

QUESTION 20

Christ's Subjection to the Father

Next we have to consider those things that belong to Christ in relation to the Father, viz., that He was subject to the Father (question 20), that He prayed to the Father (question 21), and that He ministered to the Father in the priesthood (question 22). On the other hand, certain things are said, or can be said, about the Father's relation to Him, e.g., whether the Father adopted Him (question 23) and whether the Father predestined Him (question 24).

Therefore, we have to consider, first, Christ's subjection to the Father; second, His prayer; third, His priesthood; fourth, whether adoption is appropriate for Him; and, fifth, His predestination.

On the first topic there are two questions: (1) Is Christ subject to the Father? (2) Is Christ subject to His very self?

Article 1

Should it be said that Christ is subject to the Father?

It seems that it should not be said that Christ is subject to the Father (*non sit dicendum Christum esse subiectum Patri*):

Objection 1: Everything that is subject to God the Father is a creature, since, as it says in *De Ecclesiasticis Dogmatibus*, "Within the Trinity there is nothing subservient or subjected." But as was explained above (q. 16, a. 8), it should not be said without qualification (*simpliciter*) that Christ is a creature. Therefore, it should likewise not be said without qualification that Christ is subject to God the Father.

Objection 2: Something is said to be subject to God from the fact that it serves His Lordship (*eius dominio serviens*). But service (*servitudo*) cannot be attributed to the human nature in Christ; for in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3 Damascene says, "Notice that we cannot call it"—viz., Christ's human nature—"a servant. For the names 'service' (*servitudo*) and 'Lordship' (*dominatio*) are not names of the nature, but names of relations, like 'paternity' and 'filiation'." Therefore, with respect to His human nature Christ is not subject to God the Father.

Objection 3: 1 Corinthians 15:28 says, "And when all things have been made subject to Him, then the Son Himself shall be subject to Him who has subjected all things to Him." But as Hebrews 2:8 says, "We do not yet see all things subject to Him." Therefore, He is not yet subject to the Father, who has subjected all things to Him.

But contrary to this: John 14:28 says, "The Father is greater than I." And in *De Trinitate* 1 Augustine says, "It is not without merit that the Scriptures say both things: that the Son is equal to the Father and that the Father is greater than the Son. For one understands without any confusion that the former is true because of the form of God, whereas the latter is true because of the form of a servant. But what is lesser is subject to what is greater. Therefore, Christ, as regards the form of a servant, is subject to the Father."

I respond: The things that are proper to a given nature are fitting for whatever has that nature. Now a human nature is from its founding (*ex sui conditione*) subject to God in three ways:

In one way, according to its degree of goodness, given that, as is clear from Dionysius in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 2, the divine nature is the very essence of goodness, whereas a created nature has some sort of participation in the divine nature in the sense of being subject to the rays of that goodness.

In the second way, a human nature is subject to God *as regards God's power*, insofar as a human

nature, just like any creature, is subject to the operation of God's arrangement of things (*subiacet operationi divinae dispositionis*).

In the third way, a human nature specifically is subject to God through its own proper act, viz., insofar as it *obeys His commandments by its own will*.

And Christ professes, concerning about Himself (*de seipso*), this threefold subjection to His Father:

The first sort of subjection is found in Matthew 19:17, "Why do you ask me about the good? Only God is good." Here Jerome comments, "Since he had called Him 'Good teacher ...' and had not confessed Him to be God or the Son of God, [our Lord] replied that even a holy man is not good in comparison with God." He thereby gave us to understand that *with respect to His human nature, He did not attain to the level of divine goodness*. And since, as Augustine says in *De Trinitate* 6, "in those things that are great in a non-physical way (*non mole magna*), 'greater' is the same as 'better', the Father is called greater than Christ with respect to His human nature."

The second sort of subjection is attributed to Christ insofar as all the things that were done to Christ's human nature are taken on faith to have happened because of God's plan (*divina dispositione gesta creduntur*). Hence, in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 4, Dionysius says that Christ "is subject to God the Father's ordinances." And this is *the subjection of service* (*subiectio servitutis*), according to which every creature serves God as subject to His ordinances—this according to Wisdom 16:24 ("The creature serves you, his maker"). And, accordingly, even the Son of God is said to take on "the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7).

Christ attributes the third sort of subjection to Himself in John 8:29 when He says, "I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." And this is *the subjection of obedience* (*subiectio obedientiae*). Hence, Philippians 2:8 says, "He became obedient to the Father unto death."

Reply to objection 1: In keeping with what was said above (q. 16, a. 8), just as it should not be thought that Christ is a creature without qualification, but instead only with respect to His human nature, whether or not the determination is actually added to [the proposition], so, too, it should likewise not be thought that Christ is subject to the Father without qualification, but only with respect to His human nature, even if this determination is not added. However, it is more fitting to add the determination in order to avoid the error of Arius, who claimed that the Son is less great than the Father.

Reply to objection 2: The relation between service and lordship is founded upon acting and being acted upon, viz., insofar as it belongs to a servant to be acted upon by his lord via a command. Now to act is attributed not to the nature as an agent, but to the person, since, according to the Philosopher, "acts belong to supposita and singular entities." Still, the action of a nature is attributed to the nature as *that in accord with which* the person or *hypostasis* acts. Accordingly, nothing prevents one from saying that Christ is subject to the Father, or a servant of the Father, with respect to His human nature.

