

QUESTION 33

The Person of the Father

Next we have to consider the persons in particular—and, first, the person of the Father.

On this topic there are four questions: (1) Does it belong to the Father to be a principle? (2) Is the person of the Father properly signified by the name ‘Father’? (3) Is ‘Father’ said of God as it pertains to a person prior to its being said of God as it pertains to the essence? (4) Is it proper to the Father to be unbegotten?

Article 1

Can the Father be called a principle of the Son or of the Holy Spirit?

It seems that the Father cannot be called a principle (*principium*) of the Son or of the Holy Spirit:

Objection 1: According to the Philosopher, a principle is the same as a cause. But we do not say that the Father is a cause of the Son. Therefore, we should not say that He is a principle of the Son.

Objection 2: ‘Principle’ is said with respect to that which is begun (*principiatum*). Therefore, if the Father is a principle of the Son, it follows that the Son is such that He is begun and, consequently, created. But this seems to be erroneous.

Objection 3: The name ‘principle’ comes from the name ‘priority’. But as the Athanasian creed says, in God “there is nothing prior or posterior.” Therefore, in the case of God we should not use the name ‘principle’.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* 4 Augustine says, “The Father is the principle of the whole divinity (*deitas*).”

I respond: The name ‘principle’ signifies nothing other than that from which something proceeds. For anything from which something proceeds in any way at all is such that we call it a principle, and vice versa. Therefore, since the Father is such that another proceeds from Him, it follows that the Father is a principle.

Reply to objection 1: The Greeks use the name ‘cause’ (αἰτία) and the name ‘principle’ (ἀρχή) indifferently in the case of God, whereas the Latin doctors use only the name ‘principle’ and not the name ‘cause’. The reason for this is that ‘principle’ is a more general than ‘cause’, just as ‘cause’ is more general than ‘element’. For the first endpoint (*terminus*) of a thing, as well as the first part of a thing, is called a principle, but not a cause.

Now, as was explained above (q. 13, a. 2), the more general a name is, the more appropriate it is to use it in the case of God. For the more specific a name is, the more it is tied to a mode that belongs to creatures. Hence, the name ‘cause’, but not the name ‘principle’, seems to imply a diversity of substance and a dependence of one thing on another—which the name ‘principle’ does not imply. For with every type of cause there is always a distance in perfection or power between the cause and that of which it is a cause. By contrast, we use the name ‘principle’ even in cases where there is no difference of this sort, but only a difference in ordering—as when we say that a point is a principle of a line or, again, when we say that the first part of a line is a principle of the line.

Reply to objection 2: Among the Greeks it is customary to say that the Son and the Holy Spirit are such that they are begun (*principari*). However, this is not common usage among our doctors. For even though we attribute a certain authorship (*auctoritas*) to the Father in virtue of His being a principle, nonetheless, in order to avoid an occasion of error, we do not in any way attribute subordination or inferiority to the Son or the Holy Spirit. As Hilary puts it in *De Trinitate* 9, “The Father is the greater because of the honor attached to giving, but the Son is not the lesser in virtue of being the one to whom

the gift is given.”

Reply to objection 3: Even though with respect to *that because of which* it is imposed to signify, the name ‘principle’ is taken from ‘priority’, it nonetheless does not signify priority, but instead signifies origin. For as was explained above (q. 13, a. 2), *that which* a name signifies is not the same as *that because of which* it is imposed to signify.

Article 2

Is the name ‘Father’ properly speaking the name of a divine person?

It seems that the name ‘Father’ is not properly speaking the name of a divine person:

Objection 1: The name ‘Father’ signifies a relation. But a person is an individual substance. Therefore, the name ‘Father’ is not properly speaking a name that signifies a person.

Objection 2: ‘One that generates’ (*generans*) is more general than ‘father’, since every father is one that generates, but not vice versa. But as has been explained (a. 1), the more general name is the one that is more properly said of God. Therefore, ‘One that generates’ or ‘Begetter’ (*genitor*) is a more appropriate name for a divine person than ‘Father’ is.

Objection 3: Nothing that is said metaphorically can be the name of anything properly speaking. But in our case, a word is metaphorically said to be begotten or to be an offspring and, as a result, the one who utters the word is metaphorically called its ‘father’. Therefore, the principle of the Word in God cannot properly speaking be called ‘Father’.

Objection 4: Everything that is properly said of God is said of God in a way that is prior to its being said of creatures. But ‘generation’ seems to be said of creatures prior to its being said of God. For a generation seems to be more genuine when that which proceeds from the other is distinct from that other not only with respect to a relation but with respect to its essence as well. Therefore, the name ‘father’, which is taken from generation, does not properly speaking seem to be the name of any divine person.

But contrary to this: Psalm 88:27 says, “He shall cry out to me: You are my Father.”

