

QUESTION 27

The Procession of the Divine Persons

Now that we have considered what pertains to the oneness of the divine essence (questions 2-26), what remains is to consider those things that pertain to the Trinity of persons in God (questions 27-43).

Because the divine persons are distinguished by their relations of origin, the order of teaching dictates that we should consider, first, the origin or procession (question 27); second, the relations of origin (question 28); and third, the persons themselves (questions 29-43).

On the topic of procession there are five questions: (1) Are there any processions in God? (2) Can any procession in God be called a generation? (3) Besides generation, can there be any other procession in God? (4) Can this other procession be called a generation? (5) Are there more than two processions in God?

Article 1

Are there any processions in God?

It seems that there cannot be any processions in God:

Objection 1: ‘Procession’ signifies an external movement. But there is nothing moveable in God, and there is nothing external in God. Therefore, neither is there any procession in God.

Objection 2: What proceeds is diverse from what it proceeds from. But within God there is no diversity at all, but instead the greatest simplicity. Therefore, there are no processions in God.

Objection 3: To proceed from another seems incompatible with the concept of a first principle. But, as was shown above (q. 2, a. 3), God is a first principle. Therefore, procession has no place in God.

But contrary to this: In John 8:42 our Lord says, “From God I proceeded.”

I respond: In speaking of God, divine Scripture uses names that pertain to procession. However, different thinkers have understood this sort of procession in different ways.

Some have understood this sort of procession in the manner of an effect proceeding from its cause. This is the way Arius understood it when he claimed that the Son proceeds from the Father as His first creature, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as the creature of them both. On this interpretation, neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit would be true God. But this is contrary to what is said about the Son at 1 John 5:20 (“... that we may be in His true Son; this is the true God”). And as for the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 6:19 says, “Know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Spirit?” But it belongs to God alone to have a temple.

Others have understood procession in the manner in which a cause is said to proceed into its effect, either because it moves its effect or because it imprints a likeness of itself on it. This is the way in which Sabellius was taking ‘procession’ when he claimed that God the Father is Himself called the Son insofar as He assumed flesh from the virgin. Again, he claimed that the same Father is the Holy Spirit insofar as He sanctifies rational creatures and moves them toward life. But this understanding is undermined by our Lord’s words about Himself at John 5:19, when He says, “The Son cannot do any thing of Himself,” and in many other passages that prove that it is not the Father Himself who is the Son.

Now if one considers the matter carefully, both these positions understand procession as directed toward something external, and hence neither of them posits a procession within God Himself. But since every procession involves an action, it follows that just as there is an external procession in the case of an action directed toward an external subject, so too there is an internal procession in the case of an action that remains within the agent itself. This is especially clear in the case of the intellect, whose action—viz., an act of intellectual understanding—remains within the one who understands. For when

anyone has an act of intellectual understanding, then by the very fact that he has the act of intellectual understanding, something proceeds within him—viz., a conception of what is understood (*conceptio rei intellectae*) that arises from the intellectual power and proceeds from the cognition of what is understood (*ex eius notitia procedens*). This conception is signified by the spoken word and is called the ‘word of the heart’ (*verbum cordis*), which is signified by the ‘word of the voice’ (*verbum vocis*).

Now since God surpasses all things, whatever is said of God is to be understood not according to the mode of lower creatures, which are bodies, but rather according to a likeness taken from the highest creatures, which are intellectual substances—though even a likeness so taken falls short as a representation of divine things. Therefore, procession is not to be understood as it exists in corporeal things—whether in the manner of a local movement or in the manner of a cause’s action on an external effect, e.g., heat proceeding from the thing that produces heat to the thing that is heated. Rather, procession is to be understood here in the sense of an intellectual emanation (*secundum emanationem intelligibilem*)—more specifically, the emanation of a meaningful word from a speaker, where the word remains within the speaker. This is the sense in which the Catholic Faith posits procession within God.

Reply to objection 1: This argument is talking about a procession which is a local movement or, at least, an action that is directed toward an exterior subject or exterior effect. But as has been explained, this is not the sort of procession that exists in God.

Reply to objection 2: What proceeds by a procession directed toward something exterior must indeed be diverse from what it proceeds from. However, what proceeds internally by an intellectual process (*ad intra processu intelligibili*) need not be diverse. In fact, the more perfectly it proceeds, the more united it is to what it proceeds from. For, clearly, the better something is understood, (a) the more intimate its intellectual conception (*conceptio intellectualis*) is to the one who understands, and (b) the more united it is to him; for the intellect has an actual understanding insofar as it comes to be united with the thing understood. So since, as was explained above (q. 14, a.1), God’s act of intellectual understanding has the ultimate in perfection, it must be the case that the divine Word is perfectly one with what it proceeds from, without any sort of diversity.

