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THE DIVINE SONSHIP OF CHRIST IN PSALM II

IT is agreed by all Catholic commentators that Psalm ii is a Messianic psalm predicting the universality of Christ's kingdom and the divine sonship of the Messiah. The latter point raises an important question. In what sense has David understood and expressed this divine sonship? Has he intended to represent the Messiah as a true son of God or simply as his adopted son, his beloved one or his representative on earth? The reason for this difficulty lies in the fact that while the divine sonship of the Messiah in its proper sense is nowhere expressly asserted in the Old Testament, the words in verse 7 "Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee" seem to have no other sense but that, cf. Heb. i, 5.

Father C. Lattey, S.J. (*The First Book of the Psalms in The Westminster Version of the Bible*: p. 5 ff.) solves the difficulty by the "compensation theory" according to which the words of the Holy Scriptures have, sometimes, besides their literal meaning another meaning of a

profounder import which is seen in the background and which, in some cases, completely absorbs the more obvious and literal one (op. cit. p. xx). He therefore explains verse 7 in this way: "The title 'son of God' is used with considerable freedom in the Old Testament: cf. Gen. vi, 2; Ex. iv, 22 f. . . . The title was thus one that lent itself easily to compenetrations. It was especially true of David, but belonged in an absolutely unique sense to Christ." And he goes on: "Myself this day have begotten thee. So far as this can be applied to King David, it is best interpreted in the light of the preceding verse of his enthronement as king over all Israel in II Sam. v . . . Evidently the verse can be applied in a very limited sense to any mere man." In other words, David is the king against whom the nations have revolted and who has been chosen by Yahweh as his earthly representative and anointed king on Mount Sion. As God's representative he was also, in a certain sense, his son. But both the title "son of God" and the universal kingship as described in verses 8 and 9 can be applied, in their literal and proper sense, to Christ alone. Therefore while David is the subject of the Psalm, he gradually fades away as the Psalm moves forward until he disappears entirely in order to bring to light the real subject of the Psalm, namely the King-Messias.

The principles upon which the compenetrations theory is based are generally admitted. All are agreed that the prophets sometimes depict future events, that are not strictly Messianic, with the colours of the Messianic age. Thus, for instance, the post-exilic and the Messianic restorations are very often blended into one restoration sharing the characteristics of both. The two are in reality two successive stages in the process of the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. So also David's kingdom was a preparation for, rather than a figure or type of, the Messianic kingdom, and David himself or the Davidic dynasty was the ancestor of the greatest Davidic king—the Messias. There exists therefore between David and the Messias and between their respective kingdoms, as between the post-exilic and the Messianic restorations, a nexus binding the two persons or events into a unity which God reveals to man in many of its successive stages of development. To illustrate the point with a practical example: The prophet's mind receiving a revelation is like the screen of a cinema. If the light is faint, the picture on the screen is indistinct, but if the light becomes brighter many details hitherto unnoticed become at once visible. But as soon as that bright light begins to fade, the picture will be reduced to a bare outline. Both the revelation and its greater or lesser degree of clarity come from God.

In the light of these principles, and with a stricter conformity to them, I should like to propose an interpretation of Psalm ii and particularly of verse 7 which is slightly different from, and perhaps simpler than, that proposed by Father Lattey in his commentary.

The king against whom the nations have revolted is not David at the time of Absalom's rebellion, but the Messiah and he alone. David knew only too well from earlier prophecies that the Messiah would be a king, a powerful king with a universal kingdom, cf. Gen. xlix, 10; Num. xxiv, 17-19. He could also know from his experience that vassal-kings very frequently revolted against their sovereigns. In the history of the Ancient East confederacies of vassal-kings and rebellions were events of frequent occurrence. In the Assyrian inscriptions numerous records have been preserved of hostile coalitions and their repression by the kings of Assyria. David, therefore, could very easily and without any special revelation foresee that the King-Messiah, just as any temporal king, would have his enemies who would seek the opportunity of casting off their allegiance. It is such a wide-spread rebellion of peoples and their rulers unwilling to submit to the Messiah's rule that the Psalmist is describing in verses 1-3.

