

QUESTION 42

The Equality and Likeness of the Divine Persons in Comparison to One Another

Next we must consider the persons in comparison to one another: first, with respect to their equality and likeness (question 42) and, second, with respect to their missions (question 43).

On the first topic there are six questions: (1) Does equality have a place among the divine persons? (2) Is a person who proceeds equal from eternity to the person from whom He proceeds? (3) Is there any ordering among the divine persons? (4) Are the divine persons equal in greatness? (5) Does one divine person exist in another? (6) Are the divine persons equal in power?

Article 1

Does equality belong to the divine persons?

It seems that equality does not belong to the divine persons:

Objection 1: As is clear from the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 5, equality stems from oneness in quantity. But among the divine persons one finds neither (a) intrinsic continuous quantity, which is called magnitude (*magnitudo*), nor (b) extrinsic continuous quantity, which is called place and time. Moreover, there is no equality among the divine persons with respect to discrete quantity, since two persons are more than one person. Therefore, equality does not belong to the divine persons.

Objection 2: As was explained above (q. 39, a. 2), the divine persons are of one essence, and an essence is signified in the manner of a form. But agreement in form makes for likeness and not for equality. Therefore, we should speak of the likeness—and not the equality—of the divine persons.

Objection 3: Whenever equality is found among things, those things are equal to one another, since what is equal is said to be equal to its equal. But the divine persons cannot be called equal to one another. For as Augustine says in *De Trinitate* 6, “If an image answers perfectly to that of which it is an image, then the image is made equal to that thing, but the thing itself is not made equal to its own image.” But the Son is the Image of the Father, and so the Father is not equal to the Son. Therefore, there is no equality among the divine persons.

Objection 4: Equality is a certain relation. But no relation is common to the three persons, since it is by their relations that the persons are made distinct from one another. Therefore, equality does not belong to the divine persons.

But contrary to this: The Athanasian creed says, “The three persons are coeternal and coequal with one another.”

I respond: It is necessary to posit equality among the divine persons. For according to the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 10, ‘equal’ expresses, as it were, a negation of both greater and less. But we cannot posit anything greater or less among the divine persons. For as Boethius says in *De Trinitate*, “Differences [*read: within God*] are forced on those who add or subtract, as the Arians do when they break up the Trinity by assigning varying degrees of worthiness and thus produce a plurality.” The reason for this is that unequals cannot share numerically the same quantity. But in God there is no quantity other than His essence. Hence, it follows that if there were an inequality among the divine persons, then they would not share one essence, and so the three persons would not be one God—which is impossible. Therefore, one must posit equality among the divine persons.

Reply to objection 1: There are two kinds of quantity. The one is called the *quantity of mass* (*quantitas molis*) or *dimensive quantity*, and this kind exists only in corporeal things and so has no place among the divine persons. The other is *quantity of force* (*quantitas virtutis*), which is proportioned to the perfection of a nature or form. This is the sort of quantity that is involved when something is said to be

more or less hot to the extent that it is more or less perfect in heat.

Now this quantity of force is found in the *first* place in its *root*, i.e., in the very perfection of the form or nature, and as such it is called ‘spiritual greatness’ (*magnitudo spiritualis*), in the way that heat is called ‘great’ (*magnus*) because of its intensity and perfection. Thus, in *De Trinitate* 6 Augustine says, “In those things that are great without mass, the greater *esse* is the better *esse*.” For it is the more perfect that is being called ‘better’ here.

In the *second* place, quantity of force is found in a form’s *effects*. Now the first effect of a form is *esse*, since every entity has *esse* according to its own form, whereas the second effect of a form is its operation, since every agent acts through its own form. Therefore, quantity of force is involved both in *esse* and in operation—(a) in *esse*, because things of a more perfect nature have a greater duration, and (b) in operation, because things of a more perfect nature have a greater power to act.

Thus, as Augustine puts it in *De Fide ad Petrum*, equality is found in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit “insofar as none of the three either precedes the others in eternity or exceeds them in greatness or surpasses them in power.”

