

We may turn to the N. T. for a second illustration of the danger of narrowing and misunderstanding a fruitful idea. In Eph. I, 1-5, the faithful in Christ Jesus are said to have been foreordained (*προορίσας*) unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ (*εἰς υἰοθεσίαν.*) And John writes explicitly, "Beloved now are we children of God" (I Jn. 3²) (*τέκνα θεοῦ*) This language is to be understood as interpretation because in Eph. 2²³ we have the phrases, "sons of disobedience" and "children of wrath," which are clearly not literally true. Certainly such a phrase as "sons of God" or "children of God" as applied to human beings contains a great idea, namely, that we may and should let the ape and tiger in us die, lose ourselves in helping to bring to pass the highest ideals, or, as Paul puts it, that we should finally be unto the praise of Christ's glory (*i.e.*, make it worth while for Christ to have done what he did), and become a habitation of God in the spirit. Such a destiny for man is as noble as it is strange.

Now "verbalists," unable to appreciate the grandeur of an ideal, argue that the phrase "children of God" is literally true. Accordingly we get an anthropomorphic, and it may be, polytheistic religion in which gods and goddesses are believed to be literal fathers and mothers, and their children again are considered in some cases to be gods and goddesses; and men and women trace their ancestors back to a divine being, very much indeed in the way in which Luke regards Adam as the Son of God. Such a view deprives the conception of "sonship" of all its finer halo and glory and pauperizes it. But the idea fares little better in the hands of the actualists, who, finding

that God cannot be thought of as literally a father, refuse to admit that there is any truth whatsoever in the phrase "children of God." Human beings, they say, with a fine show of precision, are mere human beings, and to call them "sons of God" is pure illusion. So between the literalists or verbalists on the one hand and the factualists on the other the splendid constructive interpretation of the deeper spirit of man as a "son of God" is frittered away.

Now the idea of the Incarnation can be and has been treated in the same way. The verbalists assert that Jesus is literally the only begotten Son of God. The actualists, refusing to admit that parentage can be ascribed to God, argue that Jesus is, as they say, merely a good man. Instead of either of these alternatives the Incarnation is to be understood as an adequate, and, therefore, truthful interpretation of the personality of Jesus; and, because true of Jesus, true also of man, since in Jesus is revealed the highest possibilities of humanity.

Such is the idea pointedly expressed by Raphael in his Sistine Madonna.* The curtain dividing heaven from earth is rolled aside, and there appears Mary the mother of Jesus with her child in her arms, stepping out of and down from the glory of the heavens, where they have been with the invisible God and His host of visible angels, into our mortal sphere. The beauty and wonder, and mystery of their lives is to be carried down to men and pass into their spirits and lift them up. Such a gift to mortals no mother had ever given before, and it is well done of Raphael to say that God, too, is the giver.

*See cut of this in last Journal.