APPENDIX A

THE SONS OF GOD AND THE DAUGHTERS OF MEN (GENESIS 6: 1-4)

Whatever view we adopt regarding the ‘sons of God’ mentioned in this passage, the wrong involved in the marriages contracted and the evils resulting therefrom bear directly upon the sanctity of marriage as the institution for the procreation of life. The interpretation of the passage obviously turns on the view we are to adopt respecting the ‘sons of God’. Are they preternatural angelic beings or are they members of the human race who are distinguished from the rest of humanity by this title?

The former view has been adopted by many interpreters and the identity of the ‘spirits in prison’ of I Peter 3: 19 has been, either wholly or partially, fixed in terms of that interpretation. The Book of Enoch has naturally exercised great influence in this direction because it definitely regards the episodes of Genesis 6: 1-3 as the sexual conjunction of angels with the daughters of men. ‘And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: “Come let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children.” . . . Then sware they all together and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. And they were in all two hundred; who descended in the days of Jared on the summit of Mount Hermon . . . And these are the names of their leaders . . . And all the others together with them took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them . . . And they became pregnant, and they bare great giants, whose height was three thousand ells: who consumed all the acquisitions of men’ (VI, 1, 2, 5, 6, 7; VII, 1, 2, 3; cf. X, 1-15; XV, 1-12; LXIV, 1, 2; as translated by R. H. Charles: The Book of Enoch, Oxford, 1912).

Most recently Bo Reicke: The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism (Copenhagen, 1946) and E. G. Selwyn: The First Epistle of Peter (London, 1946), pp. 196ff., 314–362 have ably
presented the case for this interpretation of I Peter 3: 19 and, by implication, of Genesis 6: 1-3. Without question, if I Peter 3: 19 refers to angelic beings, whether exclusively or partially so as to include also the disembodied souls of men, this interpretation would necessarily turn the scales in favour of the view that the sons of God in Genesis 6: 1-3 were angelic beings.

Genesis 6: 1-3 does appear to lend support to the view that 'the sons of God' are non-human. We should naturally suppose that 'the daughters of men' represent mankind and that those designated 'sons of God' must not only be contrasted with the women of mankind but also with mankind. We might expect that if the contrast were simply between 'daughters' and 'sons', that is between the women and the men, the distinction would be drawn in terms of 'the daughters of men' and 'the sons of men'. Also, it must be granted that angelic beings could be called 'sons of God' (cf. Job 1: 6; 2: 1; 38: 7).

If we are to be guided by considerations of a biblically-theological character there are overwhelming objections to this interpretation. However helpful extra-canonical literature may be in arriving at the sense of Scripture, extra-canonical considerations may never be pitted against the evidence which the Scripture itself determinatively provides. The arguments in support of the view that 'the sons of God' in Genesis 6: 2 refer to members of the human race have been ably presented by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch in their Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Eng. Trans., Grand Rapids, 1949), Vol. I, pp. 127-139, and by William Henry Green in an article, 'The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men' (The Presbyterian and Reformed Review, Vol. V (1894), pp. 654-660). With some abbreviation and modification I shall present the argument as developed by them.

(1) There is no reason why בְּנֵי הָאָדָם in Genesis 6: 1 should not be used in a generic sense and בְּנֵי הָאָדָם in Genesis 6: 2 in a specific sense to designate a division within mankind. The evidence from Hebrew usage adduced by Keil and Delitzsch (op. cit., pp. 130 f.) and by Green (op. cit., pp. 658 f.) demonstrates the feasibility of this construction. Besides, it may not be necessary to take בְּנֵי הָאָדָם in verse 1 in the generic sense; it may be used in the specific sense in which it is used in verse 2 and thus in both verses con-
APPENDIX A

trasted with ‘the sons of God’ in the sense to be explained presently. But, in any case, usage indicates that there is no necessity to suppose that, because ‘the sons of God’ are distinguished from ‘the daughters of men’, ‘the sons of God’ cannot belong to the genus humanity. They may also be men; only they are called ‘sons of God’ to distinguish them from other men who do not belong to the classification by which the former are distinguished.

(2) In the preceding context the family of Seth is distinguished by the significant observation that within that lineage ‘men began to call upon the name of the Lord’ (Genesis 4: 26). There is an eloquent contrast between this mark of piety within the Sethite family and that delineation which we find in the immediately preceding context of the family of Cain. Notable distinction is shown to exist within the human family. This notification of distinction in terms of the fear and service of God is certified in the genealogy of Genesis 5 which follows. ‘And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years . . . and Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him’ (5: 22, 24). ‘And Lamech lived . . . and begat a son: and he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us in our work and in the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed’ (5: 28, 29). We are thus definitely prepared for distinctions, drawn within the human family, in respect of the very relationship which the title ‘sons of God’ might be expected to connote or specify. It is neglect of this factor which appears so conspicuously in the two genealogies immediately preceding Genesis 6: 1-3 that gives plausibility to the argument that ‘the sons of God’ must refer to preternatural beings. When the contrasts of the preceding narrative are taken into account this plausibility dissipates. Quite naturally the title ‘sons of God’ can be taken as another specification of the discrimination already established.

