

**FIRST PART, QUESTION 41**  
**Of the Persons in Reference to the Notional Acts**  
*(In Six Articles)*

We now consider the persons in reference to the notional acts, concerning which six points of inquiry arise:

- (1) Whether the notional acts are to be attributed to the persons?
- (2) Whether these acts are necessary, or voluntary?
- (3) Whether as regards these acts, a person proceeds from nothing or from something?
- (4) Whether in God there exists a power as regards the notional acts?
- (5) What this power means?
- (6) Whether several persons can be the term of one notional act?

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**Whether the notional acts are to be attributed to the persons?**

Ia q. 41 a. 1

**Objection 1.** It would seem that the notional acts are not to be attributed to the persons. For Boethius says (De Trin.): “Whatever is predicated of God, of whatever genus it be, becomes the divine substance, except what pertains to the relation.” But action is one of the ten “genera.” Therefore any action attributed to God belongs to His essence, and not to a notion.

**Objection 2.** Further, Augustine says (De Trin. v, 4,5) that, “everything which is said of God, is said of Him as regards either His substance, or relation.” But whatever belongs to the substance is signified by the essential attributes; and whatever belongs to the relations, by the names of the persons, or by the names of the properties. Therefore, in addition to these, notional acts are not to be attributed to the persons.

**Objection 3.** Further, the nature of action is of itself to cause passion. But we do not place passions in God. Therefore neither are notional acts to be placed in God.

**On the contrary,** Augustine (Fulgentius, De Fide ad Petrum ii) says: “It is a property of the Father to beget the Son.” Therefore notional acts are to be placed in God.

**I answer that,** In the divine persons distinction is founded on origin. But origin can be properly designated only by certain acts. Wherefore, to signify the order of origin in the divine persons, we must attribute notional acts to the persons.

**Reply to Objection 1.** Every origin is designated by an act. In God there is a twofold order of origin: one, inasmuch as the creature proceeds from Him, and this is common to the three persons; and so those actions which are attributed to God to designate the proceeding of creatures from Him, belong to His essence. Another order of origin in God regards the procession of person from person; wherefore the acts which designate the order of this origin are called notional; because the notions of the persons are the mutual relations of the persons, as is clear from what was above explained (q. 32, a. 2).

**Reply to Objection 2.** The notional acts differ from the relations of the persons only in their mode of signification; and in reality are altogether the same. Whence the Master says that “generation and nativity in other words are paternity and filiation” (Sent. i, D, xxvi). To see this, we must consider that the origin of one thing from another is firstly inferred from movement: for that anything be changed from its disposition by movement evidently arises from some cause. Hence action, in its primary sense, means origin of movement; for, as movement derived from another into a mobile object, is called “passion,” so the origin of movement itself as beginning from another and terminating in what is moved, is called “action.” Hence, if we take away movement, action implies nothing more than order of origin, in so far as action proceeds from some cause or principle to what is from that principle. Consequently, since in God no movement exists, the personal action of the one producing a person is only the habitude of the principle to the person who is from the principle; which habitudes are the relations, or the notions. Nevertheless we cannot speak of divine and intelligible things except after the manner of sensible things, whence we derive our knowledge, and wherein actions and passions, so far as these imply movement, differ from the relations which result from action and passion, and therefore it was necessary to signify the habitudes of the persons separately after the manner of act, and separately after the manner of relations. Thus it is evident that they are really the same, differing only in their mode of signification.

**Reply to Objection 3.** Action, so far as it means origin of movement, naturally involves passion; but action in that sense is not attributed to God. Whence, passions are attributed to Him only from a grammatical standpoint, and in accordance with our manner of speaking, as we attribute “to beget” with the Father, and to the Son “to be begotten.”

**Objection 1.** It would seem that the notional acts are voluntary. For Hilary says (De Synod.): “Not by natural necessity was the Father led to beget the Son.”

**Objection 2.** Further, the Apostle says, “He transferred us to the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:13). But love belongs to the will. Therefore the Son was begotten of the Father by will.

**Objection 3.** Further, nothing is more voluntary than love. But the Holy Ghost proceeds as Love from the Father and the Son. Therefore He proceeds voluntarily.

