

CHAPTER 5

*Inferences from the Hypostatic Union***§ 18. The Natural Sonship of God of the Man Jesus Christ****1. The Heresy of Adoptionism**

Towards the end of the 8th century, *Archbishop Elipandus of Toledo* († 802) and *Bishop Felix of Urgel* († 816) taught a double sonship of Christ: They said that as God, He was the natural Son of God, but as man, He was the adopted son of God. In the Baptism at the Jordan He was adopted by God through grace. This theory of a double sonship in Jesus Christ logically demands two persons, which is the error of Nestorianism. This erroneous teaching was combated by the *Abbot Beatus of Libana*, *Bishop Etherius of Osma*, and the Frankish theologians, especially *Alcuin*.

2. The Teaching of the Church

Jesus Christ is the natural Son of God not only as God but also as Man. [*De fide.*]

The condemnation of Nestorianism indirectly involves the condemnation of Adoptionism. Pope Adrian I (772-795), in two doctrinal writings (DH 595, 610-11) rejected it as a renewal of the Nestorian error, and confirmed the decisions of the Plenary Council of Frankfurt (794) which rejected Adoptionism as a heresy on the ground that He who was born of the Virgin, was true God, and could, therefore, not be adopted. (DH 612ff)

We may thus summarise the dogma: The person subsisting in the human nature is the natural son of God. The expression "Christ as man" (*Christus ut homo*) is not to be conceived in the *reduplicative* sense (= Christ according to humanity: *Christus secundum humanitatem*) as if the ground for his natural sonship of God lay in the human nature. Rather it is to be conceived in the *specific* sense, that is, "Christ as this man" *Christus ut hic homo* or "Christ as a subsisting hypostasis in the human nature" (*Christus ut hypostasis subsistens in humana natura*). Cf. *S.th.* III 16, 11.

3. Proof from the Sources of Faith

Sacred Scripture never calls the man, Christ, the adopted Son of God, but the proper and only-begotten Son of God. Rom. 8:32: "He (God) has not spared even His *own* son, but delivered Him up for us all." John, 3:16: "For God so loved the world, as to give His *only-begotten* Son." Cf. John 1: 14,18; Matt. 3:17.

In the struggle against Nestorianism the Fathers rejected the doctrine of a double sonship in Christ, and stressed that the Son of Man is the same as the Son of God. They also expressly excluded an adoptive sonship of Christ. *St. Augustine* points to Sacred Scripture: "Read the Scriptures; you will never find it said of Christ that He is, through adoption, the Son of God (*Contra Secundinum Manich.* 5). Many traditional texts, for example, those of *St. Hilary* (*De Trin.* II 27) and the Mozarabic liturgy, employ the expressions *adoptare* and *adoptio* in the wider sense of *assumere* and *assumptio*.

