

Witness Manuals, No. 16.

# The Eternal Sonship

A STUDY IN SCRIPTURE

BY

C. F. HOGG

Joint-Author of "Notes on the Epistles to the Thessalonians,"  
"The Epistle to the Galatians," etc., etc.

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## FOREWORD.

It is with sincere pleasure that this new and enlarged edition of Mr. Hogg's pamphlet on "The Eternal Sonship" is commended to the prayerful perusal of the people of God.

The timeliness of its publication is cause for real thankfulness. For of late the eternal nature of the Sonship of Him Whom believers honour as the Son of God has been called in question, and a teaching that this relationship originated at the Incarnation is being put forth as "new light."

The knowledge of the Mode of the Divine Being pertains to a realm far beyond our finite human powers. Yet when the revelation of the Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Godhead is received as set forth in the Holy Scriptures, a profound sense of its glorious *rightness* thrills us, and we know that "this is the True God and Eternal Life." For, clearly, the Eternal Life of the Godhead must needs be life in its perfection and fulness of blessedness. And we know that in man, made in God's image, life solitary is life uncrowned, for it is in the communion and love of kindred persons that life rises to its utmost glory. So the infinitely blessed life of God has not been an everlasting loneliness, but has been, is, and ever will be the ineffable love of co-equal Persons.

"Had the Father no bosom until Bethlehem?" another has asked; and with the witness of Holy Writ before us there is but one answer to that question. Indeed He had! The relationships of Father, Son, and Spirit did not come into existence for the ends of redemption: they are essential relationships inhering in the sublimely glorious Unity in Trinity of the Ever-Blessed God, and Eternal as are all other essentials of the Unchanging One.

This is the position contended for in the pages which follow: a position which is, I humbly but firmly hold, in accordance with the Scripture revelation.

The new matter appearing in this Edition will, it is confidently hoped, prove specially confirming, many relevant passages of the Word being opened up helpfully.

May it please God to use this study of a profound truth to strengthen and settle the faith of many.

J. B. WATSON.

## FOREWORD TO PART II.

AFTER the first edition of this pamphlet was published, it came to the writer's knowledge that its subject had once more become a matter of controversy among certain Christians. In this second edition it has been judged timely to add some remarks on relevant Scriptures not noticed in the former issue. While it is not the desire of the writer to intervene in the controversy, he would esteem it a privilege to contribute even a little to an inquiry into the teaching of Holy Writ (the final authority of which is, happily, common ground) on a subject of primary importance.

It may be well to say here that it is not suggested that those brethren from whom the writer differs in judgment as to the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship deny the eternal existence of the Son, or question His essential, necessary Deity. At the same time, he is bound to put on record his apprehension that as in former ages so also in this, those who become enamoured of the teaching now revived may "go onward," and fail to "abide in the teaching of Christ;" indeed, in surrendering the doctrine of the eternity of the relations expressed in the titles "Father," "Son," and "Word" they have come perilously near to doing so (2 John 9).

We do well to remember that the doctrine of God, and of the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, can only ripen to maturity in fellowship "with all the saints," alike of the past and the present (Eph. 3. 18, 19). Separation from those who name the Name of the Lord is paid for at a heavy price.

Since the sole question at issue is as to what the Scriptures teach, the new matter in this edition consists mainly of notes on selected passages, brief, but sufficient, it is hoped, to throw some light on their meaning. C. F. H.

*November, 1932.*



The Quotations throughout are from the Revised Version of the Scriptures.

# The Eternal Sonship

Read Prov. 30. 5, 6 ; Heb. 1. 1-8.

## I

THESE words of Holy Scripture should induce in us "upon whom the ends of the ages are come," a spirit of reverence akin to that in which they were written by men who were used of God to contribute to the "divers portions" and "divers manners" in which He communicated to men His mind "concerning His Son."

To these passages we may usefully add here 1 Corinthians 13. 9 : "For we know in part and we prophesy in part," of which I take the meaning to be that the apostle had a limited knowledge, and of that limited knowledge he could impart but little ; and of that little his readers in turn could receive still less. Nevertheless, let us encourage ourselves by remembering that while the finite cannot comprehend the infinite, yet, since God has been pleased to reveal Himself to men, and has given us a record of that revelation in the Bible, it has become possible for us to apprehend something of God. We must begin, however, by recognising the inexorable limitations of our finite minds, though we are encouraged to think that when we are freed from the trammels of the old creation, and are introduced into the full liberty of the children of God, we shall know thoroughly, even as now we are thoroughly known. Meantime, if we recognise these limitations, imposed upon us in the nature of things, we shall be saved

from the disappointment inevitable upon the discovery that the infinite and the eternal exceed our grasp.

What the Scripture has revealed about the nature of Christ transcends reason, indeed, yet is not inconsistent with reason, but belongs to a higher sphere. In revelation the spiritual and eternal has dipped down into the temporal and material. What God has revealed concerning Himself is not intended as food for speculation or argument, but to make it possible for us to worship Him intelligently "in spirit and truth."

### **The Progress of Doctrine.**

Revelation is progressive and, in the written form in which it has been preserved to us, was first of all made to a people who had well-nigh lost the knowledge of God, and who had been reduced to a condition of spiritual and moral degradation in idolatrous Egypt. Thus the background of the Old Testament is polytheism, the worship of many gods. Through the centuries after Moses, God taught and trained the Israelites that they might know that God is One, that beside Him there is no other. The lesson was not readily learned, for again and again they returned to idolatry, and only after a double exile and long experience of dwelling among idolaters, was the truth that God is One burned into their souls.

The background of the New Testament is different; it is monotheistic. Israel, having learned the lesson, "The Lord our God, the Lord is one," the further revelation was offered to them that God is Triune, that in God there is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and yet, and of equal truth, these are not three Gods, but one. Just as their forefathers had found it hard to learn the lesson of the Unity of God, so they found it hard to learn that in that Unity of nature there is a Trinity of Persons.

