“BEGOTTEN NOT MADE”

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ONE of the greatest difficulties of the missionary among Moslems is undoubtedly to be found in this clause of the so-called Nicene Creed. The current Arabic rendering *mawlūd ghairu makhlūq*, an exact translation of the Greek γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα, has for a Moslem nothing but physical suggestion. The Arabic *mawlūd* may mean “born” or “begotten”—i.e., may refer to the mother or the father as also may γεννηθέντα—but it can be used only of actual birth, human or animal. So *walad* is to be distinguished from *ibn*, which is human only, and has a non-physical atmosphere. With the second element, “not made,” there need be little difficulty. The idea is already familiar by association with the Koran, which, also, is *ghairu makhlūq*. Parallels, therefore, with the orthodox Moslem doctrine of the Koran, may lead a certain way towards the Christian doctrine of the Person of Christ, and should be used freely.* But they break at the word “begotten.” The Koran is not even a Person which “proceeded”—ἐκπορευόμενον, *munbathiq*—from Allah, but is only a manifestation upon earth of the eternal quality (*ṣifa*) of Allah called Speech (*kalām*). That quality, like all the other qualities, mystically inheres in the essence (*dhāt*) of Allah in such a way that it may not be said either that it is He or that it is other than He. The Koran, therefore, is to be called “uncreated,” although many varying formulæ have been used to express the relationship between its words—physically written, heard, remembered—and the eternal quality in the

* See Canon Gairdner in “Vital Forces of Christianity and Islam,” pp. 30 ff., and my own paper, pp. 221 ff.

essence of Allah which the veil of the flesh does not permit us to hear.*

Our problem, therefore, is the negative one. How can we make plain to Moslems that "begotten" in this case is not to be understood in any physical sense? The positive problem of making Moslems understand what we *do* mean by "begotten" is vastly wider and deeper, is, indeed, one might say, the whole missionary message. Upon it I shall have to touch; but on the negative side the answer to Islam is to point out that the same expressions are used of the regeneration (παλιγγενεσία, Titus iii. 5; *al-mīlād aththānī*) of the individual believers.† They are said to be begotten of God in exactly the same terms as Christ, the one point of difference being that μονογενής, "only born" or "only one," while it is used normally as equivalent to Hebrew *yāhīdh*, Arabic *waḥīd*, of an only son or daughter both in the New Testament and in the LXX. is used theologically only of Christ. The word, further, in that sense belongs exclusively to the vocabulary of John.

An unfortunate confusion as to this matter has entered into the English Authorised Version, through one word in Greek and one word in Hebrew having the two meanings of "beget" and "bear." Thus only the context can decide whether γεννάω and *yālādh* refer to the father or the mother. The same, of course, holds of *walada* in Arabic. At first sight it would almost seem as though the Authorised Version attempted to set up an artificial distinction between the expressions as used of men and of Christ; but its usage in 1 Peter i. 3 and James i. 18, shows that the translators had no objection to speaking of God's begetting men. The confusion, therefore, seems rather due to inheritance from previous translations, and to that laxity in the use of synonyms, real or imaginary, which they so often exhibited.

The following are the passages in order: (1) John i. 13, "but of God they were begotten," ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν, A.V. and R.V. have both "born"; but R.V. margin

* See my "Development," pp. 335 f.

† This was pointed out long ago by Sir William Jones. See his "Memoirs," by Lord Teignmouth, p. 231, in ed. of 1804.

is "or, begotten." The precise force of the $\epsilon\kappa$ here is somewhat obscure, which may be the reason of the doubt.

(2) On $\mu\omicron\nu\omicron\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\varsigma$ in John i. 14, etc., it is not necessary to enter further, especially as the rendering in the Arabic version, by *wahīd*, is much better than that in the English. In verse 18 the correct reading is almost certainly $\mu\omicron\nu\omicron\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\varsigma$ $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$, "God only born," or, simply, "only God," which might be rendered by *Allāhu-l-wahīd*, like $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ $\pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$ and *Allāhu-l-'ab*.

(3) In the words of our Lord to Nicodemus, John iii. 3-8, the double use of $\gamma\epsilon\nu\nu\acute{\alpha}\omega$ comes out clearly and makes the difficulty for the English translator. In verse 4 the meaning must be "born" as the context is of the mother, but the other occurrences are intentionally vague—including $\alpha\nu\omega\theta\epsilon\nu$ which is left hanging between the two meanings of "from above" and "again." If $\epsilon\acute{\xi}$ $\psi\delta\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$ $\pi\nu\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\mu\alpha\tau\omicron\varsigma$ be taken to mean "of spiritual seed"—as to an orientalist would seem almost certain—then the verb with it must mean "begotten." All this ambiguity is happily rendered in the Arabic with equal ambiguity except as to $\alpha\nu\omega\theta\epsilon\nu$. And the ambiguity in the version is amply justified; for whether our Lord spoke to Nicodemus in Greek or Hebrew or Palestinian Aramaic, the ambiguity was already in His expressions. In Hebrew He would have used the Niph'al of *yāladh* throughout, and in Aramaic the Ethpe'el of the cognate root.*