Reply to objection 3: As Augustine says in *De Trinitate* 1, "Christ will hand over the kingdom to His God and Father when He leads the just, in whom He now reigns, to the vision (*ad speciem*)," i.e., to their seeing the very essence that is common to the Father and the Son. And at that time He will be totally subject to the Father, not only in Himself but also in His members, through a full participation in the divine goodness. At that time He will also be fully subject to the Father through the final fulfillment of [the Father's] will concerning His members—even though all things are likewise subject to Him as regards power—this according to Matthew 28:18 ("All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me ...").

Article 2

Is Christ subject to His very self?

It seems that Christ is not subject to His very self (*Christus non sit sibi ipsi subiectus*):

Objection 1: In a synodic letter received by the Synod of Ephesus, Cyril says, “Christ Himself is neither the servant of Himself or nor the Lord of Himself. For it is fatuous, or rather even impious, to say or to think this.” And Damascene likewise asserted this in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3 when he said, “The single entity Christ cannot be the servant of Himself or the Lord of Himself.” But Christ is called the servant of the Father insofar as He is subject to the Father. Therefore, Christ is not subject to His very self.

Objection 2: A servant is related to a lord. But there is no relation of someone to himself. Hence, in *De Trinitate* Hilary says, “Nothing is similar to itself or equal to itself.” Therefore, Christ cannot be called a servant of Himself. And, as a result, neither can He be said to be subject to Himself.

Objection 3: As Athanasius says, “Just as a rational soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ.” But a man is not said to be subject to himself, or a servant of himself, or greater than himself, simply because his body is subject to his soul. Therefore, neither is Christ said to be subject to Himself simply because His human nature is subject to His divine nature.

But contrary to this 1: In *De Trinitate* 1 Augustine says, “In the same way in which the truth shows that the Father is greater than Christ with respect to Christ’s human nature, it likewise shows that the Son is less great than Himself.”

But contrary to this 2: As Augustine argues in the same place, the form of a servant was received by the Son of God in such a way that the form of God was not lost. But in accord with the form of God, which is common to the Father and the Son, the Father is greater than the Son with respect to the Son’s human nature. Therefore, the Son is likewise greater than Himself with respect to His human nature.

But contrary to this 3: Christ, with respect to His human nature, is a servant of God the Father—this according to John 20:17 (“I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”). But if anyone is a servant of the Father, then he is a servant of the Son; otherwise, it would not be the case that everything that belongs to the Father belongs to the Son. Therefore, Christ is a servant of Himself and subject to Himself.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1, ad 2), ‘lord’ and ‘servant’ are attributed to a person or *hypostasis* in accord with some nature. Therefore, when Christ is said to be the Lord of His very self or the servant of His very self, or when it is said that the Word of God is the Lord of the man Christ, there are two ways in which this can be understood:

In one way, it is understood to be said *by reason of another hypostasis or person*, in the sense that the person of the Word of God is different from the *hypostasis* or person of the man who serves—and this involves the heresy of Nestorius. Hence, in the condemnation of Nestorius from the Synod of Ephesus it says, “If anyone claims that the Word of God the Father is the God or Lord of Christ without confessing that the same Christ is both God and man, so that He is the Word made flesh in accord with the Scriptures, let him be anathema.” And that is the sense in which this claim is denied by Cyril and Damascene. And on this reading it is denied that Christ is less great than Himself or that He is subject to His very self.

In the second way, it is understood *with respect to a diversity of natures in a single person or hypostasis*. And on this reading we can say with respect to one of the natures, the one in which He agrees with the Father, that He is preeminent and Lord along with the Father, whereas with respect to the other nature, the one in which He agrees with us, we can say that He is a subject and serves. And it is on this

latter reading that Augustine claims that the Son is less great than Himself.

Notice, however, that when the name ‘Christ’, is, as with the name ‘Son’, the name of the person, those things that belong to Him by reason of His person, which is eternal, can be said in their own right and without qualification of Christ—and especially relations of the sort in question, which seem to belong more properly to the person or *hypostasis*. By contrast, those things that belong to Him with respect to His human nature should instead be attributed to Christ along with a qualification. More specifically, we may say without qualification that Christ is the Greatest, and the Lord, and the Ruler, whereas one should attribute to Him that He is a subject, or a servant, or less great, only with a qualification, viz., *with respect to His human nature*.

Reply to objection 1: Cyril and Damascene deny that Christ is the Lord of His very self insofar as what is thereby implied is a plurality of persons, which is required for someone’s being the lord of someone without qualification.

Reply to objection 2: If we are speaking without qualification, then the lord has to be different from the servant. Yet some of the character of lordship and service can be preserved insofar as the same individual is the lord or master of his very self in one or another respects.

Reply to objection 3: Because a human being has diverse parts, one of which is higher and the other lower, in *Ethics* 5 the Philosopher says in like manner, “A man’s justice is with respect to himself,” insofar as the irascible and concupiscible [parts of the soul] obey reason. In this way a individual man can be said to be subject to himself, and a servant to himself, with respect to his diverse parts.

Reply to the arguments for the contrary: The replies to the other arguments are clear from what has been said. For it is with respect to His human nature, and not because of a diversity of supposita, that Augustine claims that the Son is less great than Himself or that He is subject to Himself.