We must beware, however, of reading the New Testament revelation into the Old Testament, just as, on the other hand, we must remember that the

Old Testament can be understood only in the light of the New. And when the Old Testament is read in the light of the New, the result is harmony and completeness ; for God in the Old Testament revealed Himself in such a way that, whilst no new revelation could be imagined or anticipated by man, yet every new revelation He made found its place in the framework of the Old.

### **Unity and Trinity.**

There is no attempt made in the Old Testament to prove that God is, neither is there any attempt made in the New Testament to prove that He is the Father, that the Son shares with Him, and the Holy Spirit with Both in essential Deity. Just as the Unity of God is assumed in the Old Testament, so the Trinity of Persons in that Unity is assumed in the New.

The Lord Jesus began by speaking of His Father, and then of Himself as the Son, and later of the Holy Spirit. As the revelation proceeds, it becomes evident that the Three are so related in nature that there is but One God subsisting in Three Persons. It will be plain, then, that in a matter of such moment, and so transcending our natural powers of understanding and of expression, we should be careful in our phraseology, lest there be any suspicion of our doctrine being tri-theistic rather than Trinitarian. To this end we should, as nearly as we may, " hold the pattern of sound words," for, in the last resort, only words that the Holy Spirit teaches are adequate to express the mind of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ called Himself the Son, but the phrase, " the Eternal Son " was not used by Him, nor, indeed, is it found in Holy Scripture. The question arises, whether this Sonship is temporal or eternal. Or, to use technical phraseology, is it an ontological Sonship or an economic Sonship ? That is, does the Sonship belong to the essence of the Deity, or is it a relationship assumed in time in order to carry out the Divine purpose for the redemption of

man, and for the restoration of the Universe to its allegiance to God? Our answer is, that the Sonship is eternal; it was not assumed for the discharge of functions in this world, or in the world to come; it is an essential relationship within the Being of God.\*

Entering upon our inquiry into the teaching of Scripture upon our theme, we ask, first of all, what is the meaning of "son" as used therein. It has two senses. The first is the obvious one, "offspring." It is not necessary to quote passages to illustrate this, its most frequent sense. "Son" also means "one in whom character is expressed." A single instance will suffice here. In Luke 16. 8: "... the sons of this age are wiser than the sons of light," plainly not 'offspring,' but expression of character is intended. When the Lord spoke of Himself as "Son," it was in this sense He used the word, as may be seen in His reply to Philip: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14. 9). To understand "Son" as the equivalent of "offspring" would involve thinking of the Father and the Son as in order of priority and posteriority, but, as we shall see, this would not be in accordance with Scripture.

### The Son of Man.

When the Lord Speaks of Himself as "the Son of Man," we do not understand Him to mean that He was the offspring of man, but rather that He is the Archetypal Man, He is the representative Man, Who fulfills all God's purposes for man, Who is all that God intended man to be. And just as "Son of Man" implies that He Who thus styled Himself by so doing claimed to be truly man, so when He spoke of Himself as "the Son of God," He claimed to be no less truly God.

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\*The words of 1 John 5. 7: "For there are three that bear witness in Heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one" (A.V.), are spurious, a clumsy interpolation without ancient manuscript authority in Greek. "There is not the shadow of a reason for supposing them genuine" (Alford). The words are plainly inconsistent with other Scriptures, for Heaven is not the place of witness-bearing, nor are "Father" and "Word" ever elsewhere linked together, but always "Father" and "Son"—"God" and "The Word."

**The Son of God.**

If, then, the title "Son of God," applied to the Lord Jesus Christ connotes essential Deity—not Deity on a lower plane, or in a secondary or subsidiary sense, but full and necessary Deity, so that the Deity of the Son is as real as that of the Father, and is equally without qualification of any kind, it follows that the Sonship must be eternal. Since He is, He did not become, God, so He is, He did not become, "Son."

**The Son and the Word.**

The Fourth Gospel opens thus : "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." It does not call for demonstration that "God" here refers to the Father; but notice, while the Father is called God, He is not God in the sense that He is alone in Godhood, for John goes on to say that "the Word was God." This order of the words must be preserved in English; it is obviously impossible to say that "God was the Word," inasmuch as the preceding statement is that "the Word was with God." The nature is one; the Persons are distinct, and this was so "in the beginning," that is to say, eternally.

Just as God and the Word are associated in John 1. 1, so in 1. 18 the same Persons are called Father and Son, and the Son is declared to be the Revealer of the Father. Moreover, they are distinct in such a way that it is said that the Father "gave" or "sent" the Son, and that the Son came, and also that the Holy Spirit led Him even to the Cross. Thus the thought of personality is associated alike with the Father and with the Son and with the Holy Spirit, for each acts of His own volition, and yet in spontaneous harmony each with the other (John 3. 16; 5. 30; 6. 38; Matt. 4. 1; Heb. 9. 14).

Consider next the familiar words of John 3. 16, 17 : "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world,

but that the world should be saved through Him." It is not said that God sent One Who, in coming into the world, became His Son, but that He sent One Who was His Son, One Who already sustained this relation with the Father. Indeed, the nature of the relationship is the measure of the value of the gift, and so of the greatness of the love. See also 1 John 4. 9.

### Love Active.

In John 3. 35 we read that "the Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand." Associate with these the words of 17. 24, where the Son speaks of the Father having loved Him, "before the foundation of the world." In both passages it is clear enough that the reference is to His pre-incarnate relationship with God. Consequently in them the greater word for love is used, *agapaō*, the love that has its cause in itself. But in 5. 20, "The Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth," the reference is to the experience of the Incarnate Son, Who is the object of His Father's love because of His filial devotion. Hence the word used is *phileō*, which signifies the love that has an immediate cause in the attraction of its object.

