

QUESTION 23

Whether or not Adoption belongs to Christ

Next we have to consider whether or not adoption is fitting for Christ. And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Is it fitting for God to adopt children? (2) Is this fitting for the Father alone? (3) Is it peculiar to human beings to be adopted as children of God? (4) Can Christ be called an adopted son?

Article 1

Is it fitting for God to adopt children?

It seems that it is not fitting for God to adopt children (*Deo non conveniat filios adoptare*):

Objection 1: According to what jurists say, an individual adopts as a son only a person who is an outsider (*extraneam personam*). But no person is an outsider to God, who is the creator of all. Therefore, it seems not to be fitting for God to adopt.

Objection 2: Adoption seems to be introduced because natural filiation is lacking. But as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 27, a. 2), natural filiation is found in God. Therefore, it is not fitting for God to adopt children.

Objection 3: An individual is adopted in order that he might succeed the one who adopts him as his heir (*ut in hereditate adoptantis succedat*). But it seems that no one can succeed God as His heir, since He never dies. Therefore, it is inappropriate for God to adopt.

But contrary to this: Ephesians 1:5 says, “He predestined us to be adopted as children ...” But God’s predestination is not invalidated. Therefore, God adopts some individuals as His children.

I respond: A man adopts another individual as his child insofar as, out of his goodness, he admits that individual into participating in his inheritance. But God has infinite goodness, and because of this it happens that He admits His creatures to participate in goods—and especially His rational creatures, who, because they have been made to the image of God, have a capacity for divine beatitude (*sunt capaces beatitudinis divinae*). This beatitude consists in the enjoyment of God, through which God Himself is happy and in His own right rich, viz., insofar as He enjoys Himself. Now that which makes an individual rich is called his inheritance. And so insofar as God, out of His goodness, admits human beings to the inheritance of beatitude, He is said to adopt them.

Now the process of divine adoption (*adoptatio divina*) involves more than the process of human adoption does, because through the gift of grace God makes a human being whom He adopts fit to receive the heavenly inheritance, whereas a human being does not make an individual whom he adopts fit to receive the inheritance, but instead through adoption chooses an individual who is already fit to receive the inheritance.

Reply to objection 1: Thought of in his nature, a human being is not an outsider to God with respect to the natural goods that he receives, but he is an outsider with respect to the gifts of grace and glory. And it is on this score that he is adopted.

Reply to objection 2: It is appropriate for man to work in order to supply what he needs, but this does not apply to God, for whom it is appropriate to work in order to share His perfect abundance. And so just as by the act of creation God’s goodness is shared with all creatures through some sort of likeness [to Him], so by the act of adoption a likeness of natural filiation is shared with human beings—this according to Romans 8:29 (“Those whom He foreknew were conformed to the image of His Son”).

Reply to objection 3: Spiritual goods, but not corporeal goods, can be simultaneously possessed by many individuals. And so no one can receive a corporeal inheritance except by succeeding someone who has died. By contrast, everyone can fully receive a spiritual inheritance without detriment to the

Father who is always alive.

Perhaps, though, as is pointed out by a Gloss on Romans 8:17 (“And if we are His children, then we are His heirs too”), one could say that God ‘dies’ insofar as He exists in us through faith, in order to begin to exist in us through our vision of Him.

Article 2

Is it fitting for the whole Trinity to adopt?

It seems that it is not fitting for the whole Trinity to adopt:

Objection 1: In divine matters the process of adoption is talked about by way of a likeness to human affairs. But in human affairs adoption befits only an individual who is able to generate children, and in divine matters this applies only to the Father. Therefore, in divine matters only the Father is able to adopt.

Objection 2: Through adoption human beings are made the siblings of Christ—this according to Romans 8:29 (“... that He might be the firstborn among many brethren”). But siblings are those who are children of one father; hence, in John 20:17 our Lord says, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father.” Therefore, only the Father of Christ has adopted children.

Objection 3: Galatians 4:4-6 says, “God sent His Son ... so that we might receive the adoption as children of God. And because you are children of God, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying ‘Abba’.” Therefore, adopting belongs to the one to whom it belongs to have a Son and a Holy Spirit. But this belongs to the Father alone. Therefore, it is fitting for the person of the Father alone to adopt.

