

Do the Passages “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”
Refer to the Eternal Generation of the *opera ad intra*?

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Outline

- I. Introduction
- II. The Eternal Generation in Relation to the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity
 - a. Full Deity of the Person of the Son of God
 - b. *Opera ad intra vs. opera ad extra*
 - i. The Eternal Generation of the Son of God
 - ii. Traditional *sedes doctrinae* of the Eternal Generation
- III. Passages Examined in Context
 - a. Psalm 2:7
 - b. Acts 13:33
 - c. Hebrews 1:5
 - d. Hebrew 5:5
- IV. Evaluation
- V. Summary

Introduction

Although Christians from Africa to America to Asia have been outwardly divided because of culture, time, and race, they have stood united for centuries in confessing on regular worship services with one voice the words of the historic Nicean-Constantinopolitan Creed, “*We believe in Jesus Christ, true God, begotten from the Father from eternity ...*” The confessors from the Eastern Church penned phrase after phrase to ensure Jesus Christ was truly understood to be the eternal Son of God, not in any sort of Arian subordinationist sense within the Trinity. Like all confessions, Christians, but especially Lutherans, properly believe the Nicene Creed not merely because it teaches the deity of Jesus Christ but because Scripture teaches the deity of Jesus Christ. Scripture as a whole shows time and again that Jesus is God’s Son from eternity and therefore enjoys all the benefits and honor which any other person of the Holy Trinity enjoys. Yet to determine exactly which passages fit nicely into the category of a *sedes doctrinae* is not always so simple. This study will examine the debated exegetical question of whether the passages “You are my Son, today I have become your Father,”¹ which have been traditionally cited in this section of dogmatics, properly belong in context under the locus of the eternal generation of the Son of God within the context of the *opera ad intra* of the Holy Trinity.

The Eternal Generation in Relation to the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity

The Full Deity of the Son of God

Finally dogmatics can only explain, however inadequate to our human reason, the truths of Scripture. That is all it can and must do. Such a doctrine as the Holy Trinity, and to an equal extent the eternal generation, will always confound the mind and natural reason. All theology simply repeats and explains what Scripture says, no more and no less.² The doctrine of the Holy Trinity has been caricatured to be simply lofty philosophical distinctions with no relevance to our lives. Even well-meaning Christians have wondered how to put this doctrine into practice. Even when it delves into the terminology of the eternal generation in the context of the *opera ad intra*,

¹ Psalm 2:7, Acts 13:33, Hebrews 1:5, Hebrews 5:5, following the translation of the NIV. I have retained the archaic “I have begotten you” in the title in view of the focus on the eternal generation. Passages cited are from NIV 1984 unless otherwise noted.

² Like Luther said, our theology should just be a mere *Nachsagen*, a “saying after” of God’s Word. [John Meyer, “Theology as Habitus Practicus,” *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. 1, Lyle Lange, ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), 8]. Hoenecke also writes, “Lutheran dogmatics does not set itself the task of manifestly proving the secret of the Trinity or making it comprehensible but only of gathering all its features from Scripture and, from that, of giving an ordered, clear description of the praiseworthy secret of the Trinity.” [*Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, Vol. II, Richard Krause & James Langebartels, trans. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), 178].

this doctrine has direct application to our lives since it has direct bearing on the person of Christ, and therefore by direct extension, his work as our Lord and Savior. Pieper writes,

It has been said, especially in our day, that in these technical terms the entire apparatus of the ecclesiastical terminology in the doctrine of the Trinity has reached the climax of sophistry and is the apex of unintelligible and meaningless jargon. But these terms are not based on sophistry, but rest on Scripture. Neither are they unintelligible and meaningless. As was pointed out previously, Luther did not hesitate to use these terms in sermons preached to the common man.³

The confessors at Nicea and Constantinople did the Church a great service in defining new vocabulary, which, although not found in Scripture,⁴ correctly and succinctly teaches the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Much trouble in Trinitarian conflicts can be solved through the proper definition of scriptural terms and concepts. Here at the beginning one must of course admit humans lack the perfect terminology and understanding to properly express the infinite Deity. Since the immensity of God lies outside our comprehension, we must simply use the most fitting words we can which express the scriptural truth. Christians are not bound by law to use the church's terminology, but they are bound to express the Scriptural truth on which the terminology is based. Pieper writes, "The ecclesiastical terminology is not of absolute necessity. . . . An examination of the content of the ecclesiastical terms reveals that they constitute an epitome of what Scripture teaches of the Trinity more clearly than the sun."⁵

Any attempt from human reason to confuse and comingle the distinction between the essence of God and the three persons within the divine essence either must result in some sort of subordinationism on the one hand or tritheism on the other. The second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, shares from eternity in the same essence as the Father and the Holy Spirit. It is not a division of the essence, as if the Son of God shared only one third, but rather all the divine essence resides in the second person, as it does in the first and the third persons. Paul writes against the incipient Gnostics in Colosse who wished to denigrate Christ's full deity as did Arius later and numerous false teachings today, "In Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form" (Co 2:9). The second person of the Trinity is fully God, not in an Arianian sense of the primary and first creature. All the persons of the Trinity are equal in respect to the same divine

³ Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 415-416.