The reciprocal love of Father and Son, which is independent of the Incarnation, as declared in John 17. 24, seems to be involved in the words of 1 John 4. 16: "God is love (*agapē*)." But love does not exist in a vacuum. Love exists only as there is a person to love, and a person to be loved; so that if God is love, and if from all eternity He has been a lover, there must ever have been an object for His love, Himself capable of loving. Thus the Father loved the Son, and the Son the Father, in that timelessness which we call Eternity. Into a world plunged in moral chaos and night by sin, the Son of God came to make manifest the love of God. We who through faith in Christ have become children of God, are lifted into a new creation where love is all—lifted in experience into fellowship with God in so far as His love

dwells in us, guiding and fashioning our lives, and ruling our relations with our fellows.

Fatherhood and sonship are co-terminous ; only when a child is born to him does a man attain to the status of fatherhood. As it is in natural relationships, so is it also in the higher realm of the Divine nature, the mystery of the Trinity, the Unity of the Godhead ; for if the Son is not Son from eternity, then the Father is not Father from Eternity. Yet the Son speaks to His Father of having been loved by Him "before the foundation of the world" (1 John 2. 23 ; John 17. 24).

The analogy between the statements of v. 1 and v. 18 of John 1 is in harmony with this conclusion. As suggested above, the relationship of Father and Son in the latter is parallel with that of God and the Word in the former. Word and Son alike signify the Revealer. The identification of the Word with the Son requires no demonstration ; it is self-evident, and as it is categorically stated that the Word is co-eternal with God, it follows that the Son is co-eternal with the Father.

### **The Son and the Spirit.**

Certain words of the Apostle Paul lead to the same conclusion. "When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law," a conclusion confirmed by words that follow these almost immediately, "God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts ;" for as He Who was sent was the Spirit before He was sent, and did not become the Spirit in the sending, so the Son was always Son, and did not become Son in His coming (Gal. 4. 4-6 and cp. Rom. 8. 3). In the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, the Lord's own words can hardly be taken in any other sense : "He had yet one, a beloved son ; he sent him last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son." The son in the parable, like Him of Whom He was the shadow, was son before he was sent (Mark 12. 6).

The unique expression at the close of Colossians

1. 13 further illustrates this use of the title "Son." The rendering of the A.V. is inadequate, for the thought expressed in the Greek is not of the Father's love to Christ, "His dear Son," but of the expression of His character, and, therefore, the exact translation of R.V. is to be preferred, "the Son of His love." That the title does not refer to the Son Incarnate only, the context makes abundantly evident, as we shall see when we come to consider the verses that follow.

### "Son" and "The Son."

In the Epistle to the Hebrews there are some passages in which the word "Son" stands in the Greek without the article. It opens thus: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets . . . hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in (a) Son." That is to say, He in Whom God has spoken to men is One Who stands in relation to Him as Son to Father. In 5. 8 it is said of Him that "though He was a Son, yet (He) learned obedience by the things which He suffered."\* In 7. 28 it is said that "the Law appointeth men high priests having infirmity; but the word of the oath . . . appointeth a Son, perfected for evermore."† In each of these passages the nature of the relationship subsisting between the Person described as "Son" and God is stressed.

In the same Epistle there are other passages in which the article is attached to the word; in these the unique character of the relationship and its consequent dignity are in view. Thus in 1. 8: "Of the Son He saith, Thy Throne, O God, is for ever and ever;" and in 6. 6: ". . . Seeing they

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\*It is significant that the writer does not speak of the Son learning to obey, which might have suggested a natural inclination to self-will, disobedience, such as has characterised man since the Fall. He "learned obedience," i.e., He learned by experience what obedience is; He "pleased not Himself" (Rom. 15. 3).

†"Perfected" does not refer to character, of course, but to experience. It bears the meaning of qualified; that is, through Incarnate life, death, and resurrection He is qualified to represent a redeemed people before God.

crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame ; " and 10. 29 : " . . . who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God." One other passage (7. 3), throws up the essential and therefore the eternal character of the relationship into bold relief ; that wherein it is said of Melchizedek that " having neither beginning of days nor end of life," He is, in this respect, " made like unto the Son of God." But it is clear that, if the Sonship is limited to Incarnation, it was not " without beginning of days," though it would be " without end of life." Finally, this Son of God is identified for us in 4. 14 : " Having then a great High Priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God."

Reverting to the opening of the Epistle, from v. 2 we learn that this " Son " is the appointed " Heir of all things ; " He is the Agent in Creation ; He is the effulgence, or outshining, of the Divine glory. This latter ascription suggests an analogy with the natural figure of the sun and its rays. We do not see the sun, but we do see the rays that radiate from the sun ; they reveal the sun to us, and in them there is nothing that does not come from the sun, nor do either the sun or its rays exist independently. So it is with the Father and the Son : the Son is, and ever has been, as He ever must be, the sole Revealer of the otherwise invisible God.

Moreover, as Son He is the Sustainer of all things by His own powerful Word. Thus, as He shares the nature of God, and expresses the character of God, so also He does the work of God. This is the sense in which He is called " Son ; " the title is His, therefore, as is the relationship it connotes, independently of His Incarnation.

### " The Chief Point is This."

We conclude, then, that Scripture teaches that the Son is essentially God. He is not God by the will of the Father ; He is God of necessity ; without Him God is not. We conclude further that the relationship subsisting in God and described in human speech

(we see as in a mirror, we know but in part), as that of Father and Son is an essential relationship, and therefore eternal, always providing that the distinction is preserved between the two meanings of the word "Son," eliminating from it in this connection the idea of offspring, and preserving only that of complete intimacy of communion and perfect expression of character.