(3) The passage implies that some grievous wrong had been perpetrated in the marriages concerned. Verse 3 refers to the judgment of God upon it. It is significant that the judgment has respect to man alone. If the sons of God were angels we should expect some intimation of the judgment executed upon them. The sons of God were the initiators of this travesty—‘they saw
p. 246 is not part of the Google Books preview at this time.
APPENDIX A

beings has absolutely no warrant in the text. The supposition is an importation which the syntax does not support and against which the terms definitely militate. All that is stated is that the nephilim were in the earth in the days in which the sons of God took wives from the daughters of men. And the natural construction is that they were already in the earth when these marriages took place, that after the offspring of these marriages were born the nephilim exercised the rôle of warriors, and that they long antedated these marriages and the situation arising from them. There is no suggestion of genetic connection between the nephilim and the marriages concerned. To insist that there is violates the canons of sober exegesis.

We must conclude therefore that there is no biblical support for the view that 'the sons of God' were angelic or preternatural beings. The biblical evidence militates against this interpretation and decisively supports the view that the marriages concerned were those between one classification of mankind that could be designated 'sons of God' and another classification that could not be thus designated. The narrative itself points to this discrimination as that between the Sethites and the Cainites, between those who feared the Lord and those who were worldly.

The lesson derived from this passage is directly pertinent to the sanctity of marriage. In the judgment pronounced upon this episode of human history we have the condemnation of unholy marital alliance. The point is not that these marriages were per se illicit, or that the sexual relations were of a monstrous character, but that they were contracted in disregard of the principles that should guide the people of God in the selection of marital partners. We have portrayed for us the evil that is entailed in, and results from, the failure to remember that in marriage we are not to please worldly and fleshly impulse but to seek wedlock that conserves and promotes the interests of godliness. In wedlock we must preserve the line of demarcation between the people of God and the ungodly world and have respect to the unity in faith and the bond of peace which will insure godly nurture. How early in the biblical history we have advertised and sealed the principle that marriage is not only for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue but of the church with a holy seed. We have here what becomes more explicit in the onward progress
of covenant revelation, that the godly should marry only in the
Lord.

If the *nephilim* of verse 4 do not have genetic connection with
the marriages of verse 2, what, we may ask, is the purpose of
the reference to them in this sequence? We do not need a great
deal of ingenuity to find the answer. The first three verses deal
with the vice of mixed marriages and the judgment resulting from
it. The succeeding part of the chapter (verses 5ff.) deals with the
corruption which abounded in the earth and with the violence
that became rampant—‘all flesh had corrupted their way upon
the earth’ (verse 12) and ‘the earth was filled with violence’
(verse 11). What more significant datum could be mentioned
as a transition than the reference to the *nephilim*? If the *nephilim*
were in the earth and they exercised the rôle of warriors, the
implication is that their prestige and activities had a decisive
influence, either for good or for evil, in the abounding iniquity
of that period.

If we were to suppose that the influence of the *nephilim* was for
good, then we should have to regard them as the guardians of
justice and order and as offering resistance to the rampant vice.
On this hypothesis the resistance they offered would only accentuate
the potency and prevalence of vice, for, notwithstanding
their power and renown, violence still abounded. It is more
reasonable to believe, however, that the *nephilim* were themselves
agents in promoting violence. We are told that the whole earth
was corrupt before God and it is not likely that the *nephilim* were
notable exceptions. It is more natural to think that the *nephilim*
were the main perpetrators of violence and because of their
might and renown played the rôle of dictators or tyrants and thus
gave impetus to the violence that filled the earth. The relevance
of allusion to these *nephilim* in the narrative of events is apparent.

There is one further observation that may be made regarding
the *nephilim* and the context in which allusion to them occurs. It
is to the effect that the passage as a whole shows the close interac-
tion of the various kinds of vice. While the connection between
the *nephilim* and the marriages is not genetic, there is, nevertheless,
a moral connection. The degeneration presupposed in, and again
resulting from, these unholy alliances provided fruitful soil for
the violence in connection with which the *nephilim* played a
P 249 is not part of the Google Books preview at this time.