CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DIVINE SONSHIP AT QUMRAN:
BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

In col. XVII of the *Hodayot* the poet addresses God with the following words:

For you have known me since my father
from the vitals [you have established me,]
[from the womb of] my mother you have filled me,
from the breast of her who conceived me
your compassion has always been upon me,
from the lap of my wet-nurse [you have looked after me.]

... For my mother did not know me
and my father abandoned me to you.
Because you are father to all sons of your truth.
In them you rejoice,
like one full of gentleness for the child,
and like a wet-nurse,
you clutch to your chest all your creatures.¹

In the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as in Biblical Hebrew, there are no specific words to express the abstract concept of “fatherhood” or of “sonship.” A study of divine sonship at Qumran should thus start from an analysis of the words that normally express the genetic relationship among humans (such as father, son, first-born, etc.) or from the words that express the actions that bring about such genetic relationships (such as conceive, engender, beget, give birth, etc.). In the fragment of the poem just quoted, the author expresses his sonship very concretely (“my father,” “the vitals,” “the womb of my mother,” “the breast of her who conceived me”), but the same poet does not hesitate to use the same concrete language when speaking about God, presenting him like a wet-nurse and asserting he is “father to all the sons of your truth.”

Obviously, such a full study is out of the question here, even if it were to be restricted to the most characteristic word that expresses sonship: the substantive “son.” Hebrew בָּע (be it in the singular or in the plural) is found no less than 628 times in the non-biblical texts from Qumran, and the Aramaic בָּא 325 times (בַּא father and בָּא mother are less frequently used, respectively 171 and 43 times). I thought for a moment of the possibility of restricting the study to the quotes in which “son” is used clearly as a metaphor, without reference to the carnal generation that is the basis of “sonship.” In the quoted text, the divine sonship that the author claims is clearly metaphorical, since it is directly opposed to the real human paternity. Very common expressions, such as “sons of light” or “sons of darkness” are also clearly metaphorical. Determining the precise extent and meaning of these metaphors, however, seems to me an impossible task. A single example, familiar to students of the New Testament should serve to provide a clear illustration of the difficulty involved in determining the precise meaning of metaphors that express sonship.

In the first letter of John 3:10, the antithetical expressions τέκνα τοῦ διάβολου “sons of the devil” and τέκνα τοῦ Θεοῦ “sons of god,” are used, and all the interpreters understand them in a metaphorical sense. A little further in the same Letter (1 John 3:12), however, we are told that Cain was ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ, a parallel expression to τέκνα τοῦ διάβολου, which in this case could refer to genetic sonship if the Letter is alluding to the tradition preserved in the Targum Pseudo Jonathan. According to the said Targum, Adam is not the true father of Cain but rather Samma’el. Thus if Cain is a son of the Devil in the most basic


4 See, for example, G. Strecker, The Johannine Letters (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 105.


6 On this topic see F. García Martínez “Cain, su padre y el origen del mal,” in Pal-