Reply to objection 2: Where there is equality with respect to quantity of force, the equality includes within itself likeness plus something else, since it excludes excess. For when given things share in one form, they can be said to be like one another even if they participate unequally in that form. For instance, air is said to be like fire with respect to heat, but they cannot be called equals as long as the one participates more perfectly in the form of heat than the other does. And it is because the nature of the Father and the Son is not only one, but also equally perfect in the two of them, that we claim not only that the Son is *like* the Father, so as to exclude the error of Eunomius, but also that they are *equal*, so as to exclude the error of Arius.

Reply to objection 3: In God, there are two ways in which equality or likeness can be signified, viz., by *names* and by *verbs*.

Insofar as it is signified by *names*, mutual equality and likeness are predicated of the divine persons. For the Son is equal to and like the Father, and vice versa. This is because the divine essence belongs no more to the Father than to the Son, and so just as the Son has the greatness of the Father, i.e., He is equal to the Father, so too the Father has the greatness of the Son, i.e., He is equal to the Son. By contrast, as far as creatures are concerned, “in their case equality and likeness are not convertible,” as Dionysius says in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 9. For things that are caused are like their causes to the extent that they have the form of their causes, but the converse does not hold, since the form exists principally in the cause and [only] secondarily in the thing that is caused.

Verbs, on the other hand, signify equality along with movement. And even though there is no movement in God, there is nonetheless reception there (*est tamen ibi accipere*). Therefore, since the Son receives from the Father that by which He is equal to the Father, and not vice versa, we say that the Son is made equal to the Father, but not that the Father is made equal to the Son (*filius coaequatur patri et non e converso*).

Reply to objection 4: Among the divine persons the only things to consider are the *essence*, in which they share, and the *relations*, by which they are distinguished. Equality implies both of these. It implies the distinction among the persons, because nothing is said to be equal to itself; and it implies the oneness of the essence, since the persons are equal to one another because they have a single greatness and a single essence.

Now it is clear that the same thing is not related to itself by any real relation. Nor, again, is one relation related to another by any further relation; for instance, when we say that the Paternity is opposed to the Filiation, the opposition is not itself a relation that mediates between the Paternity and the Filiation. For in both of these ways, the relations would be multiplied to infinity. And so the equality and likeness among the divine persons are not real relations distinct from the relations that constitute the

persons, but instead include within their concepts both the relations that distinguish the persons and the oneness of the essence. This is why in 1 *Sentences*, dist. 31, the Master says that in these cases the relations are merely names.

Article 2

Is a person who proceeds coeternal with His principle?

It seems that a person who proceeds is not coeternal with His principle, e.g., the Son is not coeternal with the Father:

Objection 1: Arius lays out twelve modes of generation. The first mode is the flowing of a line from a point, where equality of simplicity is lacking. The second mode is the emission of rays from the sun, where equality of nature is lacking. The third mode is the character or impression left by a seal, where consubstantiality and efficacy of power are lacking. The fourth mode is the infusion by God of a good act of will, where consubstantiality is lacking. The fifth mode is the emanation of an accident from its substance, where the accident lacks subsistence. The sixth mode is the abstraction of a species from matter in the way that the senses receive a species from a sensible thing, and here equality of spiritual simplicity is lacking. The seventh mode is the stimulation of the will by thought, which is a temporal stimulation. The eighth mode is transformation, as when an image is made from brass, and this transformation is material. The ninth mode is movement from a mover, and this is likewise effect and cause. The tenth mode is the eduction of a species from a genus, which has no place in God, since the Father is not predicated of the Son as a genus of a species. The eleventh mode is the realization of an idea, as when an external box is made from one that exists in the mind. The twelfth mode is birth, in the way that a man is from his father, and here there is temporal priority and posteriority.

Therefore, it is clear that in every mode in which one thing comes from another, there is either no equality of nature or no equality of duration. Therefore, if the Son is from the Father, then one must say that He is either less than the Father or posterior to the Father, or both.

Objection 2: Everything that is from another has a beginning. But nothing eternal has a beginning. Therefore, neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit is eternal.