## II.

We must now give attention to certain allied words that present difficulty in this connection. One of these is found in Hebrews 1. 5 : "For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee?" This is a quotation from Psalm 2. 7, which Paul also used, as recorded in Acts 13. 33 : "God hath fulfilled the same unto our children, in that He raised up Jesus; as also it is written in the second Psalm : Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee." I do not understand these words to refer to the Resurrection of the Lord, but to His Incarnation, and for this reason : v. 34 goes on : "And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He hath spoken on this wise, I will give you the holy and sure (*i.e.*, the covenanted) blessings of David."

In Acts 3. 22 the same expression is used in a quotation from Deuteronomy 18. 18 : "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto thee;" but the prophetic ministry of the Lord belonged to the days of His flesh, not to those that follow the Resurrection. There is nothing in the Greek of Acts 13. 33 to justify the "again" of the A.V., so that there the reference is to the Incarnation, and in verse 34 to the Resurrection.\*

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\*As Hebrews 1. 6 is probably to be read, "when He again shall have brought (so literally, see *margin*) in the Firstborn into the world," referring to the Second Advent, so verse 5, "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee. . . . I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son," is to be understood to refer to the First Advent. Chapter 5. 5 I take to refer to the Incarnation; verse 6 to the Resurrection.

Thus there are two senses in which He is called "Son"—the general and more frequent sense, in which He is the sharer of God's nature, and the revelation of His character, and this other in which the reference is to what is described in Matthew 1 and Luke 1 and 2—His Incarnation.

### Only Begotten.

In Scripture "only begotten" does not necessarily mean an only child, but one upon whom affection is concentrated. Hebrews 11. 17 provides an illustration. "Abraham . . . offered up Isaac . . . his only begotten son." Now Isaac was not, in the literal sense of the word, Abraham's only begotten son, for he had others, but Isaac was that one of them upon whom his affection was concentrated. Genesis 22. 2: "Take now thy son thine only son whom thou lovest even Isaac" in the Greek version (LXX) from which the writer of Hebrews quotes, is represented by "Thy son, the beloved one, whom thou lovest." Another instance is found in Proverbs 4. 3, where the Hebrew has "only begotten," and the Greek "beloved." In Psalm 22. 20, both Hebrew and Greek have "only begotten" where the English versions have "darling."

Besides meaning the object of love as above described, "only begotten" has in it the idea of complete expression, adequate representation, as in John 1. 18. Indeed, it may be suggested that each idea is the necessary complement of the other. Adequate expression seems, too, to be the intention of the parenthetical statement of v. 14 (*margin*): "We beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten from (*para*, from beside) a father." In a family among men the characteristics of the father may be distributed among his children, but in the ideal son all these would find full expression in one. Were such a son set beside such a father, the resemblance would be seen to be defective in nothing. So "the Only Begotten Son which is in (*ho ōn*, Who exists, has His being in) the bosom of the Father, He hath

(adequately) declared Him ; " always bearing in mind that " declared " here refers not only to the words spoken by the Lord Jesus, but also, and equally, to His works, His ways, His character.

### Eternal Generation.

The expression " eternal generation " does not belong to Scripture, but to theology. There is, however, but a qualified analogy between what is called eternal generation and human generation. Human generation is an act—eternal generation is a state ; it belongs to that higher plane in which God lives beyond the limits of time and space. The illustration of the sun and its rays which are in continual procession from it, and by which it is revealed, may serve again, but at best illustrations drawn from nature fail to express the Divine relationships, and may even be misleading if their strict limitations are not kept clearly in mind. Indeed, the term " eternal generation " is hardly tolerable, because of the suggestion, inherent in the latter word, of an act, the bringing into being of one who, before that act, did not exist.

### " Firstborn."

Yet another term, closely related to our subject, is " firstborn." It, too, is found in its literal meaning in certain passages, whereas in others that meaning is extended. The literal meaning is evident in Hebrews 11. 28, as it is also in Luke 2. 7, where it is said of Mary that " she brought forth her firstborn son," implying that she had other children as the wife of Joseph.\*

In the Mosaic law it was provided that no man, having two wives, the one loved, the other hated, might " make the son of the beloved the firstborn before the son of the hated, which is the firstborn " (Deut. 21. 16). Here, as well as in its primary sense,

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\*There is no foundation in the Apostolic records for the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, no suggestion that the brothers and sisters of the Lord were other than His sisters and brothers in the natural sense of the words, children of the same mother. See "Notes on Galatians" (Hogg and Vine), p. 49.

firstborn is used of headship and doubled inheritance. Then firstborn also means the place of pre-eminence without reference to primogeniture, or even to birth, as in Exodus 4. 22, where God speaks of Israel (the nation) as "My son, My firstborn," and in Jeremiah 31. 9, where He declares, "I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn."

Though the primary reference of Psalm 89. 27 : "I will make Him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth," is to David and his heirs, these are but persons prophetic of "a more than Solomon," One Whom David himself called "Lord," One Whom the Apostle declares to be "King of them that are reigning as kings, Lord of them that are ruling as lords" (Matt. 22. 42-45 ; 1 Tim. 6. 15 ; cp. *margin*). And not only in relation to earthly rulers is the Son Sovereign Lord ; "angels, authorities, and powers have been made subject unto Him," and "when He (God) again bringeth the Firstborn into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him" (1 Peter 3. 22 ; Heb. 1. 6).

In Revelation 1. 5, the Lord Jesus is said to be "the Firstborn of the dead," which should be compared with and understood by 1 Corinthians 15. 20, "Christ hath been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that are asleep." His resurrection is the assurance of ours, and as the resurrection of "the dead in Christ" is to take precedence of all other, therefore they are called "the Church of the firstborn (ones) who are enrolled in Heaven" (1 Thess. 4. 16 ; Heb. 12. 23).

### The Two Creations.

In relation to the old creation Christ is said in Colossians 1. 15 to be "Firstborn," as He is said also to be "Firstborn" in relation to the new (v. 18), where the reason given is "that in all things He might have the pre-eminence." But besides this idea of pre-eminence, there is the further thought suggested that Christ not only stands at the head of each creation, He is the type to which each conforms.