Reply to objection 3: To proceed from a principle as something external to and diverse from that principle is indeed incompatible with the concept of a first principle. But to proceed in an intellectual mode as something intimate and non-diverse is included in the concept of a first principle. For instance, when we say that the builder is a principle of the house, his conception of his craft is included in the concept of this principle—and it would be included in the concept of the first principle if the builder were the first principle. But God, who is the first principle of things, is related to created things as a craftsman is related to his artifacts.

Article 2

Can any procession in God be called a generation?

It seems that no procession in God can be called a generation (*non possit dici generatio*):

Objection 1: Generation is a transition from non-being to being (*mutatio de non esse ad esse*), the opposite of corruption; and matter is the subject of both generation and corruption. But none of this belongs to God. Therefore, there cannot be any generation in God.

Objection 2: As has been explained (a. 1), procession in God has an intellectual mode. But in our case this sort of intellectual procession is not called a generation. Therefore, neither is it called a generation in the case of God.

Objection 3: Everything that is begotten receives its *esse* from the one who generates it. Therefore, the *esse* of whatever is begotten is received *esse*. But no received *esse* is subsistent *per se*. Therefore, since, as was proved above (q. 3, a. 4), God's *esse* is *esse* that subsists *per se*, it follows that the *esse* of anything that is begotten is not God's *esse*. Therefore, there is no generation in God.

But contrary to this: Psalm 2:7 says, "This day have I begotten you."

I respond: The procession of the Word in God is called a generation. To see this clearly, notice that we use the name 'generation' in two senses.

In one sense, we use it broadly for all generable and corruptible things, and in this sense generation is nothing other than a transition from non-being to being.

The other sense is proper to living things, and in this sense 'generation' signifies the origin of a living thing from a living principle that is conjoined with it. This is properly called 'nativity' (*nativitas*). Yet not everything of this sort is said to be 'begotten' (*genitum*); rather, what is begotten, properly speaking, is that which proceeds according to a type of likeness. Thus, a hair or a whisker does not satisfy the concept of a child (*filius*) or of what is begotten. Only something that proceeds by way of a likeness does—but not just any sort of likeness. For instance, worms of the sort generated inside of animals do not satisfy this concept of generation or filiation, even though there is a likeness with respect to the genus *animal*. Rather, what is required for this sense of 'generation' is that the thing proceed by way of a likeness with respect to the *same specific nature*, e.g., a man from a man, and a horse from a horse.

Now in the case of those living things which, like men and animals, proceed from potentiality into the act of living, the generation includes both of the above senses of 'generation'. However, if there is some living thing whose life does not pass from potentiality into actuality, then a procession found in this sort of living thing excludes the first sense of 'generation' altogether. Nonetheless, such a procession can still be a generation in the sense of 'generation' that is proper to living things. This, then, is the sense in which the procession of the Word in God satisfies the concept of generation. For the Word proceeds (a) in the manner of an *intellectual action*, which is a vital operation; (b) from a *conjoined principle*, as has already been explained above (a. 1); (c) according to a type of *likeness*, since the intellect's conception is a likeness of the thing understood; and (d) as something that has the *very same nature*, since, as was shown above (q. 14, a. 4), in God the act of understanding is the same as the *esse*. Hence, the procession of the Word in God is called a generation, and the Word Himself who proceeds is called the Son.

Reply to objection 1: This objection is talking about generation in the first sense, which implies a transition from potentiality to actuality. And, as has been explained, in God there is no generation in this sense.

Reply to objection 2: In our case the act of intellectual understanding is not the very substance of the intellect. Hence, the word that proceeds in us by way of an intellectual operation is not of the same nature as that from which it proceeds. Hence, the nature of generation does not belong to it properly and completely.

However, as was shown above (14, a. 4), God's act of understanding is the very substance of Him who understands. Hence, the Word that proceeds from it proceeds as something subsistent with the same nature. Because of this, the Word is properly said to be begotten and to be the Son. This is why Scripture uses terms that pertain to the generation of living things, viz., 'conception' (*conceptio*) and 'birth' (*partus*), in order to signify the procession of the divine Wisdom. For instance, Proverbs 8:24-25 says in the personage of the divine Wisdom, "The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived . . . before the hills, I was given birth."