Objection 3: Everything that is corrupted ceases to exist. Therefore, everything that is generated begins to exist, since it is generated in order that it might exist. But the Son is begotten by the Father. Therefore, He begins to exist and is not coeternal with the Father.

Objection 4: If the Son is begotten by the Father, then either He is always being generated or else there is some instant of His generation. If He is always being generated, then given that a thing is imperfect while it is in the process of being generated—as is clear in the case of successive entities like time and movement, which are always in the state of coming to be—then it follows that the Son is always imperfect. But this is unacceptable. Therefore, there is some instant of the Son's generation. Therefore, before that instant the Son did not exist.

But contrary to this: The Athanasian creed says, “All three persons are coeternal with one another.”

I respond: One must claim that the Son is coeternal with the Father. To see this clearly, note that there are two ways in which something that comes from a principle can be posterior to its principle, viz., either (a) because of the agent or (b) because of the action.

As for the agent, this happens in one way with voluntary agents and in a different way with natural agents. In the case of voluntary agents, it happens because of the choice of time. For just as it is within a

voluntary agent's power to choose the form that he will confer on the effect—this was explained above (q. 41 a. 2)—so too it is within his power to choose the time at which he will produce the effect. On the other hand, in the case of natural agents, it happens because some agents do not possess from the beginning the entire power required to act by nature; instead, this power accrues to them after some time. For instance, a man does not possess from the beginning the power to generate.

As for the action, when an action is a successive entity, that which comes from the principle is prevented from existing at all the same times as its principle. Hence, if a given agent began to act by a successive action as soon as it itself came into existence, its effect would not exist immediately at the same instant, but would instead exist at the instant at which the action was terminated.

Now it is clear from what has been previously said (q. 41, a. 2) that (a) the Father generates the Son by nature and not by His will, and, again, that (b) the Father's nature was perfect from eternity, and, again, that (c) the action by which the Father produces the Son is not a successive entity, since in that case the Son of God would be generated successively and His generation would be a material generation involving movement—which is impossible. Therefore, it follows that the Son existed whenever the Father did. And so the Son is coeternal with the Father and, similarly, the Holy Spirit is coeternal with both of them.

Reply to objection 1: As Augustine says in *De Verbis Domini*, there is no mode of procession among creatures that perfectly represents the divine generation, and so it is necessary to gather likenesses from many modes in order that what is lacking in one might in some way be supplied by another. This is why the Council of Ephesus says, “Let the Splendor announce to you that the Son coexists always as coeternal with the Father; let the Word show you the impassibility of His nativity; let the name of the Son intimate His consubstantiality.” However, among all of these modes it is the procession of a word from the intellect that provides the clearest representation. But a word is not posterior to that from which it proceeds, unless the intellect in question is such that it goes from potentiality into actuality—which cannot be said in the case of God.

Reply to objection 2: Eternity rules out a beginning of duration, but not a principle of origin.

Reply to objection 3: Every instance of corruption involves a change, and so everything that is corrupted begins not to exist and ceases to exist. But as was explained above (q. 27, a. 2), the divine generation is not a change. Hence, the Son is always being generated, and the Father is always generating.

Reply to objection 4: In the case of time, that which is indivisible, viz., an instant, is different from that which has duration, viz., time. But as was explained above (q. 10, aa. 2 and 4), in the case of eternity, the indivisible *now* always abides. Now the generation of the Son takes place not in the temporal *now* or in time, but rather in eternity. And so in order to signify the presentness and permanence of eternity, one can say, as Origen did, that the Son is always ‘being born’ (*nascitur*). However, as Gregory and Augustine reply, it is better to say that He is always ‘already born’ (*natus*), where ‘always’ designates the permanence of eternity and ‘already born’ designates the perfection of the one who has been begotten. Therefore, the Son is not imperfect and, contrary to what Arius claimed, it was never the case that He did not exist.

Article 3

Is there a natural ordering among the divine persons?

It seems that there is no natural ordering (*ordo naturae*) among the divine persons:

Objection 1: Whatever exists in God is either the essence or a person or a notion. But ‘natural ordering’ does not signify the essence, and there is no ordering of the persons or of the notions. Therefore, there is no natural ordering in God.