This meaning is evident in Romans 8. 29, "Whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that (*eis*, to the end that) He might be the Firstborn among many brethren," that is, that in the new creation the children of God may be conformed to the type of which Christ is the perfect expression.

The words of the Apostle in Colossians 1. 15 demand a further comment, in elucidation of their meaning and to obviate a wrong deduction from them. By "Firstborn of all creation" we are not to understand that He Himself is included in that creation; rather the words are intended to exclude Him therefrom.

Indeed, the following words expressly so exclude Him inasmuch as they declare Him to exist "before all things," of whatever kind, in whatever sphere, and, indeed, that "all things have been created" "in," "through," and "unto" Him, even as it is by His power that "all things" are maintained in being. And further, if the Apostle had intended to include the Son among creatures, the word "firstcreated" lay ready to his hand, and, being free of ambiguity, would have served his purpose better than "firstborn."

The same grammatical form occurs in John 1. 15, where the Baptist testifies concerning Christ: "He was before me." Literally the words are 'first of me,' or, as the margin legitimately expands them, "He was first in regard of me," though the meaning would have gained in lucidity had the paraphrase run: 'He was first in relation to me.' On this analogy we may confidently paraphrase, 'Who is . . . Firstborn in relation to all creation.' He is not included therein any more than the Messiah to Whom the Baptist testified was included in the testifier.

This conclusion is confirmed by a comparison with the use of the same idiom by other writers. Thus Xenophon speaks of "the greatest of battles since fought," but it would be absurd to suppose him to mean that that battle was itself included among those "since fought." Milton describes Adam as "goodliest of men since born," but in so saying he

does not make Adam his own son. And when he calls Eve the fairest of her daughters," he plainly does not intend to include Eve among her own daughters ! With these analogous expressions before us, it seems clear that the words " Firstborn of all creation " are to be understood in the sense that the Lord is excluded from the category of created beings, not included in it.

### Architect and Builder.

The meaning of the passage may be illustrated thus. If the question were asked : ' How did this building come into existence ? ' the answer would be, ' The builders built it, stone upon stone, beam upon beam.' ' How did the builders know where to put the stones and the beams ? ' ' The architect provided the plan.' ' Whence did the architect get the plan ? ' ' Before a stone was put upon a stone, before a line was put upon paper, the building already existed, complete, in whole and in its parts, in the mind of the architect.'

The Lord Jesus Christ is Himself the Architect and Builder of the Universe.\* Now, every building is built for some purpose, or for some person. For whom, then, and for what, was the Universe brought into existence ? For the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that in it, through it, and to it, His glory, which is the glory of God, might be displayed.

Every building requires to be maintained, or the fabric will perish. Who maintains the Universe ? Again the answer is : " By Him (the Son) all things are held together." He upholds " all things by the Word of His power " (Heb. 1. 3).

The difference between " Only Begotten " and " Firstborn " may be thus expressed ; the former states the fact in relation to the Father, the latter states it in relation to the Universe.

To sum up : the various words used to suggest the relationship subsisting between the Lord Jesus Christ and God, and the contexts in which these words are

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\*Compare Hebrews 11. 10: "The city . . . whose Architect and Maker is God" (R. V., *margin*).

found, tell of a Fatherhood and a Sonship which belong to the nature of God, and which He has been pleased to reveal to us by the assumption of "flesh" (that is, of true and complete humanity) on the part of the Son, and thus under circumstances with which we are familiar in common experience. And the object of this revelation is that men may be brought into fellowship with Him in what is the fundamental relation of life: "Yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ," and that thus we may learn to love one another as the Father loves the Son, and to walk in the same filial obedience as the Son manifested when He lived on earth among men (1 John 1. 3).

It is, of course, impossible within the limits of a brief paper to do more than indicate the material afforded by Scripture for such a study as this. "No one knoweth (*epiginōskein*, to know fully) the Son, save the Father." Knowledge of the Son lies within the competence of the Father alone. That is, full knowledge, for with the new birth come new faculties whereby, and whereby alone, spiritual things may be discerned, and so the Son also we may come to know, though in part, for, as John reminds the mature among believers, we "know (*ginōskein*) Him which is from the beginning." Knowledge of the Father is attainable only through the revelation of the Son and according to His will; and the condition for its attainment is that we learn of One Who is meek and lowly in heart (Matt. 11. 27-30; 1 John 2. 13).

It is fitting, therefore, that this study should close with the words of the Lord Jesus, not spoken on the same occasion, indeed, nor to the same persons, but complementary one of the other nevertheless: "No one cometh unto the Father but by Me," and "No one can come to Me except the Father which sent Me draw him" (John 6. 44; 14. 6).

## PART II.

THE ground may be cleared to some extent if it is pointed out that the question at issue is not whether the Son was so named in eternity, but whether the relationship thus described in the New Testament existed in eternity; whether the Sonship belongs to the essence of Deity, or is a relationship originated in time and relevant only to the Son of Mary? The name under which that relationship is described is, of course, no older than human speech. It is the thing, not its name, that matters here. Moreover it is impossible to distinguish persons who are nameless, as would be the case, for example, if Father, Son and Spirit are intended to describe relations in time only, relations that did not exist prior to the Incarnation.