**Objection 4.** Further, the Son proceeds by mode of the intellect, as the Word. But every word proceeds by the will from a speaker. Therefore the Son proceeds from the Father by will, and not by nature.

**Objection 5.** Further, what is not voluntary is necessary. Therefore if the Father begot the Son, not by the will, it seems to follow that He begot Him by necessity; and this is against what Augustine says (Ad Orosium qu. vii).

**On the contrary,** Augustine says, in the same book, that, “the Father begot the Son neither by will, nor by necessity.”

**I answer that,** When anything is said to be, or to be made by the will, this can be understood in two senses. In one sense, the ablative designates only concomitance, as I can say that I am a man by my will—that is, I will to be a man; and in this way it can be said that the Father begot the Son by will; as also He is God by will, because He wills to be God, and wills to beget the Son. In the other sense, the ablative imports the habitude of a principle as it is said that the workman works by his will, as the will is the principle of his work; and thus in that sense it must be said the God the Father begot the Son, not by His will; but that He produced the creature by His will. Whence in the book De Synod, it is said: “If anyone say that the Son was made by the Will of God, as a creature is said to be made, let him be anathema.” The reason of this is that will and nature differ in their manner of causation, in such a way that nature is determined to one, while the will is not determined to one; and this because the effect is assimilated to the form of the agent, whereby the latter acts. Now it is manifest that of one thing there is only one natural form whereby it exists; and hence such as it is itself, such also is its work. But the form whereby the will acts is not only one, but many, according to the number of ideas understood. Hence the quality of the will’s action does not depend on the quality of the agent, but on the agent’s will and understanding. So the will is the principle of those things which may be this way or that way; whereas of those things which can be only in one way, the principle is nature. What, however, can exist in different ways is far from the divine nature, whereas it belongs to

the nature of a created being; because God is of Himself necessary being, whereas a creature is made from nothing. Thus, the Arians, wishing to prove the Son to be a creature, said that the Father begot the Son by will, taking will in the sense of principle. But we, on the contrary, must assert that the Father begot the Son, not by will, but by nature. Wherefore Hilary says (De Synod.): “The will of God gave to all creatures their substance: but perfect birth gave the Son a nature derived from a substance impassible and unborn. All things created are such as God willed them to be; but the Son, born of God, subsists in the perfect likeness of God.”

**Reply to Objection 1.** This saying is directed against those who did not admit even the concomitance of the Father’s will in the generation of the Son, for they said that the Father begot the Son in such a manner by nature that the will to beget was wanting; just as we ourselves suffer many things against our will from natural necessity—as, for instance, death, old age, and like ills. This appears from what precedes and from what follows as regards the words quoted, for thus we read: “Not against His will, nor as it were, forced, nor as if He were led by natural necessity did the Father beget the Son.”

**Reply to Objection 2.** The Apostle calls Christ the Son of the love of God, inasmuch as He is superabundantly loved by God; not, however, as if love were the principle of the Son’s generation.

**Reply to Objection 3.** The will, as a natural faculty, wills something naturally, as man’s will naturally tends to happiness; and likewise God naturally wills and loves Himself; whereas in regard to things other than Himself, the will of God is in a way, undetermined in itself, as above explained (q. 19, a. 3). Now, the Holy Ghost proceeds as Love, inasmuch as God loves Himself, and hence He proceeds naturally, although He proceeds by mode of will.

**Reply to Objection 4.** Even as regards the intellectual conceptions of the mind, a return is made to those first principles which are naturally understood. But God naturally understands Himself, and thus the conception of the divine Word is natural.

**Reply to Objection 5.** A thing is said to be necessary “of itself,” and “by reason of another.” Taken in the latter sense, it has a twofold meaning: firstly, as an efficient and compelling cause, and thus necessary means what is violent; secondly, it means a final cause, when a thing is said to be necessary as the means to an end, so far as without it the end could not be attained, or, at least, so well attained. In neither of these ways is the divine generation necessary; because God is not the means to an end, nor is He subject to compulsion. But a thing is said to be necessary “of itself” which cannot but be: in this sense it is neces-

sary for God to be; and in the same sense it is necessary that the Father beget the Son.