Objection 2: Whenever things are ordered naturally, one of them is prior to another, at least conceptually and according to nature. But as the Athanasian creed says, among the divine persons there is nothing prior or posterior. Therefore, there is no natural ordering among the divine persons.

Objection 3: If things are ordered, then they are distinct from one another. But there is no distinction within God’s nature (*natura in divinis non distinguitur*). Therefore, there is no ordering. Therefore, neither is there any natural ordering there.

Objection 4: God’s nature is His essence. But one does not speak of an essential ordering in God. Therefore, neither is there a natural ordering.

But contrary to this: Wherever there is a plurality of things without order, there is conflation (*confusio*). But as the Athanasian creed says, there is no conflation among the divine persons. Therefore, there is an ordering there.

I respond: An ordering always involves a comparison to some principle. Hence, just as ‘principle’ is said in many ways—viz., (a) with respect to *position*, as in the case of a point, (b) with respect to *understanding*, as in the case of a principle of demonstration, and (c) with respect to *singular causes*—so, too, ‘ordering’ is said in many ways.

Now as was explained above (q. 33, a. 1), in the case of God, ‘principle’ is predicated with respect to *origin* and without any priority. Hence, in this case there must be an ordering with respect to origin, but without priority. And this is called a *natural ordering* (*ordo naturae*), in keeping with what Augustine says: “Not an ordering whereby one is *prior to* another, but an ordering whereby one is *from* another.”

Reply to objection 1: ‘Natural ordering’ signifies the notion of an origin in general, though not in particular.

Reply to objection 2: Among created things, even when that which is from a principle is coeval in duration with its principle, the principle is nonetheless conceptually prior to it and prior to it in nature, as long as we are considering the thing itself which is a principle.

By contrast, if the relations *cause of* and *caused by*, and *principle of* and *from a principle*, are themselves being considered, then it is clear that the opposed relations are simultaneous both naturally and conceptually, since each occurs in the definition of the other. But in God the relations are themselves subsistent persons in a single nature. Hence, one person cannot be prior to another—naturally or conceptually—either with respect to the nature or with respect to the relations.

Reply to objection 3: There is a natural ordering not because the nature itself is ordered, but rather because there is an ordering among the divine persons with respect to their natural origin.

Reply to objection 4: ‘Nature’, but not ‘essence’, in some sense implies the character of a principle. And so the ordering of origin is better called a *natural* ordering than an *essential* ordering.

Article 4

Is the Son equal to the Father in greatness?

It seems that the Son is not equal to the Father in greatness (*secundum magnitudinem*):

Objection 1: At John 14:28 the Son Himself says, “The Father is greater than I.” And at 1 Corinthians 15:28 the Apostle says, “The Son also Himself shall be subject unto Him that put all things

under Him.”

Objection 2: The Paternity pertains to the dignity of the Father. But the Paternity does not belong to the Son. Therefore, it is not the case that the Son has whatever dignity the Father has. Therefore, the Son is not equal in greatness to the Father.

Objection 3: Whenever there is a whole and parts, many parts are something greater than one part or a few parts; for instance, three men are something greater than two men or one man. But in God there seems to be a universal whole along with parts. For more than one notion is contained under a relation or notion. Therefore, since there are three notions in the Father and only two in the Son, it seems that the Son is not equal to the Father.

But contrary to this: Philippians 2:6 says, “He thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”

I respond: It is necessary to claim that the Son is equal to the Father in greatness. For God’s greatness is nothing other than the perfection of the divine nature itself. But it is part of the concepts of the Paternity and of the Filiation that through His generation the Son attains to having the perfection of the nature that is in the Father, just as the Father does.

By contrast, since among men generation is a certain change in something that goes from potentiality into actuality, a human son is not from the beginning equal to the father who generates him. Rather, he must attain to equality by growing in the normal way, unless things turn out otherwise because of some defect in the principle of generation.