⁴ The only exception would be *ὑπόστασις* in Hebrews 1:3, although that is used in the sense of *forma*, or essence, not in the sense of *persona*, person, or hypostasis, as the Church would later define the term as such.

⁵ Pieper, *Dogmatics*, 407-408.

essence which all possess.⁶ Because the second person possesses the complete divine essence, divine names, attributes, works, and glory can be ascribed to him.⁷

Although the divine essence belongs to all three persons equally and fully, the persons must not be comingled. All three have a distinct hypostasis, which has been consistently defined as “something which subsists in itself.”⁸ God is one in essence, but he has consistently revealed himself in three persons, even from the beginning of the Old Testament in the creation account. Gerhard writes,

[T]rinity, or three persons taken together, does not differ from essence – otherwise quaternity would be introduced instead of trinity. Consequently, there is a great difference between *trinus* [“three”] and *triplex* [“triple”]. That which is *trinus* is one in essence and has three modes⁹ of subsisting; *triplex* is that which is composed of three.¹⁰

Christ is therefore neither a subordinate Son within the Godhead nor is he one of three Gods. He is distinguished from the other persons through the hypostasis. As the essence refers to something shared, so the hypostasis to something distinctive.¹¹ Thus the person of the Son of God, both revealed as the preincarnate Word in the Old Testament and the incarnate Word in the New, always has been distinct from the Father as to his hypostasis, but at the same time from eternity fully equal as to his essence.

Opera ad intra and opera ad extra

God’s works can be distinguished between his operating within the Godhead and his operating outside of the Godhead in relation to us. In his outer works (*opera ad extra*), he acts united, although specific acts are often attributed to one specific person; this, however, does not mean the other two persons are absent in their workings. Creation is often *attributed* to the Father, but Scripture *ascribes*¹² creation to all three persons: the Father in Genesis 1:1, the Son in

⁶ Hoenecke writes, “When we confess the consubstantiality, we further confess with Scripture (Col 2:9) that the whole divine essence is undivided in each of the three persons, as the essence is undivided and indivisible. ‘One undivided divine essence is totally in each person’” (*Dogmatics*, 185).

⁷ For specific biblical examples and explanations, see Hoenecke, *Dogmatics*, 173.

⁸ See for example Johann Gerhard’s tri-fold definition in *On the Nature of God and On the Most Holy Mystery of the Trinity*, Richard Dinda, trans. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 320: “That it subsists of itself, not in something else as in a subject. That it be of an intelligent nature. That it be distinguished from another, not predicated of another person in the nominative case.”

⁹ Perhaps a poor choice in terminology here by Gerhard (or Dinda), as this is not to be understood in a sense of modalistic monarchianism.

¹⁰ Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 323.

¹¹ Using Gerhard’s phrasing: *On the Nature of God*, 320.

¹² This is my distinction of terms, and it may be somewhat artificial. Pieper, however, makes a similar case when answering the question of whether the Apostle’s Creed or the Catechism breaks this rule in dividing the *opera ad*

John 1:3, and the Spirit in Genesis 1:2. The same could be said of the Son with redemption and the Spirit with sanctification; Scripture ascribes both acts to all persons of the Trinity. In the *opera ad extra*, the persons of the Trinity act united, but in the *opera ad intra*, they act separately and independently.¹³ Pieper explains:

If in the realm of creation, that is, outside the Trinity [*ad extra*] I were to ascribe to each Person a specific work in which the other two would not share, then I would divide the one Godhead and posit three gods or creators. That is wrong. And again, if within the Deity, or outside and beyond creation [*ad intra*] I do not ascribe to each person a distinct characteristic which cannot be said of the other two, then I have confounded the three Persons into one Person, and that, too, is wrong. . . . The divine works performed by God outside the Deity cannot be divided. In other words, the Persons dare not be divided according to their works, nor dare their specific work from without [*ad extra*] be ascribed to each Person. Within the Godhead [*ad intra*] the Person must be distinguished.¹⁴

Thus, although all three persons share in the same essence, it would contradict Scriptures' revelation to simply speak of the order or manner of the Trinity in any order we wish.¹⁵ The fact of Christ's full deity as our Savior and Lord ultimately is derived from the *opera ad intra*, and specifically the eternal generation.

The persons of the Trinity can ultimately be distinguished only by the inner workings of the Trinity, since they all equally possess the divine essence and participate together in the *opera ad extra*. Only the Father is unbegotten, only the Son is begotten, and only the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Only the Father begets the Son, and only the Father and the Son send out the Spirit.¹⁶ If the Trinity in general surpasses our human understanding, how much

extra among the persons of the Trinity: "This objection to the Church's terminology does not rest of fact. In the first place, no orthodox teacher speaks of a division and distribution of the *opera ad extra* unless the tongue or the pen has shipped. Furthermore, while the Church uses the terms *attribution* and *appropriation*, it does not use the term *distribution*. The former terms have Scriptural basis because Scripture attributes the work of creation especially to the Father. This is clearly taught in those passages which state that the Father created the world through the Son (Col. 1:15-16; Heb. 1:2); and through the Holy Ghost (Ps. 33:6)." He later demonstrates that Scripture speaks in a twofold truth: each of the *opera ad extra* is attributed to one person in particular and at the same time ascribed to all persons in general. (*Dogmatics*, 422-423)

¹³ The only exception here is the spiration and sending out of the Holy Spirit, which Scripture (and the *filioque* clause of the Nicene Creed) properly attribute to both the Father and the Son.