But in vain will the subject nations threaten to revolt. The Messiah is neither a self-made king nor a king appointed by man. He is chosen by God to rule over the whole world as his earthly representative. It is from God that the Messiah will receive his sovereign rights, and man is powerless against God.

The Messiah himself asserts his royal rights deriving them from his divine sonship. A universal kingship is given to the Messiah because he is the son of God. This seems to be the most natural connection between verse 7 and verse 8. Now this is the knot of the problem. In what sense does the Psalmist represent the Messiah as the son of God?

Both the noun "son" and the verb "to beget" must be taken in their literal and proper meaning unless there is evidence for their improper or metaphorical meaning. Now when God is the subject of the verb "to beget," it is obvious that the metaphorical meaning is the only one which the verb can have; thus Deut. xxxii, 18 "Thou hast forsaken the God that begot thee" (i.e. the people of Israel); cf. James i, 18 "For of his own will hath he (God) begotten us by the word of truth." The metaphorical meaning of the word "son" or "children," when it is used in relation to God, is not less obvious; thus Wisdom ii, 13 "He (collectively for 'the just people') calleth himself the son of God"; cf. also Gen. vi, 2; Job i, 6; Osee i, 10; The metaphorical meaning of the expression "Thou art my son" seems therefore to be required by Old Testament usage.

The metaphorical meaning of the expression "Thou art my son" does not necessarily exclude the proper meaning. The two meanings may in fact be complementary to each other or even synonymous. If a father calls his son "my dear," he does not mean in any way that the boy is not his natural offspring. The words "Thou art my son" admit of these two meanings: "Thou art my beloved one" and "Thou art my natural son," both of which apply to the Messiah. As has been

just said, these are not two different senses but two different aspects of one and the same sense. David clearly perceived a close relation between God and the Messias, a relation much closer than that existing between God and himself or any of his successors, because it was by reason of this relation that the Messias was to receive a universal dominion.

Therefore to the question put at the beginning of this note we may answer: David intended to represent Christ the Messias as God's beloved and as ruling over the whole world on account of God's special love for him. He neither understood nor positively excluded Christ's divine sonship which was absolutely beyond the Old Testament Messianic outlook. This divine sonship, however, David has foreshadowed by expressing, under divine inspiration, Christ's relation to God in a way that is not applicable to any other of his successors upon the throne of Israel.

P. P. SAYDON.

PROFANE EVIDENCE FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT

The notes and list of abbreviations are printed at the end of the article.

IN a somewhat industrialized market-town this winter the librarian of the public library reported that the two books for which he had the longest waiting-lists were *Forever Amber* and Bp. Barnes's *Rise of Christianity*. The questioning of the veracity of the Evangelists which this latter book has caused must be held to be the principal reason for this article, which is intended to reply to the questions: What tests can be used to prove that the NT is a collection of valid historical documents? Are there any independent sources or documents which back up events and happenings in the NT? These questions fall chiefly upon the gospels and Acts, for the epistles, concerned as they are more with teaching and exhortation, have less call to be narrating facts. An attempt will therefore be made to give samples, for in the space no more can be done, of what profane evidence there is that supports the veracity of gospels and Acts.

In any narrative of travel one can easily test whether the writer has visited the places he describes by examining his use of the local names and titles. If he describe a visit to Edinburgh and mention that he spoke with a Writer to the Signet, or tell of an interview with the Proctors at Oxford, he is more likely to be telling the truth than not. If this happens throughout his narrative, the probability of his truthfulness has increased indefinitely. Now this is exactly what is observed in St. Luke's narrative of travel in the Acts. At Thessalonica he mentions the *politarchs* as the chief magistrates. The title is attested by five in-