While the words "son" and "father" must be as old as the birth of Cain, this relationship in the Deity could not, in the very nature of the case, be the subject of Old Testament revelation, inasmuch as the Unity, but not the Tri-unity of God, is therein declared. Yet the earlier revelation that God gave of Himself to men was so unfolded that later revelations are seen to be in harmony therewith. The eighth chapter of Proverbs, for example, may be understood as a preparation for the doctrine of the pre-incarnate existence of the Son (though it contains nothing that the Arian does not accept), but there is no suggestion in it of sonship between Wisdom and Jehovah. The couplet form is characteristic of Hebrew poetry as in Psalm 8. 4, Proverbs 8. 4, for example. So that when Agur (Prov. 30. 1-4) asks "What is His name? What is His Son's name if thou canst tell?" he is asking but one question, not two. "What is his son's name?" is added because to name a man's son fixed his identity. No one knows, no one can tell, is the answer to the double question, for no human being ever did any of

the things named—so insignificant is man! The words cannot be taken prophetically as referring to God and to Christ, for that would involve speaking of God as having ascended up into Heaven, which is impossible. That Agur was thinking of man, and that his words can refer only to man, is evident from the order in which the descent is set in relation to the ascent, which is the reverse of that insisted on by Paul in Ephesians 4. 9, 10 : " Now this, He ascended : what is it but that He also descended ? . . . He that descended is the same also that ascended." The Lord Himself confirms this, saying, " No man hath ascended into Heaven but He that descended out of Heaven, even the Son of Man which is in Heaven ; " (*ho ōn*, as in 1. 18) Whose native place it is, and Who, in the mystery of His relation with the Father had never left it (John 3. 13).

Micah 5. 2. While the prophet's words plainly declare the pre-incarnate, and even the eternal existence of Messiah, there is no suggestion in them of any such relation between Him and God as that between son and father. This is also true of the Psalms (45. 6, 7 and 102. 25-27) quoted in Hebrews 1.

Isaiah 9. 6 foreshadows Bethlehem ; but the prophet does not say that God sustains the relation of Father to the Child to be born, the Son to be given. The revelation of that relation was reserved for a later time. Truth must be maintained on certain, not on precarious testimony. Doubtful arguments weaken a good case. The doctrine of the Eternal Sonship rests on adequate New Testament grounds.

It is true that since the Incarnation a deeper knowledge of God has become available to men. But that is altogether different from a change in the being of God. God is as He ever was—immutable ; the Son but brought into light what God is essentially, what He has been and must ever be. He did not become Jehovah, the self-existent One, when He made Himself known by that name. The " Eternal Spirit " did not become such at Pentecost, nor did

He then begin to "search . . . the deep things of God." For at least eleven hundred years of Israel's history "men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 2. 10; 1 Peter 1. 11; 2 Peter 1. 21). In like manner the coming of the Son into Manhood did not constitute Him Son nor God His Father; it revealed what was true "in the beginning." He did not become Son that there might be a Father to reveal.

When First, Second, and Third are used of the Persons in the Trinity, these words describe not the order of Their being, but the order of Their revelation to men. There is no constant order in which the Names appear in the New Testament (see Matt. 28. 19; 2 Cor. 13. 14; Eph. 2. 18; Rev. 1. 4, 5, for example).

In the Trinity there is not priority and posteriority, superiority and inferiority, but equality and unity. Father, Son, and Spirit are "the same in substance, equal in power and glory." To speak of the Godhead as comprising three individuals (as partners in a business, for example) is Tritheism, the worship of three Gods, not Trinitarianism, the worship of One God subsisting in Three Persons.

Human language must always be inadequate to express Divine truth. The word 'person,' for example, ordinarily used as the equivalent of 'individual,' must not be understood in that sense when used of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 3. 14. "For this cause I bow my knee unto the Father (*patēr*), from Whom every Fatherhood (*patria*) in Heaven and on earth is named" (R.V.M., and see Darby's note). The A.V. after "Father" adds "of our Lord Jesus Christ," but even were the omitted words to be retained, they would not support the doctrine that the Fatherhood of God originated with the Incarnation, for there were fatherhoods in the earth, and the text suggests in other spheres also, through the millennia that pre-

ceded the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. The words make it clear that the Fatherhood of God is independent of the Incarnation, independent, indeed, of all His creative work. He is the archetypal Father, to the pattern of Whose Fatherhood all created fatherhoods are conformed. But 'father' is a relative term, and involves the existence of a son; an uncreated Father involves an uncreated Son. Thus this Fatherhood and this Sonship are relations outside time—they are eternal.

Ephesians 1. 17. "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory." The first phrase assumes the Incarnation—the God to Whom Paul prays is the God Who was "declared" by the Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom He prayed, and on Whom He cried in the hour of His distress (John 1. 18, Luke 6. 12, Matt. 27. 46). The second phrase has two parallels in the Old Testament: "King of Glory" in Psalm 24. 7-12, and "God of Glory" in Psalm 29. 3, in each case the Person spoken of is Jehovah. He is the King Whose glory is manifested in His triumph over His adversaries; He is the God Whose glory is manifested in creation; He is the Father Whose glory is manifested in His Son. The glory of Fatherhood, however, is not merely a glory that began from Bethlehem. That that glory was expressed before, and independently of Bethlehem, is clear from Eph. 3. 14. Thus He is the Son not merely from Bethlehem, but "before the world was."

Romans 15. 6, 1 Peter 1. 3. "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;" that is, 'the God and Father Whom our Lord Jesus Christ revealed.' Sonship involves community of nature, but the Lord's community of nature with God does not date from His Incarnation, it is eternal. That which began by the begetting of the Holy Spirit, and in the conception of Mary, was not His Deity, but His humanity alone (John 1. 1, with v. 14). There was no communication of the Divine essence in that begetting, for the Divine

essence is incommunicable ; it was His in perfection and eternally.

" The Father " is not mentioned in either of the accounts of the Incarnation, nor in any indisputable reference thereto, such as the quotation from the second Psalm ; the Agent in the Incarnation was the Holy Spirit, as Gabriel declared to Mary : " The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee : wherefore also the Holy Thing which is to be born shall be called (the) Son of God " (Luke 1. 35). It is not, then, in virtue of the Incarnation that the Lord spoke of His Father, but in virtue of a relation that preceded that event. The Sonship that began in Bethlehem is the manifestation in time of a relationship, altogether independent of time.

