OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH OR THE
BIRTH OF CHRISTIANS?
THE TEXT OF JOHN 1:13 ONCE MORE

by

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The third edition of the U.B.S. Greek NT takes as the accepted
reading of Jn 1:13 οἱ ... ἐγεννηθησαν. Several variants to this are
noted in the textual witness, however the editors are sufficiently
confident in the reading to give it an A rating. Supporting this
reading (rather than the singular δὲ ... ἐγεννηθη) is the overwhelm-
ing majority of modern translations (the singular reading is ac-
cepted by Jerusalem Bible) and of modern commentaries (none are
known to the contrary). And yet in modern times there has not been
wanting a body of scholarly opinion which has argued for the
originality of the singular.¹ Two monographs have also appeared,
examining the matter in detail and concluding in favour of the
singular.² While an exhaustive study cannot here be undertaken,
the voice of protest against the plural cannot be ignored and needs
to be heard and its arguments considered.

(a) The Textual Witness

The witness to the singular reading is limited to the following:
(i) one early Latin text, itb;

¹ Proponents of an original singular include: Th. Zahn, Das Evangelium nach
Johannes (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1908), Excursus II, 711-714—without the relative;
A. Loisy, Le Quatrième Évangile (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1903) 174-183; A.
von Harnack, “Zur Textkritik und Christologie der Schriften des Johannes”, in
Studien zur Geschichte des Neuen Testaments und der Alten Kirche (Berlin, 1931),
115-127—a marginal gloss; F. C. Burney, The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel
(Oxford: OUP, 1922) 34f; M.-E. Boismard, St. John’s Prologue (London:
Blackfriars’ Publications, 1957) 33-45; F. M. Braun, “Qui ex Deo natus est”, in
Aux Sources de la Tradition Chretienne, Melanges offerts a M. Maurice Goguel
(Neuchatel: Delachaux et Nestle, 1950) 11-31; M. Vellanickal, The Divine Sonship of
Christians in the Johannine Writings (An. Bib. 72, Rome: Biblical Institute Press,
1977) 112-132. For a fuller list see Hofrichter, p. 12 n. 1.

Hofrichter, Nicht aus Blut sondern monogen aus Gott geboren (Würzburg: Echter Verlag,
1978).
(ii) the Curetonian Syriac and six mss of the Peshitta Syriac which read the verb in the singular but the relative \( \alpha \) in the plural;

(iii) more significantly, the undoubted witness of Irenaeus and Tertullian, and the possible witness of Justin, and, more conjecturally, of Ignatius;

(iv) some later Latin testimony from Origen, Ambrose, Augustine.

All Greek mss and other versional and patristic readings cite the text in the plural (though D* and ita omit the relative). On the basis of external attestation, the case seems overwhelming in favour of the traditional reading. And when one considers that the tendency in the early Church in the face of its many Christological battles would have been to make texts more not less Christological,\(^3\) it is difficult to imagine the need to give much attention to the singular. What, then, are the arguments put forward to overthrow the plural as original? Harnack, Galot, and Hofrichter, each come to a different conclusion on the state of the original, though in the process of arriving they often make use of similar arguments. It is the conclusions of these three scholars that we shall discuss in this article.

(b) Harnack - the Marginal Gloss

Harnack begins his study with a rapid survey of the early witness, and draws attention particularly to the absence of the relative qui in Tertullian’s quote in de Carne Christi, ch 19. While he is not willing to go as far as Blass, who says that Tertullian did not read the relative, or of Zahn, who adds that neither did the Valentinians read it, he is willing to concede ‘dass Tertullian das ‘‘qui’’ vielleicht nicht gelesen hat.’\(^4\) More significant is the fact that in D* and in the Latin Vercellensis the relative is lacking.

Before proceeding to present a case for the acceptability of the singular, Harnack first sets down the premise upon which he is operating. He states that while the number of witnesses overwhelmingly support the plural,

\[ \text{ein Text, den Irenäus, Tertullian und der Veronensis bieten, der also bis zur Mitte des 2. Jahrhunderts herauf verfolgt werden kann, darf nur durch sachliche} \]


\(^4\) Harnack, 116.