(4) The group of cases in the first Epistle of John may be taken together. In ii. 29, iii. 9 and iv. 7 the A.V. has "born"; but the R.V. "begotten," which is clearly right; in iii. 9 we have even $\sigma\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\mu\alpha$. In v. 1-4 the R.V. has "begotten" throughout and "begat" in verse 1; but while the A.V. renders "begat" it alternates "born" and "begotten" in verse 1, so as to suggest that it regarded them as synonyms. In verse 4 it renders "born." In v. 18 the A.V. again

* For this passage in an early translation into Palestinian Aramaic, see Lewis and Gibson, "Palestinian Syriac Lectionary," 1899, p. 8. The Peshitta renders in the same way and also Delitzsch in his Hebrew New Testament.

alternates "born" and "begotten" as though synonyms and the R.V. reads "begotten." Throughout the Arabic version has one form or another of *walada*.

(5) In 1 Peter are two very clear passages. In i. 3, "who according to his great mercy begat us again (*ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς*) unto a living hope"; and verse 23, "having been begotten again (*ἀναγεγεννημένοι*), not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible." So the R.V. renders; but the A.V. again alternates with "hath begotten" in the first and "born again" in the second.

(6) James i. 18 is equally clear; "of His own will He brought us forth (*ἀπεκύησεν ἡμᾶς*) by the word of truth"; compare *ἀποκύει θάνατον*, "bringeth forth death," in verse 15. Curiously enough the A.V. has "begat" in verse 18 and "bringeth forth" in verse 15. These are the only two occurrences of this verb in the New Testament, and in the LXX. there is only one, in iv. Macc. 15-17. "Brought forth" is certainly right. It is unnecessary to enter upon the Pauline conception. He approaches the divine paternity from a quite different side, and does not use *γεννάω* of the relation of God to the regenerate believer. Yet he uses it as a metaphor for his own work. Thus in 1 Cor. iv. 15, "for in Christ Jesus I begat (*ἐγέννησα*) you through the Gospel," and also of Onesimus in Philemon 10.

These passages make it abundantly clear that "begotten," as used in the N.T., need not be physical, but may indicate a relationship entirely spiritual. That relationship we often broadly call regeneration; it is wrought by God upon us, and as we through it become children of God (*τέκνα θεοῦ* John i. 12, etc.), we can be said to be begotten of Him. When Paul said that he "begat" the Corinthians and Onesimus, he used only a metaphor to express that he had been the instrument in their regeneration. But the work of God is different; it is creative of a kind that both Greeks and Hebrews called begetting. To that I shall return.

Is there any equivalent in Islam for this direct, creative, working of God in the souls of men? Moslems may use very different expressions for it, and may greatly object to our expressions; but do they recognise

the fact itself ? It would not be difficult to show from the Koran that Mohammed was as sure as any Calvinist that all changes in the heart of man must be wrought by God. But in Moslem religious biography there is an outstanding case which will bring together Koran and tradition and the personal experience of a great theologian. It is that of al-Ghazzālī, and he has told his story in his *Munqidh*. I translate from the edition of Cairo, A.H. 1303, p. 7 : “ During that time [almost two months] I was an absolute sceptic in fact if not in confession. At length Allah healed me of that disease, and my soul returned to health and balance, and the necessary intellectual truths came back, accepted and certain. That was not by arranging a proof and building up an argument, but by a light which Allah cast into my heart. That light is the key of the most of knowledge ; and whoever believes that the mystical unveiling (*al-kashf*) is based upon abstract proofs, narrows the wide mercy of Allah. When the Apostle was asked what was the meaning of ‘ opening ’ (*ash-sharḥ*) in the saying of Allah, ‘ Whom Allah wills to guide He opens his breast to Islam ’ (Koran vi. 125), he said, ‘ It is a light which Allah throws into the heart.’ And when he was asked, ‘ And what is its sign ? ’ he said, ‘ Removing from the abode of deceit and returning to the abode of eternity.’ About this same thing the Prophet said, ‘ Allah Most High created His creatures in darkness ; then He sprinkled upon them some of His light.’ It is from that light that the unveiling ought to be sought, and that light is poured forth copiously out of the divine bounty on certain occasions, and should be watched for ; as the Prophet said, ‘ Lo, in the days of your earthly life, your Lord hath out-breathings ; oh, then, be ready to meet them.’ ”*

It would be easy to translate this into Biblical terms ; change in expressions only would be required. But while, through this beginning and through the further means described by al-Ghazzālī in the *Munqidh*, the individual in Islam is brought into a truly religious

