

QUESTION 34

The Person of the Son: The Name 'Word'

Next we have to consider the person of the Son. Three names are attributed to the Son, viz., 'Son', 'Word', and 'Image'. But the concept *Son* is taken from the concept *Father*. So it is 'Word' and 'Image' that remain to be considered.

As regards the name 'Word', there are three questions: (1) Is the name 'Word' said of God with respect to the divine essence or with respect to a person? (2) Is 'Word' a proper name of the Son? (3) Does the name 'Word' imply a relation to creatures?

Article 1

Is 'Word' the name of a person in God?

It seems that the name 'Word' is not the name of a person in God:

Objection 1: The names of persons in God, e.g., 'Father' and 'Son', are predicated properly [and not metaphorically]. But as Origen says in *Super Ioannem*, 'Word' is predicated metaphorically of God. Therefore, 'Word' is not the name of a person in God.

Objection 2: According to Augustine in *De Trinitate*, "A word is a cognition (*notitia*) with love." And according to Anselm in the *Monologion*, "For the Highest Spirit, to speak is nothing other than to see by thinking (*cogitando*)." But cognition and thinking and seeing are said of God with respect to His essence. Therefore, 'Word' is not predicated of God with respect to a person.

Objection 3: It is part of the concept of a word that it should be spoken. But according to Anselm, just as the Father is intelligent and the Son is intelligent and the Holy Spirit is intelligent, so too the Father speaks and the Son speaks and the Holy Spirit speaks. And, similarly, each of them is spoken. Therefore, the name 'Word' is said of God with respect to the divine essence and not with respect to a person.

Objection 4: No divine person is a deed to be done (*factum*). But the Word of God is a deed to be done; for instance, Psalm 148:8 says, "Fire, hail, snow, ice, stormy winds, which do His Word." Therefore, 'Word' is not the name of a person in God.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* 7 Augustine says, "The Word is related to that whose Word it is in the same way that the Son is related to the Father." But 'Son' is the name of a person, since it is predicated relationally. Therefore, so is 'Word'.

I respond: As long as the name 'Word' is being used properly of God, it is the name of a person and in no way the name of the essence.

To see this clearly, notice that among us there are three senses in which the name 'word' is predicated properly and a fourth sense in which it is predicated improperly or figuratively.

In our case, what is most clearly and commonly called a word is that which is uttered vocally. This spoken word proceeds from within us with respect to the two aspects that are found in an exterior word, viz., (a) the sound itself and (b) the signification of that sound. For according to the Philosopher in *Perihermenias* 1, the sound signifies what is conceived by the intellect and, again, as he puts it in *De Anima* 2, the sound proceeds from the imagination. However, a sound that does not signify anything cannot be called a word. Thus, an exterior sound is called a word in virtue of the fact that it signifies something conceived interiorly by the mind.

So, then, (a) what is *first* and principally called a word is that which is interiorly conceived by the mind, and (b) what is called a word in the *second* place is the sound that signifies what is interiorly conceived, and (c) what is called a word in the *third* place is the imagining of the sound. These are the

three senses of ‘word’ that Damascene posits in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 1, chap. 13, when he says, “What is called a word is the natural movement of the intellect in accord with which it moves and understands and thinks, like a light and shining beam”—this is the *first* of the above senses. “Second, a word is not what is uttered by the voice, but what is pronounced in the heart”—this is the *third* of the above senses. “Third, there is also the word that is an angel [*read*: a messenger] of the intelligence”—this is the *second* of the above senses. In the fourth sense, (d) what is called a word figuratively is that which is either signified by a word or effected by a word. Thus, we customarily say, ‘This is the word I have spoken to you’, or ‘This is the word that the king has commanded’, indicating some deed that has been signified by the word of a mere herald or even of the one who is doing the commanding.

Now ‘Word’ is predicated properly of God insofar as ‘Word’ signifies what is conceived by the divine intellect. Hence, in *De Trinitate* 15 Augustine says, “Whoever is able to conceive of a word not only before it is sounded, but even before the image of its sound is seized upon by thought, can grasp a likeness of that Word of whom it is said, ‘In the beginning was the Word’.” But what is conceived in the heart is by its nature such that it proceeds from another, viz., from the cognition of the one who conceives it. Hence, insofar as ‘Word’ is said properly of God, it signifies something that proceeds from another, and this pertains to the nature of those names that are predicated of God with respect to a person. For as has been explained (q. 32, a. 3), the divine persons are distinguished by origin.