But contrary to this: It belongs to the one whom we can call Father to adopt us as children; hence, Romans 8:15 says, “You have received the spirit of adoption as children, whereby we cry: ‘Abba, Father’.” But when we say to God, “Our Father,” this pertains to the whole Trinity, just like the other names that are said of God in relation to creatures; this was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 33, a. 3 and q. 45, a. 6). Therefore, it is fitting for the whole Trinity to adopt.

I respond: The difference between an adopted son of God and the natural Son of God is that the natural Son of God is “begotten, not made,” whereas the adopted son is made—this according to John 1:12 (“He gave them power to be made children of God”). Still, an adopted son is sometimes said to be begotten because of his spiritual re-generation, which comes from grace and is not natural (*quae est gratuita, non naturalis*); hence, James 1:18 says, “For of His own will He has begotten us by the word of truth.”

Now even though in divine matters it is proper to the Father to generate, still, to work an effect in creatures is common to the whole Trinity because of the oneness of the [divine] nature; for where there is one nature, there has to be one power and one operation. Hence, in John 5:19 our Lord says, “Whatever the Father does, the Son does in like manner.” And so it belongs to the whole Trinity to adopt human beings as children of God.

Reply to objection 1: It is not the case that all human persons have numerically one nature, in the sense that there has to be one operation for all of them and one effect, as happens in divine matters. And so on this score it is not possible to find a similarity in the two cases.

Reply to objection 2: Through adoption we are made siblings of Christ in the sense of having the same Father as He does; however, the Father is the Father of Christ in one way and our Father in another way. Hence, it is significant that in John 20 our Lord said “my Father” separately from “your Father.”

For He is the Father of Christ by generating Him naturally, and this is proper to Himself, whereas He is our Father by doing something of His own will, and this is common to Himself, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And so Christ is not the Son of the whole Trinity in the way that we are children of the whole Trinity.

Reply to objection 3: As has been explained, adoptive filiation is a certain sort of likeness of eternal filiation, just as all things that are made in time are certain sorts of likenesses of those things that have existed from eternity. Now a man is made similar to the eternal splendor of the Son through the light of grace, which is attributed to the Holy Spirit. And so even though the process of adopting is common to the whole Trinity, it is appropriated (a) to the Father as its author, (b) to the Son as its exemplar, and (c) to the Holy Spirit as the one who imprints in us the likeness of this exemplar.

Article 3

Is it peculiar to the rational creature to be adopted?

It seems that it is not peculiar to the rational creature to be adopted (*adoptari non sit proprium rationalis creaturae*):

Objection 1: God is the Father of the rational creature only through adoption. But He is called the Father of the non-rational creature as well—this according to Job 38:28 (“Who is the father of the rain? Or who has begotten the dew drops?”). Therefore, it is not peculiar to the rational creature to be adopted.

Objection 2: Because of adoption individuals are called children of God. But in Scripture it is to the angels that being sons of God seems to be properly attributed—this according to Job 1:6 (“On a certain day, when the sons of God came to stand before the Lord ...”). Therefore, it is not peculiar to the rational creature to be adopted.

Objection 3: What is peculiar to a given nature belongs to all the things that have that nature, in the way that being risible belongs to all human beings. But being adopted does not belong to every rational nature. Therefore, it is not peculiar to the rational nature to be adopted.

But contrary to this: As is clear from Romans 8:17, the adopted children are “heirs of God.” Therefore, it is peculiar to the rational creature to be adopted.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1, ad 2), adoptive filiation bears a certain likeness to natural filiation. But the Son of God proceeds naturally from the Father as the intellectual Word and is one with the Father Himself. Therefore, there are three ways in which something can be like this Word:

First, with respect to the character of a form, though not with respect to its intellectuality (*non autem secundum intellectualitatem*)—in the way that the form of an externally constructed house is like the craftsman’s mental word as regards the species of the form, but not as regards its intelligibility, since the form of the house is not intelligible in the matter as it was in the mind of the craftsman. And on this score every creature is like the eternal Word, because it was made through the Word.