Still, in the case of our intellect we do use the name 'conception', since in the word of our intellect there is a likeness of the thing understood, though not an identity of nature.

Reply to objection 3: Not everything that is received is received in a subject; otherwise, one could not claim that the total substance of a created thing is received from God, since there is no subject that receives the whole of the substance. Therefore, that which is begotten in God does not receive *esse* from the one who generates in the sense that this *esse* is received in some matter or subject—that would be incompatible with the subsistence of the divine *esse*. Instead, this *esse* is said to be received insofar as that which proceeds from the other has divine *esse* and does not exist as something distinct from the divine *esse*. For the very perfection of the divine *esse* contains both the Word that proceeds intellectually and the principle of the Word. For as was explained above (q. 4, a. 2), the divine *esse* contains everything that pertains to its perfection.

Article 3

Is there a procession in God other than the generation of the Word?

It seems that there is no procession in God other than the generation of the Word:

Objection 1: There would, for the same reason, be another procession from the second procession, and so there would be an infinite regress—which is absurd. Therefore, one should stop with the first procession, so that there is only a single procession in God.

Objection 2: For every nature, there is just one way of communicating that nature, and this is because operations are the same or different according to their termini. But a procession in God is nothing but a communication of the divine nature. Therefore, since, as was shown above (q. 11, a. 3), there is just a single divine nature, it follows that there is just a single procession in God.

Objection 3: If there were some other procession in God distinct from the intellectual procession of the Word, it would have to be a procession of love, which would involve an operation of the will. But such a procession could not be distinct from the intellect's intellectual procession, since, as was shown above (q. 19, a. 1), in God the will is not distinct from the intellect. Therefore, in God there is no procession other than the procession of the Word.

But contrary to this: As John 15:26 says, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. But the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Son—this according to John 14:16 (“I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete”). Therefore, there is in God another procession besides the procession of the Word.

I respond: In God there are two processions, viz., the procession of the Word and one other. To see this clearly, notice that in God a procession involves only an action which remains within the agent Himself and is not directed to anything external. But in an intellectual nature, the actions of this sort are the action of the intellect and the action of the will. The procession of the Word involves an action of the intellect. Now in our own case the other sort of procession, viz., the procession of love, involves an operation of the will, in which what is loved exists in the lover, just as through the conception of a word, the thing spoken or understood (*res dicta vel intellecta*) exists in the one who understands. Hence, in addition to the procession of the Word, another procession is posited in God, viz., the procession of the Love.

Reply to objection 1: There is no need to proceed to infinity in the divine processions. For the procession that is intrinsic to an intellectual nature is terminated in the procession that involves the will.

Reply to objection 2: As was shown above (q. 3, a. 3 and 4), whatever exists in God is God—something that is not true of other things. And so the divine nature, and no other nature, is communicated through any procession that is not directed toward something external.

Reply to objection 3: Even though the intellect and will are not distinct in God, nonetheless, it is part of the nature of an intellect and will that the processions that involve their actions have a certain ordering with respect to one another. For there is no procession of love except in relation to the procession of a word, since nothing can be loved by the will unless it is conceived by the intellect. Therefore, just as the Word is ordered to the principle from which it proceeds, despite the fact that in God the substance of the intellect is the same as the intellect's conception, so, too, despite the fact that the intellect and will are the same in God, the procession of the Love has an ordering distinct from the procession of the Word in God, because it is part of the nature of love that it should proceed only from a conception of the intellect.

Article 4

Is the procession of the Love in God a generation?

It seems that the procession of the Love in God is a generation:

Objection 1: Among living things, that which proceeds with a likeness of nature is said to be 'generated' and 'born' (*generatum et nascens*). But in the case of God, that which proceeds in the mode of love proceeds with a likeness of nature—otherwise, it would be something external to the divine nature and the procession would thus be directed toward something external. Therefore, that which proceeds in God in the mode of love proceeds as something begotten and born.

Objection 2: Just as likeness belongs to the nature of a word, so too it belongs to the nature of love; this is why Ecclesiasticus 13:19 says, "Every beast loves its like." Therefore, if it is by reason of a likeness that the Word which proceeds is generated and born, then it seems that the Love which proceeds is likewise generated.

Objection 3: Whatever belongs to a genus belongs to some species of that genus. Therefore, if there is a procession of the Love in God, then besides the common name 'procession', it must have some more specific name. But there is no name to give it other than 'generation'. Therefore, it seems that the procession of the Love in God is a generation.