However, it is clear from what has been said (q. 27, a. 2 and q. 33, aa. 2-3) that in God Paternity and Filiation exist truly and properly. Nor can one claim that God the Father’s power was defective in generating, or that the Son of God reached perfection step by step and through changes. Hence, one must say that from eternity the Son was equal to the Father in greatness. Thus, in *De Synodis* Hilary says, “If one removes the infirmities of the bodies, and removes the beginning of conception, and removes the sorrows and all human necessity, then every son has equality with his father because of his natural birth, since there is a likeness of nature.”

Reply to objection 1: These words are understood of Christ with respect to His human nature, in which He is less than the Father and subject to the Father. But with respect to His divine nature, He is equal to the Father. And this is just what the Athanasian creed says: “Equal to the Father with respect to His divinity, less than the Father with respect to His human-ness.”

Here is an alternative reply given by Hilary in *De Trinitate* 9: “The Father is greater by the authority of the giver, but the one to whom *esse* is given is not lesser.” And in *De Synodis* Hilary says, “The subjection of the Son’s nature is His piety [*read*: His recognition of the Father’s authority], whereas the subjection of other sons is the infirmity of creatures.”

Reply to objection 2: Equality has to do with greatness. But as has been explained (a. 1), in God ‘greatness’ signifies the perfection of the nature and pertains to the essence. And so in God equality and likeness stem from the attributes of the essence, whereas inequality and unlikeness cannot be predicated with respect to the distinction among the relations. Hence, in *Contra Maximinum* Augustine says, “The question about origin is ‘What is from what?’, whereas the question about equality is, ‘What qualities does it have?’ or ‘How great is it?’” Therefore, the Paternity is the dignity of the Father because it is the essence of the Father. For dignity is something absolute and thus pertains to the essence. Thus, just as the same essence that is the Paternity in the Father is the Filiation in the Son, so too the same dignity that is the Paternity in the Father is the Filiation in the Son. Therefore, it is true to say that the Son has whatever dignity the Father has. Still, ‘The Father has the Paternity, therefore the Son has the Paternity’ is invalid, since here relational names have replaced a substantival name (*mutatur enim quid ad aliquid*). For the essence is the same as the dignity of the Father and the Son, but it is in the Father according to the relation *giving*, whereas it is in the Son according to the relation *receiving*.

Reply to objection 3: In God a relation is not a universal whole, even if it is predicated of more than one relation. For all the relations are one in essence and *esse*, and this is incompatible with the nature of a universal whole, whose parts are distinct in *esse*. Similarly, as was explained above (q. 30, a. 4), ‘person’ is not a universal in God. Nor is it the case that all the relations are something greater than just one relation; nor are all the persons something greater than just one person. For the whole perfection of the divine nature exists in each of the persons.

Article 5

Is the Son in the Father, and vice versa?

It seems that the Son is not in the Father, or vice versa (*filius non sit in patre et e converso*):

Objection 1: In *Physics* 4 the Philosopher lays out eight ways in which one thing is in another and, as is clear to anyone who goes through them one by one, in none of these ways is the Son in the Father, or vice versa. Therefore, the Son is not in the Father, or vice versa.

Objection 2: Nothing that goes forth from a thing is in that thing. But according to Micah 5:2 (“His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity”), the Son goes forth from the Father from eternity. Therefore, the Son is not in the Father.

Objection 3: One of two opposites is not in the other. But the Father and the Son are relational opposites. Therefore, one cannot be in the other.

But contrary to this: John 14:10 says, “I am in the Father, and the Father is in me.”

I respond: There are three things to consider in the case of the Father and the Son, viz., the *essence*, the *relations*, and *origin*. And with respect to each of these the Son is in the Father, and vice versa.

With respect to the *essence*, the Father is in the Son, since the Father is His own essence and communicates His essence to the Son—but not through any sort of change. Hence, it follows that since the essence of the Father is in the Son, the Father is in the Son. Similarly, since the Son is His own essence, it follows that He is in the Father, because His own essence is in the Father. Accordingly, in *De Trinitate* 5 Hilary says, “The immutable God follows His nature, so to speak, in begetting an immutable God. We understand that the nature of God subsists in [the Son], since He is God in God.”

With respect to the *relations*, it is clear that one of two relational opposites is in the other conceptually.