* See, too, my “ Religious Attitude and Life in Islam,” p. 179. I have slightly corrected the translation given there.

attitude and into an intimate relationship to God, yet the relationship never becomes filial; it remains that of a creature, an *'abd*. This is an instance of the abiding influence of Mohammed upon the ideas and utterances of his followers. At every turn in the stories of the ecstatic life of mystical Islam we keep expecting that Allah will be represented as addressing his worshipping and yearning creatures with *Yā bunayya!* "Oh my son!" but these words, in my reading, never come. There is the utmost familiarity, jesting intimacy, raptures of the Lover and the Beloved, proud and, for us, blasphemous claims of influence with Allah; but sonship and fatherhood never. For Mohammed had rejected not only the special and eternal sonship of Christ but even God's general fatherhood of mankind. In thus blocking out one of the most fundamental conceptions in religion, he was evidently swayed by at least two considerations. The Meccans of his time made their Allah the father of subordinate goddesses; they asserted that he had sons and also that there was a relationship (*nasab*) between Allah and the jinn ("Encycl. of Islam," vol. i., p. 302). All this, of course, is primitive Semitic religion and kin to the "Sons of Elōhīm" in the O.T. But it was all abomination to Mohammed, and to eradicate its possibility he denied any fatherhood to God even of the most spiritual or metaphorical kind. The *word* even must never be used of Allah. His second consideration was the Sonship of Christ. That doctrine had come to him in a fantastically crude form. He believed that the Christian Trinity consisted of the Father, the Mother and the Son. That an Arabian sect existed in his time holding that faith seems certain; traces of it still remain.*

And not only against that view was his polemic directed, but against any view which made Jesus aught but a creature. And, further, his positive Christological teaching is so definite that we are compelled to recognise in it a system which he had himself been taught, and in him an eager disciple defending the faith committed

* Musil, "Arabia Petrea," Vol. iii., p. 91. There is a suggestion of the same in Philo's doctrine of his Logos.

to him by a master. The position of that master still abides, and dominates Islam.

In pre-Moslem Arabia, then, all spiritual beings, from the jinn to Allah, were conceived to be related to one another, even as the early Hebrews divided all intelligent beings into "Sons of Mankind" (*benē Adhām*) and "Sons of God" (*benē Elōhīm*), and reckoned God Himself among the latter. But there is no evidence that the Arabs regarded any men as kinsmen or descendants of a deity, as evidently did the primitive Hebrews and the other Semitic peoples. Yet though we admit this difference on the Arab side in Mohammed's starting point, it is a very striking fact that he should have succeeded in crushing out what has been so natural a development in other peoples. He must have been aware of the Christian and Jewish belief in God as the father of all mankind, but he effectually prevented that belief from forming any part of the faith of his followers. And it is illuminating to contrast with this inhibition the development elsewhere by which what was in the beginning a crude and often repulsive bit of heathen mythology was broadened and purified into a great religious truth. We have amongst the Greeks the Zeus of mythology moralised and becoming the father of Gods and men until Cleanthes' sublime *Hymn* was possible, which Paul quotes, "For we are also His offspring" (Acts xvii. 28). Again, if we go far enough back with the Hebrews, we find among them also a similar development. Most Semitic peoples regarded themselves, and in a very literal way, as children of their gods. When the great change came for the Hebrews, which lifted them out of Semitic heathenism and made them different from every other people of the earth, it did not eliminate such conceptions. In part they survived as crystallised poetical imagery or even mere phrases no longer understood; in part they were transformed, developed and spiritualised. There had always been a spiritual kernel in these primitive myths; myth is the way in which concrete-minded peoples, who think only in images and tales, express their ideas. Then as the thinking power of the people develops three things may, generally

do, happen. The myth may survive simply as a story—the earliest history or a tale told for amusement; or it may be utterly denounced and rejected for its crudity, absurdity and uncleanness; or it may be spiritualised and moralised—that is, the idea latent in it may be developed into new reality. We can see all three of these things happening to the Greek myths. They were used as history and they were told as tales for amusement; they were furiously rejected; they were worked out as creations of the deepest and most refined Greek thought, plumbing and expressing the most absolute reality. Mohammed sometimes chose the first of these methods, as when he fixedly retained the jinn; in our present case he chose the second and as fixedly rejected from Islam any conception of the divine paternity. How unhappy each choice was the development of Islam has amply proved.

