

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Is it likely that the phrase "El Gibbor" (God the mighty) in Is. ix, 6, caused the Jews to have any suspicion that the Messiah would be God incarnate?

The questioner may be referred to an interesting article by Fr. W. H. McClellan, S.J., in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, for July 1944, Vol. VI, pp. 276—288, entitled "El Gibbor." It is a plea for maintaining the traditional interpretation in the sense of "Mighty God" as against Kissane's rendering "Divine-hero." Of this title Fr. McClellan writes: "It evidently startled the Jewish translators of the Greek Septuagint. They paraphrased the beginning of the last distich in such inexplicable fashion that St. Jerome wrote 'I believe that the Seventy, alarmed at the majesty of the names, durst not say of the Child that he would be plainly called God, and so on, but substituted for those six names something not present in the Hebrew.'" Certainly "El Gibbor" must have seemed to them an inconceivable thing for one of their prophets to have predicted of a new-born child. The other attributes, lofty as they were, did not surpass the unique dignity of the Anointed, but the Seventy would not be answerable for translating "El Gibbor" in the only meaning obvious to them. The subject, particularly on its textual side, may be pursued further in *The Book of Isaiah according to the Septuagint* by R. R. Ottley, 2nd edition, Cambridge University Press, 1909, especially Vol. I, p. 25.

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Catholic exegetes are agreed that Peter's words in Matt. xvi, 16 ("Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God") are a confession of divinity and therefore merit Christ's praise. How is it, then, that Nathanael's similar confession (Jn. i, 49: "Thou art the son of God, thou art the king of Israel") is not similarly praised?

The assumption is, it seems, that the phrase "son of God" is patient of only one interpretation in the Gospel story. If this were really the case we should be confined to the Old Testament meaning: "one singled out for God's paternal love by an act comparable to the adoption of a child." So God loved Israel (Dt. xiv, 1f. cp. Ex. xi, 1—3) and favoured its royal representative (II Kings vii, 14); in a similar, though not identical, sense the just man also is the "son of God" (Wisd. ii, 13). To the expected Davidic king Yahweh says: Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee (ps. ii, 7); in this phrase the Jew saw no more than an outstanding expression of divine affection (*Origen, Contra Celsum* i, 49). Nevertheless the very nature of the phrase "son of God" empowers it, should the circumstances require, to break the artificial bonds of metaphor and assume its natural significance. It remains now to be seen if and when in the New Testament the attendant circumstances, verbal