Hence, the name ‘Word’, insofar as it is used properly in the case of God, must be taken only as the name of a person and not as a name of the essence.

Reply to objection 1: The Arians, whose roots lie in Origen, claimed that the Son is distinct from the Father by a diversity of substance. Hence, they tried to maintain that when the Son is called the Word of God, the term ‘Word’ is not being predicated properly—lest, by reason of the fact that the Word proceeds from the Father, they should be forced to admit that the Son of God does not exist outside the substance of the Father. For an interior word proceeds from the speaker in such a way that it remains within him.

However, even if one claims that ‘Word of God’ is predicated metaphorically, it must also be claimed that ‘Word of God’ is predicated properly. For nothing can be called a word metaphorically except by reason of a manifestation, since either (a) it makes something manifest like a word does, or else (b) it is itself made manifest by a word. Now if it is made manifest by a word, then one must posit a word by which it is made manifest. On the other hand, if it is called a word because it makes something manifest exteriorly, note that what makes something manifest exteriorly is called a word only insofar as it signifies something which is conceived interiorly by the mind and which one then makes manifest by means of exterior signs. Therefore, even if ‘Word’ is sometimes predicated metaphorically in the case of God, it is still necessary to claim that ‘Word’ is predicated properly, i.e., predicated with respect to a person.

Reply to objection 2: With the sole exception of the name ‘Word’, nothing that pertains to the intellect in God is predicated with respect to a person. For it is only ‘Word’ that signifies something that emanates from another, since a word is what the intellect forms when it conceives something.

By contrast, insofar as the intellect itself is made to act by an intelligible species, it is being considered absolutely [and not relationally]—and the same holds for understanding (*intelligere*), which is related to the intellect as acting in the way that existing (*esse*) is related to an actual being. For ‘to understand’ does not signify an action that proceeds from the one who is understanding, but instead signifies an action that remains within the one who is understanding. Therefore, when it is claimed that a word is a cognition (*notitia*), ‘cognition’ is not being taken for the knower’s act of understanding or for any habit of his; instead, it is being taken for what the intellect conceives by its cognizing. This is why Augustine himself says that a word is “wisdom begotten,” which is nothing other than what is conceived by one who is wise, and which can also in a parallel manner be called ‘cognition begotten’.

This is also the way to understand the claim that for God to speak is for Him to “see by thinking”—viz., insofar as the Word of God is conceived by the vision of God’s thinking (*cogitatio*). Still, the name ‘thinking’ does not properly apply to the Word of God. For in *De Trinitate* 15 Augustine says, “The name ‘Word of God’ is not predicated in the way that ‘thinking’ is predicated—lest one believe that in God there is something unstable, as it were, which at one time takes the form of the Word of God and then can lose that form and in some way wallow around without a form.” For thinking properly consists in inquiry after the truth, which has no place in God. But when the intellect has already attained to the form of truth, it is no longer thinking, but is instead contemplating the truth in a perfect manner. Hence, Anselm is taking ‘think’ in an improper sense for ‘contemplate’.

Reply to objection 3: Just as ‘Word’, properly speaking, is predicated of a person in God and not of the divine essence, so too it is with ‘speak’. Hence, just as ‘Word’ is not common to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, so neither is it true that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one speaker. Hence, in *De Trinitate* 7 Augustine says, “The one who speaks by that coeternal Word is understood as not being alone in God.”

On the other hand, ‘to be spoken’ belongs to each of the persons. For it is not only a word that is spoken, but also the thing that is understood or signified by the word. Therefore, it belongs to one person alone in God to be spoken in the way in which a word is spoken, but it belongs to each of the persons to be spoken in the way that the thing understood is spoken by a word. For it is in understanding Himself and the Son and the Holy Spirit and all the other things contained in His knowledge that the Father conceives the Word, with the result that the whole Trinity, and every creature as well, is spoken in that Word—just as a man’s intellect ‘speaks’ a rock with the word it conceives when it understands a rock.

Now Anselm is taking ‘speak’ in an improper sense for ‘understand’, though the two differ. For ‘understand’ implies just the relation of the one understanding to the thing understood, and this relation does not imply any sort of origin, but merely implies that our intellect has a form, since our intellect is made to act by the form of the thing that is understood. However, as was shown above (q. 14, a. 2 and 4), in God ‘understand’ implies complete identity, since in God the intellect is altogether the same as the thing understood. On the other hand, ‘speak’ principally implies a relation to the word that is conceived, since to speak is nothing other than to utter a word; however, by the mediation of the word, ‘speak’ also implies a relation to the thing understood, which is made manifest by the uttered word to someone who understands that word.