But contrary to this: On this view it would follow that the Holy Spirit, who proceeds as the Love, would proceed as begotten. But this is contrary to the Athanasian creed, which says: "The Holy Spirit is not made or created or begotten by the Father and the Son, but proceeds from them."

I respond: The procession of the Love in God should not be called a generation. To see this clearly, note that the difference between the intellect and the will is that the intellect comes to have its act in virtue of the fact that what is understood exists in the intellect by means of its likeness, whereas the will comes to have its act not in virtue of the fact that a likeness of what is willed exists in the will, but rather in virtue of the fact that the will has an inclination toward what is willed. Therefore, a procession that takes place in accord with the nature of the intellect involves a type of likeness, and it can satisfy the concept *generation* because each generator generates what is similar to itself. By contrast, a procession that takes place in accord with the nature of the will is thought of not as involving a type of likeness, but rather as involving an impulse or movement toward something. And so that which proceeds in God in the mode of love does not proceed as something that is begotten or as a Son, but rather proceeds as Spirit, where the name 'Spirit' signifies a certain vital movement and impulse—in the way that someone is said to be moved or impelled by love to do something.

Reply to objection 1: Whatever exists in God is one with the divine nature. Hence, one cannot construct on the basis of this oneness a special argument about this or that procession, according to which

the one is distinguished from the other. Instead, a special argument about this or that procession has to be based on the ordering of the one procession toward the other. But an ordering of this sort involves the nature of the will and the intellect. Hence, it is in accord with the proper nature of the intellect and the will that the two processions in God receive names that are imposed to signify the proper nature of the reality. And, for this reason, what proceeds in the mode of love receives the divine nature and yet is not said to be born.

Reply to objection 2: Likeness pertains in one way to the Word and in a different way to the Love. For it pertains to the Word insofar as the Word Himself is a likeness of what is understood, in the way that what is begotten is a likeness of the generator. On the other hand, likeness pertains to the Love not because the Love Himself is a likeness, but because likeness is a principle of loving. Hence, it follows not that the Love is begotten, but that what is begotten is a principle of the Love.

Reply to objection 3: As was explained above (q. 13, a. 1), we cannot name God except from creatures. And since among creatures the communication of the nature occurs only through generation, procession in God does not have a proper or special name other than ‘generation’. Hence, the procession that is not a generation remains without a special name. Nonetheless, we can name it ‘spiration’, because it is the procession of the Spirit.

Article 5

Are there more than two processions in God?

It seems that there are more than two processions in God:

Objection 1: Just as knowledge and will are attributed to God, so, too, is power. Therefore, if there are two processions in God with respect to intellect and will, then it seems that there should be a third procession with respect to power.

Objection 2: Goodness seems especially apt to be a principle of procession, since the good is said to be diffusive of itself. Therefore, it seems that there should be a procession with respect to goodness in God.

Objection 3: The power of fecundity is greater in God than in us. But in us there are many processions of words and not just one, since in our case one word proceeds from another; and similarly, one love proceeds from another love. Therefore, in God there are likewise more than two processions.

But contrary to this: In God there are only two who proceed, viz., the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, there are only two processions in God.

I respond: Processions cannot exist in God except with respect to actions that remain within the agent. But there are just two such actions in an intellectual and divine nature, viz., understanding and willing. For sensing, which likewise seems to be an operation within sentient beings, lies outside of an intellectual nature and is not totally removed from the genus of actions that are directed toward the outside, since sensing is perfected by the action of the sensible thing on the senses themselves. Therefore, it follows that there can be no processions in God other than the procession of the Word and the procession of the Love.

Reply to objection 1: Power is a principle of acting on another, and so in the case of power it is action with respect to something external that is understood. Thus, with respect to the attribute of power there is no procession of a divine person, but only the procession of creatures.

Reply to objection 2: As Boethius says in *De Hebdomadibus*, good pertains to the essence and not to action—unless perhaps as the object of an act of will. Hence, since the divine processions necessarily

involve certain actions, it follows that with respect to goodness and other such attributes there are no other processions besides the procession of the Word and the procession of the Love. For it is these two processions by which God understands and loves His own essence, truth, and goodness.

Reply to objection 3: As was established above (q. 14, a. 7 and q. 19, a. 5), God understands all things by one simple act and, similarly, wills all things by one simple act. Hence, in Him there cannot be any procession of one word from another word or of one love from another love. Rather, in Him there exists just one perfect Word and one perfect Love. And it is in this that His perfect fecundity is manifested.