernatural truth (cf. D BUZY, *Introduction aux paraboles évangéliques*, Paris, 1912, p. 185f. J. M. VOSTE, *Parabola selectae Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*, I, ed. 2a, Romae, 1933, p. 54f.).

79 Such as St. Paul speaks of the Church as being metaphorically the "Body of Christ" or "the wife of Christ". But the Church is really and, in a special sense, also literally the Mystical Body and wife of Jesus Christ.

of the human begetting and in the spiritual character of the divine, as both related to different agents. Hence, as by carnal begetting material life is communicated to the offspring so, in an analogous sense, by the generation of the Spirit spiritual life is imparted to the spiritually begotten. Thus this metaphorical speech, far from being merely such, implies rather strict similarity, a reasoning from a parallel case — for which reason it would be better termed “an analogy”. The Johannine conception of the origin of spiritual life is completely analogous to the ordinary conception of the origin of physical life.

Things being so, the very strong comparison brought out by John to illustrate the nature of man’s divine childhood suggests that it is not a matter of a mere title. A new birth or a generation from God is not only the change of heart or of character. It is the entrance into a new state of existence. Generation is coming out of non-existence into existence. A change in man really happens, but it is a change so great that no other figure but that of being begotten and born again can fully express it. It is as when a new being is brought into the world. From the clear and strong comparison and antithesis with the physical begetting we may also grasp the sense of the Johannine words: as by material and human generation we became children of a man, so by means of the ineffable spiritual generation from God we become His children (80).

3. Moreover, such a great change of the regenerate man is strictly connected with Baptism. As the believer is said to “be born of the spirit” or “of God” he is also said “born of water” (8.5). That these words refer to Christian Baptism is beyond all doubt. The Council of Trent made use of this passage with evident reference to our Baptism of water (81). This is indeed the traditional interpretation of the Fathers and exegetes, old and modern, catholic and non-catholic alike, though some of the latter dared even to reject

80 Note also the perfect analogy with the process of the natural birth, which consists in the communication of life and in the connexion of relationship resulting thereof between the parent and the offspring. The first stage is conceived as a being begotten of God and the second is the state of divine childhood established thereby.

81 *Sess. VII, De Sacramento Baptismi*, can. 2, Denz. 858.

it explicitly (82). From these venerable words of Jesus, therefore, as related by St. John, man's generation from God depends upon the external rite of Baptism. Of course, spiritual regeneration is not attributed to the virtue of water in the same way as it is said to be of the Spirit. It is only God who begets spiritually His children. Baptism, therefore, cannot be said to contribute to this wonderful supernatural birth if not in the sense of being the instrument by which it is conferred and so denotes the ordinary way in which, according to the explicit will of God, men are entitled to become His children. We know, however, that even this external rite in virtue of the power communicated to it by God, really begets men to a new spiritual life (83). The action of spiritually begetting, therefore, is attributed to two distinct, but united, agents: the water and the Spirit. The two elements are nicely represented by *Isho'dad* of Merv as being the female and male agents of this supernatural birth: "Just as at the natural birth the womb is the place where the babe that is to be born is formed; but the Divine Power, according to the primeval order forms him there, thus also here, the waters represent the womb and the spirit is in the place of the Lord and Creator" (84). Thus the sacred water of Baptism co-operates so intimately with the divine action of begetting that together with the Holy Spirit it is also an efficient cause of regeneration, the difference between both being that while the Spirit is the principal cause, water is only the instrument.

Now, we ask, "does not the fact that new birth is so closely connected with and made necessarily dependent upon the external rite of Baptism suggest at least the thought that in the baptised

82 So, for example, M.S. TERRY, *Biblical Dogmatics. An exposition of the principal documents of the Holy Scripture*, London, 1907, p. 151: "The common interpretation which makes these words born of water mean the outward performance of baptism in water has never been able to make itself thoroughly satisfactory". So also B. WEISS, *Das Leben Jesu*, I, *Vierte umgearbeitete Auflage*, Stuttgart und Berlin, 1902, p. 385.

83 So St. Paul calls Baptism *lutron paliggenesias* (Tit. 3. 5).

84 M. DUNLOP-GIPSON, *The Commentaries of Isho'dad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha, in Syriac and English* (Horae Semiticae, V), Cambridge, 1911, p. 225. The same thought is also nicely expressed by the liturgical blessing of the Fountain of Baptism on Holy Saturday: *Qui hanc aquam regenerandis hominibus praeparatam, arcana sui numinis admixtione foecundet, ut sanctificatione concepta, ab immaculato divini fontis utero, in novam renata creaturam progenies coelestis emergat*".

Christian a complete inward change takes place?" Even if Baptism did not contribute directly and effectively to regeneration, it would, however, figure the action of God exerted upon the believer, it would signify a direct and — as it were — physical intervention of the Spirit of God in begetting. The Christian is a child of God, that is, he is begotten of Him. But this supernatural begetting takes place when the sacrament of Baptism is administered. The external rite signifies divine birth and, being the very action of divine begetting, transfers the baptised to the new state of divine childhood. There can be no question of a mere changing of character here. The baptised person — even if he is a babe — is already begotten of the spirit and by this he becomes a child of God before any change in his moral actions or behaviour would ever happen. This is what is evidently implied in Jn 3.5.

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(to be continued).