John 3. 16. " God . . . gave His only begotten Son." Galatians 4. 4, " God sent forth His Son, born of a woman." 1 John 4. 14, " The Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." Such passages might be multiplied, but these will suffice as basis for the inquiry when this sending and giving took place. If the Son is Son in Incarnation only, then the sending must have taken place after Bethlehem. Yet neither in the Gospels nor in the Epistles is there any suggestion of such a sending. The words (it is not too much to say) are incapable of any other meaning than that He was already Son when He was sent. In what other sense can the words of John 10. 36 be understood : " Say ye of Him Whom the Father *sanctified and sent into the world* ? "

John 16. 27, 28. " I came forth from the Father." The preposition is *para*, that used of the Holy Spirit coming from the Father in 15. 26. Sent by the Father the Son came forth from the Father. In v. 28, " I came out from (*ek*) the Father . . . into the world." In both statements His mission is in view, as is seen by the description of His return in the reverse order to that of His coming, " Again I leave

the world and go unto the Father." How can these words be understood in any other sense than that which makes the Father to have been the Father when He sent the Son ; the Son to have been the Son when He was sent by the Father out of Heaven into the world ?

That " sending " denotes subordination is clear ; but subordination does not necessarily imply inferiority. Subordination is not a matter of nature, but of relationship. The " Eternal Spirit " (Heb. 9. 14) was ' given ' by the Father, and " poured forth " by the Son, in order that He might come, and therefore before He came into the world at Pentecost (John 14. 16, Acts 2. 33). This does not make the Spirit inferior to either the Father or the Son, but the perfect fellowship that is the condition of the ineffable life of the Triune God is brought within the limits of our apprehension by this expression of subordination in essential relationship.

In the relationship of wife to husband, for example, there is subordination without inferiority. Darby's translation " inferior to the angels," even with reference to " the days of His flesh," is not happy (Heb. 2. 7, 9).

John 10. 36. The title " Christ " (Heb., Messiah) means " the Anointed One." Upon kings and priests in Israel the oil was actually put by human hands ; it was the sign of consecration to office. The Lord was not less the Anointed One because no oil was actually put upon Him for that purpose. (The incident recorded in Matt. 26. 6-13 and parallels, is not to the point here, of course). To His anointing, His consecration, He seems to refer when He said, " Say ye of Him Whom the Father sanctified (consecrated, R.V.M., both words mean set apart for an object) and sent into the world, thou blasphemest ; because I said, I am (the) Son of God ? " Thus it is not according to Scripture, and it is misleading in this connection, to speak of the " Anointed Man."

He is the Anointed One, the Anointed Son—His anointing is by the Father, and belongs to Eternity, not to time.

There is an analogy between David and his "Greater Son," inasmuch as David was anointed king while yet in his father's house. After Saul's death he was anointed king "over the house of Judah," and later still "over Israel" (1 Sam. 16. 12; 2 Sam. 2. 4; 5. 3). So also He "that is to be ruler in Israel" is to that end anointed "from everlasting" (Micah 5. 2). At no point in the days of His flesh was He anointed to be King either over Israel or over "the Kingdom of the world" (Rev. 11. 15). The anointing of Acts 10. 38, referring to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him at Jordan, is said to be for a different purpose, and is not the same as the "anointing" that preceded the sending.

Hebrews 7. 3. The Sonship that began at Bethlehem cannot be described as "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days . . ." The Son born there had a father (reputed) Joseph, and actual, God; and a mother, Mary, and His genealogy is provided. Scripture tells us with particularity how the Son came into the world, though the whole point of the comparison with Melchizedek is that there is no record of how he (Melchizedek) entered it. Moreover, it is not said that the Son of God was made like unto Melchizedek, but that Melchizedek was made like unto the Son of God. How could this be if there was no Son of God for centuries after the days of Abraham? The comparison is thus seen to be on the Divine, not the human, side of the Son of God, with what He was, not with what He became in Incarnation. Moreover, the title here is in its full form—"the Son of (the) God," of which more is to be said later. It would seem, therefore, that the unoriginated Sonship is that which has an analogy in Melchizedek, "Priest of God Most High."

This testimony is the more cogent since the mention

of the Sonship is merely incidental to the argument ; the appropriateness of the illustration to the priesthood of Melchizedek depends upon the Sonship's being independent of time and circumstances.

Colossians 1. 13-15. "The Son of His love . . . Who is the image of the invisible God." The latter words cannot be taken other than as describing the Lord in His relation to God independently of time or condition, for He was the image of God before man was created (Gen. 1. 26, 27). If He is thus essentially and eternally the image of God, it seems to follow that in like manner He is essentially and eternally the Son of the Father (v. 12). The two phrases are equated, and their association is so close that it is impossible to limit the first to His Manhood without limiting the latter in the same way. This is confirmed by the further description of Him as "First-born of all creation," which "must be either a subjective genitive, classing Him with creation, or an objective genitive, producing creation. The context rules out the former."

Philippians 2. 6. *Huparchōn*, here translated "being," and "being originally" (R.V.M.), "subsisting" (Darby), include the idea that what was continues to be. The word rendered "form" (*morphē*) expresses what is essential. Only God could be in the form of God. Thus there was no time "when" the Son was other than "in the form of God," not even when He was upon the earth, for that "form" is essentially His ; to say that "He emptied Himself" of it would be to say that He ceased to be God, and therefore that He ceased to exist !

John 1. 18. "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father." *Ho ōn* (present participle of the verb *to be*) is independent of time, and might be rendered 'He Who has His being in the bosom of the Father.' The words describe the peculiar

intimacy of the relation between Father and Son, knowing neither variation nor interruption; an ineffable relation, for which human experience has no analogy, and which can be expressed but approximately in human speech, for even while He was actually upon earth, 'tabernacling among us,' the Lord spoke of Himself as being in Heaven (John 3. 13, where *ho ōn* appears as in 1. 18).