With respect to *origin*, it is likewise clear that the procession of the intelligible Word is not external to the speaker, but instead remains within the speaker. Also, that which is said by means of the Word is contained by the Word.

And the same line of reasoning applies to the Holy Spirit.

Reply to objection 1: The things that are in creatures do not adequately represent the things that belong to God. And so the Son is in the Father, and vice versa, in none of those ways that the Philosopher enumerates. However, the closest of those ways is the one according to which a thing is said to be in its originating principle—except that oneness of essence between the principle and what is from the principle is not found among created things.

Reply to objection 2: The Son’s going forth from the Father is in the manner of an interior procession, in the way a word goes forth from the heart and yet remains within the heart. Hence, this ‘going forth’ in God involves just a distinction among relations and not any distance between essences.

Reply to objection 3: The Father and the Son are opposed relationally and not with respect to

their essence. And yet, as has been explained, one relational opposite is in the other.

Article 6

Is the Son equal to the Father in power?

It seems that the Son is not equal to the Father in power:

Objection 1: John 5:19 says, “The Son cannot do anything by Himself (*a se*), but what He sees the Father doing.” But the Father is able to do things by Himself. Therefore, the Father is greater in power than the Son.

Objection 2: The one who commands and teaches is greater in power than one who obeys and listens. But according to John 14:31 (“As the Father has given me commandments, so do I . . .”), the Father commands the Son, and according to John 5:20 (“For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all things which He Himself does”), the Father also teaches the Son. Similarly, according to John 5:30 (“As I hear, so I judge”), the Son listens to the Father. Therefore, the Father is greater in power than the Son.

Objection 3: It pertains to the Father’s omnipotence that He is able to generate a Son equal to Himself; for in *Contra Maximinum* Augustine says, “If God the Father was unable to generate a Son equal to Himself, then where is the omnipotence of God the Father?” But as was shown above (q. 41, a. 6), the Son is unable to generate a Son. Therefore, it is not the case that the Son is able to do whatever pertains to the Father’s omnipotence. And so the Son is not equal to the Father in power.

But contrary to this: John 5:19 says, “For whatever things the Father does, these the Son also does in like manner.”

I respond: It is necessary to claim that the Son is equal to the Father in power, since the power to act follows upon the perfection of the nature. For among creatures we see that a thing has more power to act to the extent that it has a more perfect nature. But it was shown above (a. 4) that the very character of the divine Paternity and Filiation demands that the Son be equal to the Father in greatness, i.e., in the perfection of the nature. Hence, it follows that the Son is equal to the Father in power. And the same line of reasoning holds for the Holy Spirit with respect to both the Father and the Son.

Reply to objection 1: The claim that the Son cannot do anything by Himself (*a se*) does not take away from the Son any power had by the Father. For He adds immediately that whatever the Father does, the Son does in like manner. Instead, this shows that the Son has His power from the Father, from whom He has His nature. Hence, in *De Trinitate* 9 Hilary says, “The oneness of the divine nature is such that the Son does *through* Himself (*per se*) what He does not do *by* Himself (*a se*).”

Reply to objection 2: By the Father’s teaching and the Son’s listening, all that is meant is that the Father communicates His knowledge to the Son in the same way that He communicates His essence to Him. And the Father’s command can be interpreted in the same way, viz., that in generating the Son, the Father gave to Him from eternity His knowledge and will with respect to the things that were to be done.

An alternative, and perhaps better, reply is that this should be taken to refer to Christ with respect to His human nature.

Reply to objection 3: Just as it is the same essence that is the Paternity in the Father and the Filiation in the Son, so too it is the same power by which the Father generates and the Son is generated. Hence, it is clear that the Son is able to do whatever the Father is able to do.

However, it does not follow that the Son is able to generate. Rather, a relational name (*ad aliquid*) has here replaced a substantival name (*quid*), since ‘generation’ signifies a relation in God. Therefore, the Son has the same omnipotence as the Father, but with a different relation. For the Father has the omnipotence as the one who *gives* it, and this is what is meant by saying that He is able to generate. The

Son, on the other hand, has the omnipotence as one who *receives* it, and this is what is meant by saying that He is able to be generated.