I respond: The proper name of a person signifies that by which the person in question is distinguished from all others. For according to *Metaphysics* 7, just as soul and body belong to the nature of man, so *this* soul and *this* body belong to our understanding of *this* man, and they are what distinguish this man from all others. But that by which the person of the Father is distinguished from all other persons is the Paternity. Hence, the proper name of the person of the Father is the name ‘Father’, which signifies the Paternity.

Reply to objection 1: Among us a relation is not a subsistent person, and so among us the name ‘father’ signifies not a person but a relation belonging to a person. But, contrary to the false opinion held by some, this is not the way it is with God. For in God the relation that the name ‘Father’ signifies is a subsistent person. Hence, it was explained above (q. 29, a. 4) that in God the name ‘person’ signifies a relation as subsisting in the divine nature.

Reply to objection 2: According to the Philosopher in *De Anima* 2, the designation of a thing should be derived especially from its perfection and completion. But ‘generation’ signifies a thing as coming into being (*fieri*), whereas ‘paternity’ signifies the completion of a generation. And so the name ‘Father’ is a better name for a divine person than is ‘One that generates’ or ‘Begetter’.

Reply to objection 3: In a human nature a word is not something subsistent, and this is why it cannot properly be said to be begotten or to be a son. By contrast, in the divine nature the divine Word is

something that subsists. Thus, He is properly, and not metaphorically, called the Son, and His principle is properly, and not metaphorically, called the Father.

Reply to objection 4: With respect to the thing that is signified, though not with respect to their mode of signifying, the names ‘generation’ and ‘paternity’, like the other names that are properly said of God, are said of God in a way prior to their being said of creatures. This is why the Apostle says at Ephesians 3:14-15, “For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named.”

This is evident as follows. It is clear that generation takes its species from its terminus, which is the form of the thing that is generated. And the closer this form is to the form of the one that generates, the more genuine and more perfect the generation is. For instance, a univocal generation is more perfect than a non-univocal generation, since it belongs to the nature of the thing that generates that it should generate something similar to itself in form. Hence, the very fact that in the divine generation the one who generates and the one who is generated have numerically the same form—whereas in created things the form is the same only in species and not numerically—shows that generation and thus paternity exist in God in a way that is prior to their existing in creatures. Hence, the very fact that in God the distinction between the one who generates and the one who is generated is only relational pertains to the genuineness of the divine generation and the divine paternity.

Article 3

Is the name ‘Father’ said of God in the first place with respect to a person?

It seems that the name ‘Father’ is not said of God in the first place with respect to a person:

Objection 1: What is conceptually common is prior to what is conceptually proper. But insofar as the name ‘Father’ is taken for a [divine] person, it is proper to the person of the Father, whereas insofar as it is taken for the essence, it is common to the whole Trinity, since we say ‘Our Father’ to the whole Trinity. Therefore, the name ‘Father’ is taken for the essence prior to its being taken for a person.

Objection 2: There is no prior or posterior predication in the case of names that have the same definition. But paternity and filiation seem to be predicated with the same definitions in (a) ‘A divine person is the Father of the Son’ and (b) ‘The whole Trinity is our Father, i.e., the Father of creatures’. For according to Basil, to receive something is common to both the Son and creatures. Therefore, ‘Father’ is not predicated of God with respect to the essence prior to its being predicated with respect to a person, [or vice versa].

Objection 3: There can be a comparison only between names that are predicated with a single definition. But according to Colossians 1:15 (“..... who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature”), the Son is comparable to creatures in the concepts of filiation and generation. Therefore, ‘paternity’ is not taken for a person in God prior to being taken for the essence; rather, it is taken with the same definition in both cases.

But contrary to this: The eternal is prior to the temporal. But from eternity God is the Father of the Son, whereas it is from a given point in time that God is the Father of creatures. Therefore, ‘paternity’ is said of God with respect to the Son prior to its being said with respect to creatures.

I respond: A name is predicated of something in which the whole meaning of the name is perfectly preserved prior to its being predicated of something in which the meaning is preserved only in a certain respect (*secundum aliquid*). For it is predicated of the latter because of a certain likeness to that in which the meaning is perfectly preserved, since everything imperfect is taken from what is perfect.

Thus it is that the name ‘lion’ is said of the animal in which the whole meaning of ‘lion’ is preserved and which is properly called a lion prior to its being said of a man in whom something of the nature of a lion is found, e.g., audacity or courage, etc. For it is said of the man because of a likeness.

Now it is clear from what was said above (q. 27, a. 2 and q. 28, a. 4) that the perfect meaning of paternity and filiation is found in God the Father and God the Son, since the Father and the Son are one in nature and in glory.

By contrast, the filiation with respect to God that is found in a creature is not in keeping with this perfect meaning, but only in keeping with a certain likeness, since the creator and the creature are not one in nature. And the more perfect the likeness is, the more closely it approaches the genuine nature of filiation.