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**Whether the notional acts proceed from something?**

Ia q. 41 a. 3

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**Objection 1.** It would seem that the notional acts do not proceed from anything. For if the Father begets the Son from something, this will be either from Himself or from something else. If from something else, since that whence a thing is generated exists in what is generated, it follows that something different from the Father exists in the Son, and this contradicts what is laid down by Hilary (De Trin. vii) that, “In them nothing diverse or different exists.” If the Father begets the Son from Himself, since again that whence a thing is generated, if it be something permanent, receives as predicate the thing generated therefrom just as we say, “The man is white,” since the man remains, when not from white he is made white—it follows that either the Father does not remain after the Son is begotten, or that the Father is the Son, which is false. Therefore the Father does not beget the Son from something, but from nothing.

**Objection 2.** Further, that whence anything is generated is the principle regarding what is generated. So if the Father generate the Son from His own essence or nature, it follows that the essence or nature of the Father is the principle of the Son. But it is not a material principle, because in God nothing material exists; and therefore it is, as it were, an active principle, as the begetter is the principle of the one begotten. Thus it follows that the essence generates, which was disproved above (q. 39, a. 5).

**Objection 3.** Further, Augustine says (De Trin. vii, 6) that the three persons are not from the same essence; because the essence is not another thing from person. But the person of the Son is not another thing from the Father’s essence. Therefore the Son is not from the Father’s essence.

**Objection 4.** Further, every creature is from nothing. But in Scripture the Son is called a creature; for it is said (Ecclus. 24:5), in the person of the Wisdom begotten, “I came out of the mouth of the Most High, the first-born before all creatures”: and further on (Ecclus. 24:14) it is said as uttered by the same Wisdom, “From the beginning, and before the world was I created.” Therefore the Son was not begotten from something, but from nothing. Likewise we can object concerning the Holy Ghost, by reason of what is said (Zech. 12:1): “Thus saith the Lord Who stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundations of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him”; and (Amos 4:13) according to another version\*: “I Who form the earth, and create the spirit.”

**On the contrary,** Augustine (Fulgentius, De Fide ad Petrum i, 1) says: “God the Father, of His nature, without

beginning, begot the Son equal to Himself.”

**I answer that,** The Son was not begotten from nothing, but from the Father’s substance. For it was explained above (q. 27, a. 2; q. 33, Aa. 2, 3) that paternity, filiation and nativity really and truly exist in God. Now, this is the difference between true “generation,” whereby one proceeds from another as a son, and “making,” that the maker makes something out of external matter, as a carpenter makes a bench out of wood, whereas a man begets a son from himself. Now, as a created workman makes a thing out of matter, so God makes things out of nothing, as will be shown later on (q. 45, a. 1), not as if this nothing were a part of the substance of the thing made, but because the whole substance of a thing is produced by Him without anything else whatever presupposed. So, were the Son to proceed from the Father as out of nothing, then the Son would be to the Father what the thing made is to the maker, whereto, as is evident, the name of filiation would not apply except by a kind of similitude. Thus, if the Son of God proceeds from the Father out of nothing, He could not be properly and truly called the Son, whereas the contrary is stated (1 Jn. 5:20): “That we may be in His true Son Jesus Christ.” Therefore the true Son of God is not from nothing; nor is He made, but begotten.

That certain creatures made by God out of nothing are called sons of God is to be taken in a metaphorical sense, according to a certain likeness of assimilation to Him Who is the true Son. Whence, as He is the only true and natural Son of God, He is called the “only begotten,” according to Jn. 1:18, “The only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him”; and so as others are entitled sons of adoption by their similitude to Him, He is called the “first begotten,” according to Rom. 8:29: “Whom He foreknew He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son, that He might be the first born of many brethren.” Therefore the Son of God is begotten of the substance of the Father, but not in the same way as man is born of man; for a part of the human substance in generation passes into the substance of the one begotten, whereas the divine nature cannot be parted; whence it necessarily follows that the Father in begetting the Son does not transmit any part of His nature, but communicates His whole nature to Him, the distinction only of origin remaining as explained above (q. 40, a. 2).