And so only the person who utters the Word is speaking in God, even though each of the persons both understands and is understood—and, as a consequence, is spoken by the Word.

Reply to objection 4: In this passage ‘Word’ is being taken figuratively, since what is being called a ‘Word’ is that which is signified or effected by a word. For creatures are said to do the Word of God insofar as they bring about an effect to which they are ordained by the conceived Word of divine wisdom. In the same way, someone is said to do the word of a king when he does some deed to which he has been prompted by the king’s word.

Article 2

Is ‘Word’ a proper name of the Son?

It seems that ‘Word’ is not a proper name of the Son:

Objection 1: The Son is a subsistent person in God. But ‘Word’ does not signify a subsistent thing, as is clear in our own case. Therefore, ‘Word’ cannot be a proper name of the person of the Son.

Objection 2: A word proceeds from the speaker by way of an utterance. Therefore, if the Son is

properly speaking the ‘Word’, then He proceeds from the Father only by means of an utterance. But as is clear from Augustine in *De Haeresibus*, this is the heresy of Valentinus.

Objection 3: Every name that is proper to a [divine] person signifies some property of His. Therefore, if ‘Word’ is a proper name of the Son, then it will signify some property of His. And so there will more properties in God than those enumerated above (q. 32, a. 3).

Objection 4: If anyone understands, then he conceives a word in his understanding. But the Son understands. Therefore, there is a Word of the Son. And so ‘Word’ is not proper to the Son.

Objection 5: Hebrews 1:3 says of the Son, “He upholds all things by the word of his power.” Basil infers from this that the Holy Spirit is the Word of the Son. Therefore, it is not proper to the Son to be a Word.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* 6 Augustine says, “‘Word’ means the Son alone.”

I respond: In God the name ‘Word’, properly speaking, is taken with respect to a person, and it is a proper name of the person of the Son. For ‘Word’ signifies what emanates from the intellect, and, as was shown above (q. 27, a. 2), in God the person who proceeds by an emanation of the intellect is called the Son, and the relevant procession is called the generation. Hence, it follows that in God the Son alone is properly called the Word.

Reply to objection 1: In our case, to be (*esse*) and to understand (*intelligere*) are not the same, and so that which has intelligible *esse* in us does not pertain to our nature. But God’s *esse* is the same as His act of understanding, and so the Word of God is not an accident in Him or an effect of His; rather, it pertains to His very nature. And so it must be the case that the Word of God is something subsistent, since whatever exists in God’s nature is subsistent. This is why Damascene says, “The Word of God is substantial and a being in a hypostasis, whereas other words [*read: our words*] are powers of the soul.”

Reply to objection 2: As Hilary notes in *De Trinitate* 6, Valentinus was condemned not because—as the Arians misrepresented the matter—he claimed that the Son was begotten by an utterance, but rather, as is clear from Augustine in *De Haeresibus*, because of the various modes of utterance that he posited.

Reply to objection 3: The name ‘Word’ implies the same property implied by the name ‘Son’, and this is why Augustine says, “‘Word’ says the same thing as ‘Son’.” For the begottenness of the Son, which is His personal property, is signified by different names that are attributed to the Son in order to express the diverse aspects of His perfection. For the fact that He is connatural with the Father is expressed by the name ‘Son’; the fact that He is coeternal with the Father is expressed by the name ‘Splendor’; the fact that He is altogether similar to the Father is expressed by the name ‘Image’; and the fact that He is begotten in an immaterial mode is expressed by the name ‘Word’. And it was impossible to find any one name to designate all of these aspects.

Reply to objection 4: The Son understands in virtue of being God, since, as has been explained (a. 1), to understand is predicated of God with respect to the divine essence. However, the Son is God Begotten and not God Begetting. Hence, He understands not insofar as He produces the Word but insofar as He is the Word that proceeds. For in God the Word that proceeds does not differ in reality from the divine intellect, but is distinguished from the Word’s source (*principium*) only by a relation.

Reply to objection 5: When it is said of the Son that “He upholds all things by the word of his power,” the name ‘word’ is being taken figuratively for the effect of a word. Hence, the Gloss on this passage says that ‘word’ here means ‘command’, viz., insofar as it is because of the effect of the word’s power that things are conserved in being, just as it is because of the of the word’s power that things are brought into being.