The Hebrews were better guided. They frankly accepted the expressions of paternity and made a new thing of them. In Numbers xxi. 29 we have the sons and daughters of Chemosh; but in Exodus iv. 22 Israel is the first-born son of Jehovah. In Hosea i. 10 the people of Israel are the “sons of the living God,” and in xi. 1 Israel is “my son.” And even more direct language is used. The house of Israel in its idolatry says “to a stone, ‘Thou hast begotten me’” (Jer. ii. 27), instead of saying it, as is the evident implication, to Jehovah. So, too, Deut. xxxii. 18, “Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that gave thee birth.” The LXX., in their translation of Isaiah i. 2, have a similar expression, *υἱὸς ἐγέννησα* “sons have I begotten” for “sons have I brought up,” and there is much to be said for the reading as Bishop Lowth saw long ago. But beyond this there is a strange development—or rather survival—which makes God also the begetter of the world as in the *Timæus* of Plato.* In

* There are other striking parallels between the vocabulary of the “*Timæus*,” and that of John. The spherical *κόσμος*, called also *ὁ οὐρανός* is not only “begotten” by God the Father (*ὁ γεννήσας πατήρ*) but is also a *θεός* and *μονογενής*. The *κόσμος*, however, is not eternal but is formed after an eternal pattern, *παράδειγμα*. This attitude towards the *κόσμος* is, of course, quite different from

Psalm xc. 2, "Before the mountains were born or thou gavest birth to the earth and the world," seems to be the explanation of the unique *tōledhōth*, "begettings" in Gen. ii. 2, "These are the begettings of the heavens and the earth." The word and phrase occur elsewhere only of persons, as in Gen. v. 1, vi. 9, x. 1. This usage looks backwards, and shows that the Hebrew mind, secure in its knowledge and conception of Jehovah, felt no need to avoid such old phrases.

But there remain two usages, the full meaning of which lay in the future. In Psalm ii. 7 Jehovah says to a king on his enthroning in Zion, "Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee." The "begetting" was the enthroning as anointed king over the people of Israel, and so its outlook was to the final anointed one, the King Messiah. In this thought the verse is quoted twice in the Epistle to the Hebrews (i. 5 and v. 5). The second is in Proverbs viii. 24, 25. There we have personified as the teacher of men the primeval Wisdom by which Jehovah in the beginning created the world, a Wisdom which was not created but born, and that before all things. "When there were no depths I was brought forth . . . before the hills was I brought forth." This is the Logos (reason) that was in the beginning with God; "all things were made through him." There is kinship more than merely verbal or of coincidence between the passage in Proverbs and the Prologue to John's Gospel.* And so the King Messiah and the eternal creative Word are the last expression of the realities dimly felt by the ancient Semites—in truth, mysteries hid from the foundation of the world.

Finally, a threefold and very real distinction must

that of John, but is like that of Philo, where the *κόσμος* is the son of God who "begat" it. Philo, apparently, uses "beget" simply for "create," although he shows no sign of contact with the Old Testament usage. "Timaeus," 34 B.; 37 C.D.; 92 B.; Drummond, "Philo Judaeus," ii. 192-238.

* That the LXX. render in Proverbs viii., ix. with *σοφία* and not *λόγος* seems to have obscured the essential parallelism of the passages; indeed, they appear never to have translated *hokhmā*, "wisdom," with *λόγος*. Nor does Philo act here as a bridge; the Wisdom of Proverbs is for him, too, *σοφία*.

be observed. We have (i.) Paul's use of "begotten," which is a pure metaphor; so in Arabic there are multitudinous uses of *ibn* and some even of *tawallud* and *tawlid*.

(ii.) The creative working of God in the hearts of men. Inasmuch as by this they become children of God in a peculiar and intimate sense beyond that of Cleanthes in his *Hymn*, and enter into an immediate and vital relationship to Him, issuing in obedience, they are said to be begotten anew and from above of spiritual seed and born again. This is not a metaphor; it is an event as real in the spiritual world as our first birth in the material. Islam, as we saw, knows the fact as well as does Christianity, but declines, following Mohammed, to understand, and express it in this way. The newer psychology knows it, too, however it may choose to name and interpret it.

(iii.) The eternal Sonship. This has been grasped at in various broken and distorted forms by different peoples. But, in the purpose of God, it fell to the Hebrews, through their holding fast to, and yet purifying and moralising the divine Paternity and through their personifying of a special divine Wisdom, begotten and with God before all things, a Wisdom that is also the guide of men, to lead directly up to the revelation in Christ of the person of God. For the doctrine of the Sonship of Christ is really the doctrine that God is a true personality and not an absolute unity. The genius of the Hebrews saw this and never hesitated to state Jehovah in anthropomorphic terms. Theologising Islam feared this, sought by cunning dialectic to avoid it, and condemned its Allah to negations and unthinkableness. The unity and the unreasoned will of Allah were saved, but for the thinking and devout Moslem the universe was left a mystery and its problems remained unsolved. And so we have the paradox that in spite of "begotten" and "only born," it is exactly the Gospel of John which appeals to that thinking and devout Moslem. For there he finds a clue to the mystery and a real person meeting his need.

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