**Reply to Objection 1.** When we say that the Son was born of the Father, the preposition “of” designates a consubstantial generating principle, but not a material principle. For that which is produced from matter, is made by

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\* The Septuagint

a change of form in that whence it is produced. But the divine essence is unchangeable, and is not susceptible of another form.

**Reply to Objection 2.** When we say the Son is begotten of the essence of the Father, as the Master of the Sentences explains (Sent. i, D, v), this denotes the habitude of a kind of active principle, and as he expounds, “the Son is begotten of the essence of the Father”—that is, of the Father Who is essence; and so Augustine says (De Trin. xv, 13): “When I say of the Father Who is essence, it is the same as if I said more explicitly, of the essence of the Father.”

This, however, is not enough to explain the real meaning of the words. For we can say that the creature is from God Who is essence; but not that it is from the essence of God. So we may explain them otherwise, by observing that the preposition “of” [de] always denotes consubstantiality. We do not say that a house is “of” [de] the builder, since he is not the consubstantial cause. We can say, however, that something is “of” another, if this is its consubstantial principle, no matter in what way it is so, whether it be an active principle, as the son is said to be “of” the father, or a material principle, as a knife is “of” iron; or a formal principle, but in those things only in which the forms are subsisting, and not accidental to another, for we can say that an angel is “of” an intellectual nature. In this way, then, we say that the Son is begotten ‘of’ the essence of the Father, inasmuch as the essence of the Father, communicated by generation, subsists in the Son.

**Reply to Objection 3.** When we say that the Son is begotten of the essence of the Father, a term is added

which saves the distinction. But when we say that the three persons are ‘of’ the divine essence, there is nothing expressed to warrant the distinction signified by the preposition, so there is no parity of argument.

**Reply to Objection 4.** When we say “Wisdom was created,” this may be understood not of Wisdom which is the Son of God, but of created wisdom given by God to creatures: for it is said, “He created her [namely, Wisdom] in the Holy Ghost, and He poured her out over all His works” (Ecclus. 1:9,10). Nor is it inconsistent for Scripture in one text to speak of the Wisdom begotten and wisdom created, for wisdom created is a kind of participation of the uncreated Wisdom. The saying may also be referred to the created nature assumed by the Son, so that the sense be, “From the beginning and before the world was I made”—that is, I was foreseen as united to the creature. Or the mention of wisdom as both created and begotten insinuates into our minds the mode of the divine generation; for in generation what is generated receives the nature of the generator and this pertains to perfection; whereas in creation the Creator is not changed, but the creature does not receive the Creator’s nature. Thus the Son is called both created and begotten, in order that from the idea of creation the immutability of the Father may be understood, and from generation the unity of nature in the Father and the Son. In this way Hilary expounds the sense of this text of Scripture (De Synod.). The other passages quoted do not refer to the Holy Ghost, but to the created spirit, sometimes called wind, sometimes air, sometimes the breath of man, sometimes also the soul, or any other invisible substance.

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#### Whether in God there is a power in respect of the notional acts?

Ia q. 41 a. 4

**Objection 1.** It would seem that in God there is no power in respect of the notional acts. For every kind of power is either active or passive; neither of which can be here applied, there being in God nothing which we call passive power, as above explained (q. 25, a. 1); nor can active power belong to one person as regards another, since the divine persons were not made, as stated above (a. 3). Therefore in God there is no power in respect of the notional acts.

**Objection 2.** Further, the object of power is what is possible. But the divine persons are not regarded as possible, but necessary. Therefore, as regards the notional acts, whereby the divine persons proceed, there cannot be power in God.

**Objection 3.** Further, the Son proceeds as the word, which is the concept of the intellect; and the Holy Ghost proceeds as love, which belongs to the will. But in God power exists as regards effects, and not as regards intellect and will, as stated above (q. 25, a. 1). Therefore, in God

power does not exist in reference to the notional acts.

**On the contrary,** Augustine says (Contra Maxim. iii, 1): “If God the Father could not beget a co-equal Son, where is the omnipotence of God the Father?” Power therefore exists in God regarding the notional acts.