John 1. 1, 18. As already noticed above, there is an evident analogy between the titles "the Word of God" and "the only begotten Son (of God)." The phrase "in (the) beginning" is fixed by Genesis 1. 1, and by what follows here in v. 3, "all things were made (came into existence) by Him," that is, by the Word.

Elsewhere the Son is declared to have been the Agent in Creation, Colossians 1. 13-16 for example. "In the beginning . . . the Word was God," implies, of course, that He shared the eternal existence of God. That He was the Word before, and did not become the Word in Incarnation is the more evident from the subsequent statement that "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us" (v. 14). And what is true of the Word is equally true of the Son.

Moreover, whereas in Genesis 1. 1, "in the beginning" marks a definite time when something was done, that is, the heavens and the earth were created, John 1. 1 tells not that something was done, but that a Person then already existed, and that that Person was "the Word." There were intelligent beings in existence before man. Did not God communicate with these through the Word? At least He did communicate with man in Old Testament times in the Theophanies. As Son He is the Mediator not only between God and men, He is Mediator also between God and the Universe in the creation of which He was His agent, as He is in its maintenance (John 17. 5; Col. 1. 15-17).

Those who submit that "only begotten" (*monogenēs*) should be understood, not in its literal significance according to its etymology, but in accordance with its use in Scripture, are not open to the charge of special pleading; they appeal to a sound principle of interpretation, not only of Scripture, but of all speech. The Hebrew word *yahgeed* is translated by *monogenēs* in the Septuagint Version of Judges 11. 34, but in Genesis 22. 2; 12. 16 it is rendered by *agapētos*, 'beloved,' a clear indication of the translators' understanding of the Hebrew word. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, referring to Genesis 22, uses *monogenēs*, although Isaac was not an only son, but one of several. It is true that Isaac alone "was born after the Spirit" (Gal. 4. 29), but what is said in Hebrews 11. 17 is said as fact, and it is fact that Isaac was the peculiar object of his father's affection, and that he was not an "only begotten" son in the etymological sense of the term.

The Voice that came out of Heaven at Jordan, and that testified on the Mount, spake of the Lord as "My Son, the beloved" (Matt. 3. 17). "Beloved" is not used of the Lord at all by John, who uses "only begotten" apparently in the same sense; thus providing contributory evidence of the meaning of the latter word.

The precision of the Greek language is proverbial; distinctions difficult to bring out in English are obvious in the original. The article which must often appear in English is omitted in Greek when the intention is to emphasise the characteristic expressed by the noun; it appears when the intention is to indicate a specific person or thing.

This somewhat crude definition does not cover the whole ground, but may serve to make what follows clear. The title "Son of God" in the English versions does not always represent exactly the same form of words in the original. The Voice borne out of Heaven at Jordan and on the Mount said (following the order of the words in Greek), 'This is the Son of

Me, the Beloved,' where the title had a deeper meaning than could be recognised until after the coming of the Spirit (John 14. 16; 16. 23). The words of Satan in which he twice addressed the Lord were, "If Thou art Son of God." The former is specific, acknowledging a unique relationship with the Father; the latter raises the question whether any such relation exists.

The High Priest questioned the Lord whether He were "the Son of God;" on his lips this meant no more than to ask whether He claimed to be Messiah, but when the Lord used the same words (John 11. 4) He meant a great deal more. The full title, "the Son of God," is not used in the Gospels with reference to the Lord's birth of Mary. In Luke 1. 35 both articles are omitted, "Son of God;" the character of "that which is to be born" (neuter) is such as to suit Him Who was to come into the world therein. The same feature marks Romans 1. 4. He is "declared to be Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection of the dead." His resurrection is the vindication of the Virgin Birth. But in such a passage as Ephesians 4. 13, "until we all attain unto . . . the (full) knowledge of the Son of God," the Apostle was surely thinking of more than a Sonship that began at Bethlehem.

In the two other places in his Epistles in which the Apostle uses the title, "the Son of God" appears in full (2 Cor. 1. 19; Gal. 2. 20). In twelve places he speaks of "His (that is, God's) Son," always with the article, "the Son of Him," and in two places he calls Him "His own Son." In all these places a sound exegesis calls for a larger reference than merely to a Sonship limited to Incarnation.

As reported in John's Gospel, the Lord frequently spoke of Himself as "the Son" without qualifying phrase. In each case the article is present, as is the case where it occurs in Matthew (11. 27; 24. 36) and in Mark (13. 32). In all these places (Matt. 11. 27 is the first recorded, John 17. 1 the last), it seems altogether inadequate to associate the title merely

with Bethlehem. "The Son" is the correlative of "the Father." The relation does not arise out of the common experience of men; rather it is the archetypal relationship from which every such relationship "in Heaven and on earth" is named. See paragraph on Ephesians 3. 14 above.

1 John 1. 1, 2. John's Epistle may have been a 'covering letter' written to accompany his Gospel, but however that may be, the two must be read together. In the Prologue to the Gospel he declares that in the Word "was life," and this "in the beginning," that is, it was there eternally. Apparently John has in mind the Lord's repeated "I am . . . the Life" (11. 25; 14. 6). In his Epistle he speaks of that Life "which was with the Father," and which "was manifested unto us." The latter phrase plainly refers to what happened in time, the former as plainly refers to a condition altogether independent of time. Could the Life be with the Father from Bethlehem had He not been with Him before Bethlehem? Did He begin to be the Life in His Incarnation? Is He "the true God and eternal life" merely since His ascension? Only a negative answer to these questions is possible.

The preposition *pros*, translated "with," when it is used of persons suggests not merely proximity, but intercourse. This personal function is ascribed both to "the Word" and to "the Life," as it is to "the Son." Christ not only brought the Message of Life, He was Himself the Life. Being the Word, He came to reveal God; being the Son, He came to represent God; and being the Life, he came to impart life to men "dead through their trespasses and sins."