Second, a creature is like the Word not only with respect to the character of a form, but also with respect to its intellectuality, in the way that the knowledge which exists in the mind of the student is like the word which exists in the mind of the teacher. And on this score the rational creature, even in its nature, is like the eternal Word.

Third, a creature is like the eternal Word with respect to the oneness that He has with the Father, and this likeness is effected through grace and charity; hence, in John 17:21-22 our Lord prays, “Let them be one in us, just as we are one.” And this sort of likeness brings to completion the character of adoption, since an eternal inheritance is owed to those who have this sort of likeness.

Hence, it is clear that being adopted belongs to the rational creature alone—though not to every rational creature, but only to a rational creature who has charity, which, as Romans 5:5 says, “is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” And this is why, in Romans 8:15, the Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of the adoption of children.”

Reply to objection 1: God is called the Father of the non-rational creature not properly speaking because of adoption, but instead because of creation, in accord with the first sort of participation in likeness [noted above].

Reply to objection 2: The angels are called sons of God not because this befits them primarily, but because they were the first ones to receive adoption as sons (*non quia ipsis primo conveniat, sed quia ipsi primo adoptionem filiorum receperunt*).

Reply to objection 3: Adoption is a property that follows not upon nature, but upon grace, which the rational nature has a capacity for. And so adoption does not have to be fitting for every rational creature; instead, what has to be the case is that every rational creature has a capacity for adoption.

Article 4

Is Christ as a man an adopted son of God?

It seems that Christ as a man is an adopted son of God (*Christus secundum quod homo sit filius Dei adoptivus*):

Objection 1: In speaking about Christ, Hilary says, “The dignity of His power is not lost when the human nature of flesh is adopted.” Therefore, Christ as a man is an adopted son.

Objection 2: In *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* Augustine says, “That man is Christ by the same grace by which any man is a Christian from the beginning of his faith.” But other men are Christians by the grace of adoption. Therefore, that man is likewise Christ by adoption. And so it seems that He is an adopted son.

Objection 3: Christ as a man is a servant. But it is more dignified to be an adopted son than to be a servant. Therefore, *a fortiori*, Christ as a man is an adopted son.

But contrary to this: In *De Incarnatione* Ambrose says, “We do not say that an adopted son is a son by nature; instead, we say that he who is the true son is the son by nature.” But Christ is the true and natural Son of God—this according to 1 John 5:20 (“... that we might exist in His true Son, Jesus Christ”). Therefore, Christ as a man is not an adopted son.

I respond: Filiation belongs properly to the *hypostasis* or person and not to the nature. Hence, in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 32, a. 3 and q. 34, a. 2 and q. 40, a. 1) it was explained that filiation is a personal property (*proprietas personalis*). But in Christ there is no person or *hypostasis* other than the uncreated person, to whom it belongs to be a Son by nature.

Now it was explained above (a. 1, ad 2) that the sort of filiation that belongs to adoption is a participated likeness of natural filiation. But it is not the case that what is predicated of something by way of participation is predicated of it in its own right (*non autem dicitur aliquid participative quod perse dicitur*). And so Christ, who is the natural Son of God, can in no way be called an adopted son.

On the other hand, according to those who posit two persons or two *hypostases*—i.e., two *supposita*—in Christ, there is no reason that prohibits the man Christ from being called an adopted son.

Reply to objection 1: Just as filiation does not properly belong to the nature, so neither does adoption. And so when it is said that “the human nature of flesh is adopted,” the locution is improper and ‘adoption’ is here being taken for the union of the human nature with the person of the Son.

Reply to objection 2: The likeness posited by Augustine should be understood with respect to the *principle*, since, namely, just as every man has without merit the fact that he is a Christian, so, too, that man had without merit the fact that He was Christ.

Yet there is a difference with respect to the *terminus*, since, namely, Christ is a natural Son through the grace of union, whereas the others are adopted children through habitual grace. By contrast, the habitual grace that belongs to Christ does not make an adopted son out of a non-son, but is instead an effect in Christ's soul of His [natural] filiation—this according to John 1:14 (“We have seen His glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth”).

Reply to objection 3: Being a creature, along with being a servant or a subject of God, has to do not only with the person, but also with the nature—something that cannot be said of filiation. And so the two lines of reasoning are not similar.