**I answer that,** As the notional acts exist in God, so must there be also a power in God regarding these acts; since power only means the principle of act. So, as we understand the Father to be principle of generation; and the Father and the Son to be the principle of spiration, we must attribute the power of generating to the Father, and the power of spiration to the Father and the Son; for the power of generation means that whereby the generator generates. Now every generator generates by something. Therefore in every generator we must suppose the power of generating, and in the spirator the power of spirating.

**Reply to Objection 1.** As a person, according to notional acts, does not proceed as if made; so the power in God as regards the notional acts has no reference to a per-

son as if made, but only as regards the person as proceeding.

**Reply to Objection 2.** Possible, as opposed to what is necessary, is a consequence of a passive power, which does not exist in God. Hence, in God there is no such thing as possibility in this sense, but only in the sense of possible as contained in what is necessary; and in this latter sense it can be said that as it is possible for God to be, so also is it possible that the Son should be generated.

**Reply to Objection 3.** Power signifies a principle; and a principle implies distinction from that of which it is the principle. Now we must observe a double distinction in things said of God: one is a real distinction, the other is a distinction of reason only. By a real distinction, God by His essence is distinct from those things of which He is the principle by creation: just as one person is distinct from the other of which He is principle by a notional act. But

in God the distinction of action and agent is one of reason only, otherwise action would be an accident in God. And therefore with regard to those actions in respect of which certain things proceed which are distinct from God, either personally or essentially, we may ascribe power to God in its proper sense of principle. And as we ascribe to God the power of creating, so we may ascribe the power of begetting and of spirating. But “to understand” and “to will” are not such actions as to designate the procession of something distinct from God, either essentially or personally. Wherefore, with regard to these actions we cannot ascribe power to God in its proper sense, but only after our way of understanding and speaking: inasmuch as we designate by different terms the intellect and the act of understanding in God, whereas in God the act of understanding is His very essence which has no principle.

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### Whether the power of begetting signifies a relation, and not the essence?

Ia q. 41 a. 5

**Objection 1.** It would seem that the power of begetting, or of spirating, signifies the relation and not the essence. For power signifies a principle, as appears from its definition: for active power is the principle of action, as we find in *Metaph.* v, text 17. But in God principle in regard to Person is said notionally. Therefore, in God, power does not signify essence but relation.

**Objection 2.** Further, in God, the power to act [posse] and ‘to act’ are not distinct. But in God, begetting signifies relation. Therefore, the same applies to the power of begetting.

**Objection 3.** Further, terms signifying the essence in God, are common to the three persons. But the power of begetting is not common to the three persons, but proper to the Father. Therefore it does not signify the essence.

**On the contrary,** As God has the power to beget the Son, so also He wills to beget Him. But the will to beget signifies the essence. Therefore, also, the power to beget.

**I answer that,** Some have said that the power to beget signifies relation in God. But this is not possible. For in every agent, that is properly called power, by which the agent acts. Now, everything that produces something by its action, produces something like itself, as to the form by which it acts; just as man begotten is like his begetter in his human nature, in virtue of which the father has the power to beget a man. In every begetter, therefore, that is the power of begetting in which the begotten is like the begetter.

Now the Son of God is like the Father, who begets Him, in the divine nature. Wherefore the divine nature in the Father is in Him the power of begetting. And so Hilary says (*De Trin.* v): “The birth of God cannot but contain that nature from which it proceeded; for He cannot subsist

other than God, Who subsists from no other source than God.”

We must therefore conclude that the power of begetting signifies principally the divine essence as the Master says (*Sent.* i, D, vii), and not the relation only. Nor does it signify the essence as identified with the relation, so as to signify both equally. For although paternity is signified as the form of the Father, nevertheless it is a personal property, being in respect to the person of the Father, what the individual form is to the individual creature. Now the individual form in things created constitutes the person begetting, but is not that by which the begetter begets, otherwise Socrates would beget Socrates. So neither can paternity be understood as that by which the Father begets, but as constituting the person of the Father, otherwise the Father would beget the Father. But that by which the Father begets is the divine nature, in which the Son is like to Him. And in this sense Damascene says (*De Fide Orth.* i, 18) that generation is the “work of nature,” not of nature generating, but of nature, as being that by which the generator generates. And therefore the power of begetting signifies the divine nature directly, but the relation indirectly.