Now when Basil interprets ‘word’ here as the Holy Spirit, he is speaking improperly and figuratively. For everything that is revelatory of someone can be called his word, and so the Holy Spirit

is called the word of the Son by reason of the fact that He makes the Son manifest.

Article 3

Does the name ‘Word’ imply a relation to creatures?

It seems that the name ‘Word’ does not imply a relation to creatures:

Objection 1: Every effect that connotes a relation to creatures is predicated of God with respect to the divine essence. But, as has been explained (a. 1), ‘Word’ is predicated of God with respect to a person and not with respect to the essence. Therefore, ‘Word’ does not imply a relation to creatures.

Objection 2: Names that imply a relation to creatures, e.g., ‘lord’ and ‘creator’, are predicated of God from a given point in time. But ‘Word’ is predicated of God from eternity. Therefore, ‘Word’ does not imply a relation to creatures.

Objection 3: ‘Word’ implies a relation to that from which it proceeds. Therefore, if it implies a relation to creatures, then it follows that the Word proceeds from a creature.

Objection 4: There are many divine ideas, corresponding to the diverse relations to creatures. Therefore, if ‘Word’ implies a relation to creatures, it follows that in God there are many Words and not just one Word.

Objection 5: If ‘Word’ implies a relation to creatures, then this is only because creatures are known by God. But God knows not only beings, but also non-beings. Therefore, ‘Word’ will imply a relation to non-beings—which seems false.

But contrary to this: In 83 *Quaestiones* Augustine says, “The name ‘Word’ signifies not only a relation to the Father, but also a relation to those things that are made through the Word by means of the operative power.”

I respond: ‘Word’ implies a relation to creatures. For in knowing Himself, God knows every creature. But a word conceived in the mind represents each thing that is actually being understood. Hence, in our case there are different words corresponding to the different things that we understand. But since God understands Himself and all things by a single act, His single Word expresses not only the Father but all creatures as well. And just as God’s knowledge of God is merely speculative (*cognoscitiva*) whereas His knowledge of creatures is both speculative and creative (*factiva*), so too the Word of God is merely expressive (*expressiva*) of that which is in God the Father, but is both expressive of and operative with respect to creatures. It is because of this that Psalm 32:9 says, “He spoke and they were made.” For the Word implies a creative idea of the things that God makes.

Reply to objection 1: The name ‘person’ includes ‘nature’ in an oblique grammatical case, since a person is an individual substance with a rational nature. Therefore, the name of a divine person does not imply a relation to creatures as far as the personal relation is concerned, but instead implies only that which pertains to the divine nature. However, nothing prevents it from implying a relation to creatures insofar as it includes the divine essence in its signification. For just as it is proper to the Son to be the Son, so too it is proper to Him to be God Begotten, i.e., the Creator Begotten. And it is in this way that a relation to creatures is implied by the name ‘Word’.

Reply to objection 2: Since relations follow upon actions, some names implying a relation of God to creatures—e.g., ‘create’, ‘govern’, and others of this sort—follow upon God’s action with respect to an exterior *transeunt* effect. Such names are predicated of God from a given point in time. On the other hand, some names—e.g., ‘know’, ‘will’, and others of this sort—imply a relation which follows upon an action that remains within the agent and does not pass into an exterior effect. And names of this sort are

not predicated of God from a given point in time. It is a relation to creatures of this latter sort that is implied by the name 'Word'.

Moreover, it is not true that names implying a relation of God to creatures are all predicated from a given point in time. Instead, the only names that are predicated of God from a given point in time are those which imply a relation that follows upon God's action with respect to a *transeunt* exterior effect.

Reply to objection 3: Creatures are known by God through His essence and not by a knowledge that is taken from the creatures. Hence, it is not necessary for the Word to proceed from creatures, even though the Word expresses creatures.

Reply to objection 4: The name 'idea' is imposed mainly to signify a relation to creatures, and so it is used in the plural of God and does not pertain to a person. By contrast, the name 'Word' is imposed mainly to signify (a) a relation to the speaker of the Word and, as a consequence, (b) a relation to creatures insofar as God understands every creature in understanding Himself. For this reason, there is in God just a single Word, and the name 'Word' is predicated with respect to a person.

Reply to objection 5: God's Word is of non-beings in just the way that God's knowledge is of non-beings. For, as Augustine puts it, there is nothing less in God's Word than in God's knowledge.

Still, the Word both expresses and produces beings, but [merely] expresses and manifests non-beings.