For instance, according to Job 38:28 (“Who is the father of rain? Or who begot the drops of dew?”), God is said to be the Father of certain creatures, viz., non-rational creatures, only because of a certain *vestigial likeness*.

By contrast, according to Deuteronomy 32:6 (“Is this the return you make to the Lord, O foolish and senseless people? Is not He your father, that has possessed you, and made you, and created you?”), He is the Father of certain other creatures, viz., rational creatures, according to a *likeness of image*.

Moreover, according to Romans 8:16-17 (“For the Spirit himself gives testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God; and if sons, heirs also”), He is the Father of some according to a *likeness of grace*; these are called His adopted children insofar as they are ordered to the inheritance of eternal glory through the gift of grace they have received.

Finally, according to Romans 5:2 (“We glory in the hope of the glory of the sons of God”), He is the Father of some according to a *likeness of glory*, insofar as they already possess the inheritance of glory.

So, then, it is clear that ‘paternity’ is predicated of God insofar as it implies the relation of one person to another prior to its being predicated of Him insofar as it implies a relation of God to creatures.

Reply to objection 1: According to the order of our intellect, common names, predicated absolutely, are prior to proper names, since common names are included in our understanding of proper names, but not vice versa. For instance, our concept of the person of the Father includes the concept *God*, but is not convertible with it.

However, common names that imply a relation to creatures are predicated of God posterior to the predication of proper names that imply the relations among the [divine] persons, since a person who proceeds in God proceeds as a principle for the production of creatures. For just as a word conceived in the mind of the craftsman is understood to proceed from the craftsman prior to the procession of the artifact, which is produced as a likeness of the word conceived in the mind, so too the Son proceeds from the Father prior to the procession of creatures, of whom the name ‘filiation’ is predicated insofar as they have some participation in the likeness of the Son. This is clear from Romans 8:29, “Whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son.”

Reply to objection 2: To receive is said to be common to creatures and to the Son not univocally, but according to a certain remote likeness by reason of which the Son is called the firstborn of creatures. Hence, in the passage cited [in objection 3] it is added that He is the firstborn among many brothers, after [the Apostle] had already said that some have been conformed to image of the Son.

However, the Son of God has by nature a singular status over the others, viz., having by His nature that which He receives, as Basil himself says. Accordingly, as is clear from John 1:18 (“The only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him”), He is called the ‘Only-begotten’.

Reply to objection 3: The reply to this objection is clear from what has already been said.

Article 4

Is it proper to the Father to be unbegotten?

It seems that it is not proper to the Father to be unbegotten (*ingenitum*):

Objection 1: Every property posits some reality in that of which it is the property. But ‘unbegotten’ merely denies something of the Father and does not posit anything in Him. Therefore, it does not signify a property of the Father.

Objection 2: ‘Unbegotten’ is predicated either as a privation or as a negation. If it is predicated as a negation, then whatever is not begotten can be called ‘unbegotten’. But the Holy Spirit is not begotten, and neither is the divine essence. Therefore, to be unbegotten belongs to them as well and so is not proper to the Father. On the other hand, if ‘unbegotten’ is predicated as a privation, then since every privation signifies an imperfection in the thing that has the privation, it follows that the person of the Father is imperfect—which is impossible.

Objection 3: In the case of God, ‘unbegotten’ does not signify a relation, since it is not predicated relationally. Therefore, it signifies the substance. Therefore, what is unbegotten differs in substance from what is begotten. But the Son, who is begotten, does not differ from the Father in substance. Therefore, the Father should not be said to be unbegotten.

Objection 4: What is proper belongs to just one person. But since there is more than one person who proceeds in God, it seems that nothing prevents it from being the case that there should be more than one person who is not from another. Therefore, it is not proper to the Father to be unbegotten.

Objection 5: Just as the Father is a principle of the person who is begotten, so too He is a principle of the person who proceeds. Therefore, if one should claim that being unbegotten is proper to the Father because of the [relational] opposition that He has to the begotten person, then one should likewise claim that it is proper to Him that He does not proceed.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* 4 Hilary says, “One is from One, i.e., the begotten One is from the unbegotten One, viz., by the property in each, respectively, of Innascibility and Origin.”

I respond: Just as, among creatures, there are first principles and secondary principles, so too, among the divine persons, in whom there is no prior or posterior, there is a *principle-not-from-a-principle*, which is the Father, and a *principle-from-a-principle*, which is the Son.

Now among created things a first principle is known in two ways: (a) in one way, insofar as it is a first principle in virtue of having a relation to those things that are from it; and (b) in a second way, insofar as it is a first principle in virtue of its not itself being from another. So, then, the Father is likewise known by the Paternity and the Common Spiration in virtue of His relation to the persons who proceed from Him, whereas insofar as He is a *principle-not-from-a-principle*, He is known in virtue of the fact that He is not from another—which pertains to the property of Innascibility and which is signified by the name ‘unbegotten’.