**Reply to Objection 1.** Power does not signify the relation itself of a principle, for thus it would be in the genus of relation; but it signifies that which is a principle; not, indeed, in the sense in which we call the agent a principle, but in the sense of being that by which the agent acts. Now the agent is distinct from that which it makes, and the generator from that which it generates: but that by which the generator generates is common to generated and generator, and so much more perfectly, as the generation is more perfect. Since, therefore, the divine generation is most

perfect, that by which the Begetter begets, is common to Begotten and Begetter by a community of identity, and not only of species, as in things created. Therefore, from the fact that we say that the divine essence “is the principle by which the Begetter begets,” it does not follow that the divine essence is distinct (from the Begotten): which would follow if we were to say that the divine essence begets.

**Reply to Objection 2.** As in God, the power of begetting is the same as the act of begetting, so the divine

essence is the same in reality as the act of begetting or paternity; although there is a distinction of reason.

**Reply to Objection 3.** When I speak of the “power of begetting,” power is signified directly, generation indirectly: just as if I were to say, the “essence of the Father.” Wherefore in respect of the essence, which is signified, the power of begetting is common to the three persons: but in respect of the notion that is connoted, it is proper to the person of the Father.

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**Whether several persons can be the term of one notional act?**

Ia q. 41 a. 6

**Objection 1.** It would seem that a notional act can be directed to several Persons, so that there may be several Persons begotten or spirated in God. For whoever has the power of begetting can beget. But the Son has the power of begetting. Therefore He can beget. But He cannot beget Himself: therefore He can beget another son. Therefore there can be several Sons in God.

**Objection 2.** Further, Augustine says (Contra Maxim. iii, 12): “The Son did not beget a Creator: not that He could not, but that it behoved Him not.”

**Objection 3.** Further, God the Father has greater power to beget than has a created father. But a man can beget several sons. Therefore God can also: the more so that the power of the Father is not diminished after begetting the Son.

**On the contrary,** In God “that which is possible,” and “that which is” do not differ. If, therefore, in God it were possible for there to be several Sons, there would be several Sons. And thus there would be more than three Persons in God; which is heretical.

**I answer that,** As Athanasius says, in God there is only “one Father, one Son, one Holy Ghost.” For this four reasons may be given.

The first reason is in regard to the relations by which alone are the Persons distinct. For since the divine Persons are the relations themselves as subsistent, there would not be several Fathers, or several Sons in God, unless there were more than one paternity, or more than one filiation. And this, indeed, would not be possible except owing to a material distinction: since forms of one species are not multiplied except in respect of matter, which is not in God. Wherefore there can be but one subsistent filiation in God: just as there could be but one subsistent whiteness.

The second reason is taken from the manner of the processions. For God understands and wills all things by

one simple act. Wherefore there can be but one person proceeding after the manner of word, which person is the Son; and but one person proceeding after the manner of love, which person is the Holy Ghost.

The third reason is taken from the manner in which the persons proceed. For the persons proceed naturally, as we have said (a. 2), and nature is determined to one.

The fourth reason is taken from the perfection of the divine persons. For this reason is the Son perfect, that the entire divine filiation is contained in Him, and that there is but one Son. The argument is similar in regard to the other persons.

**Reply to Objection 1.** We can grant, without distinction, that the Son has the same power as the Father; but we cannot grant that the Son has the power “generandi” [of begetting] thus taking “generandi” as the gerund of the active verb, so that the sense would be that the Son has the “power to beget.” Just as, although Father and Son have the same being, it does not follow that the Son is the Father, by reason of the notional term added. But if the word “generandi” [of being begotten] is taken as the gerundive of the passive verb, the power “generandi” is in the Son—that is, the power of being begotten. The same is to be said if it be taken as the gerundive of an impersonal verb, so that the sense be “the power of generation”—that is, a power by which it is generated by some person.

**Reply to Objection 2.** Augustine does not mean to say by those words that the Son could beget a Son: but that if He did not, it was not because He could not, as we shall see later on (q. 42, a. 6, ad 3).

**Reply to Objection 3.** Divine perfection and the total absence of matter in God require that there cannot be several Sons in God, as we have explained. Wherefore that there are not several Sons is not due to any lack of begetting power in the Father.