Reply to objection 1: Some claim that insofar as Innascibility, which is signified by the name ‘unbegotten’, is a property of the Father, it is not just predicated as a negation, but instead either (a) signifies both things at the same time, viz., that the Father is from no one and that He is a principle of the others, or else (b) signifies [just] universal authorship (*universalis auctoritas*) or, again, originating fullness (*fontalis plenitudo*).

But this does not seem true. For if it were so, then Innascibility would not be a property different from Paternity and [Common] Spiration, but would instead include them in the way that what is common includes what is proper. For ‘origination’ (*fontalitas*) and ‘authorship’ (*auctoritas*) signify nothing in God other than the principle of origin.

Thus, one should say instead, with Augustine in *De Trinitate* 5, that ‘unbegotten’ implies the negation of passive generation; for Augustine says, “‘Unbegotten’ means exactly what ‘not the Son’ means.” Nor does it follow from this that ‘unbegotten’ should not be posited as a proper notion of the Father. For first things and simple things are known through negations; for instance, we say that a point is that which has no parts.

Reply to objection 2: ‘Unbegotten’ is sometimes taken just as a negation. This is the sense in which Jerome says that the Holy Spirit is unbegotten, i.e., not begotten.

Alternatively, ‘unbegotten’ can in some sense be predicated as a privation, though not as a privation that implies an imperfection. For ‘privation’ has several meanings:

In one sense, there is a privation when a thing lacks something that another thing is apt to have, even if it itself is not apt to have it—as, for instance, if a rock were said to be a dead thing because it lacks life, which certain other things are apt to have.

In a second sense, there is a privation when a thing lacks something that is apt to be had by some member of its own genus—as, for instance, if moles were said to be blind.

In a third sense, there is a privation when a thing lacks something that it itself is apt to have, and this is the sense in which ‘privation’ implies an imperfection.

Now ‘unbegotten’ is not predicated as a privation of the Father in this third sense, though it may be predicated of Him in the second sense, viz., insofar as one suppositum of the divine nature is not begotten, whereas some other suppositum of that nature is begotten. But on this meaning ‘unbegotten’ can likewise be predicated of the Holy Spirit.

Hence, in order for ‘unbegotten’ to be proper to the Father alone, we must understand something further in the name ‘unbegotten’, viz., that it belongs to a divine person who is a principle of another person; and in this sense the name is understood to imply a negation in the genus *principle* insofar as it is predicated of God with respect to a person.

Alternatively, we might understand in the name ‘unbegotten’ that what is unbegotten is such that it is *in no way* from another—and not just that it is not from another *through generation*. In this sense it does not belong to the Holy Spirit to be unbegotten, since the Holy Spirit is from another as a subsistent person through the Procession. Neither does it in this sense belong to the divine essence to be unbegotten, since the divine essence can be said to be in the Son from another or in the Holy Spirit from another, viz., from the Father.

Reply to objection 3: According to Damascene, in one sense ‘unbegotten’ is the same as ‘uncreated’, and in this sense it is predicated of the [divine] substance. For it is through this that a created substance differs from an uncreated substance.

In a second sense, ‘unbegotten’ is predicated relationally, in the way that a negation is reduced to the genus of its corresponding affirmation—as ‘non-man’ is reduced to the genus of substance and ‘non-white’ is reduced to the genus of quality. Hence, since ‘begotten’ implies a relation in God, ‘unbegotten’ likewise pertains to a relation. And so it does not follow that the unbegotten Father is distinct from the Son in substance; rather, all that follows is that they are distinct with respect to a relation, viz., insofar as the Son’s relation is denied of the Father.

Reply to objection 4: Just as it necessary to posit a first element in any genus, so too in the divine nature it is necessary to posit one principle which is not from another and which is called ‘unbegotten’. Therefore, to posit two innascible elements is to posit two gods and two divine natures. Hence, in *De Synodis* Hilary says, “Since God is one, there cannot be two innascibles.” This is mainly because if there were two innascibles, it would not be the case that one of them is from the other, and so they would not be distinguished by a relational opposition; therefore, they would have to be distinguished by a diversity of nature.

Reply to objection 5: The property of the Father insofar as He is not from another is signified by

the negation of the Son's begottenness (*nativitas*) rather than by the negation of the Holy Spirit's procession. This is because, first of all, as was remarked above (q. 27, a. 4), the procession of the Holy Spirit does not have a special name. Second, in the order of nature the procession of the Holy Spirit presupposes the generation of the Son. Hence, once being begotten is denied of the Father, since He is nonetheless a principle of the generation, it follows as a consequence that He does not proceed by the procession of the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is not a principle of generation, but is instead the one who proceeds from Him who has been begotten.