¹⁴ Pieper, *Dogmatics*, 420.

¹⁵ Scripture consistently reveals us the Trinity as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not the Son, Father, and Holy Spirit, nor the Holy Spirit, Father, and Son, etc. The only possible exception to this, although the contexts are somewhat dissimilar, would be the apostolic blessing: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

¹⁶ Cf. Hoenecke's definition: "To the Father belongs ἀγεννησία, fatherhood, active begetting, and active breathing. To the Son belongs γεννησία, passive begetting, sonship, and active breathing. To the Spirit belongs procession, ἐκπόρευσις, passive breathing, and being sent out." (*Dogmatics*, 189). See also Pieper, *Dogmatics*, 417, and his use

more the inner workings of the Trinity! The terms of the *opera ad intra* cannot be defined in such a way as to find direct parallels in common human usage which will satisfy us. God does not expect us to understand his workings; all he requires is that we faithfully speak of him as he reveals himself in his Word. Christian doctrine speaks of the Father begetting the Son and the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son not because it fully understands what those terms mean or can relate it to some understandable illustration but simply because Scripture itself uses those terms. The phrase *opera ad intra sunt divisa* is “obviously nothing more than a dogmatic formula for the Scripture statements. And, finally dogmatics can do nothing more. It can never explain what Scripture doesn’t explain; it can only describe and reproduce what Scripture states and produces.”¹⁷ Pieper asks rhetorically,

Can we expect our people to understand the nature and manner of the Son’s eternal generation from the Father and the Holy Spirit’s eternal procession from the Father and the Son? Obviously the answer must be in the negative. But neither can the trained theologian understand the mystery of the Trinity. Every wise theologian will confess: *Quid sit nasci, quid processus, me nescire sum professus.*¹⁸

Thus the full deity of the person of the Son of God according to the essence of the divine nature, in which the fullness of the divine essence resides from eternity, and the distinction of the second person from the first person of the Trinity ultimately derives itself from the eternal generation, *i.e.*, the Father begetting the Son from eternity. This is specifically attested in numerous locations in the Holy Scriptures (Jn 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 Jn 4:9) and by logical direct extension in other passages which attest Jesus’ full divinity from eternity: both from the Old Testament (Ps 110:1,4; Is 9:6-7, Mi 5:2, *et al.*) and the New (Jn 1:1-3 [cf. Gn 1], 5:16-30, 8:58, 20:30; 1 Co 8:6; Co 1:16, He 1:2, 7:1-3, 13:8, *et al.*). However, many eminent dogmaticians¹⁹ have cited Psalm 2:7, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father,” as the traditional and primary *sedes doctrinae* of the eternal generation of the Son, and it is the passage from which the term “generation” has been derived. This passage is also quoted in the New Testament in Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5. It is the primary purpose of this study to see whether the context

of the Latin terms and the Athanasian Creed; also Meyer, “The Essence of God” and “The Holy Trinity,” 481, 540-543.

¹⁷ Hoenecke, *Dogmatics*, 189.

¹⁸ Pieper, *Dogmatics*, 418.

¹⁹ This list is not meant to be exhaustive: Pieper, *Dogmatics*, 395; Hoenecke, *Dogmatics*, 173; Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 325; Koehler, *Summary of Christian Doctrine* (River Forest, IL: Koehler Publishing Company, 1939), 27; Lange, *God So Loved the World*, 123; Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 67; Louis Roehm, “The Eternal Sonship” in “The Person of Christ,” *Abiding Word*, Vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 21.

of these four passages refers to the eternal generation of the Son or whether it would be best to develop this doctrine from the other abundant passages in Scripture cited above.

Passages Examined in Context

Psalm 2:7

Psalm 2, probably thematically attached to Psalm 1 as the opening of the Psalter A and B, is attributed to David in Acts 4:25 and was perhaps composed for a kingly coronation. Whatever the human and earthly circumstances were which inspired this psalm, it is quite clear both from internal evidence and the corroboration of the New Testament that this is a thoroughly messianic psalm. From the very beginning (vs. 2) it speaks of the King as being divinely placed and commissioned in his formal office as the Messiah. It features the futility of the earthly kings fighting against the LORD and his Anointed King (vs. 2, 4-6). The Lord enthroned in heaven considered this simply a laughing matter; he does not even bother to get out of his seat to deal with this pseudo-attack. His anger rebukes them by saying he has installed his King on Zion. The Messiah then proclaims the decree of the LORD: “He said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’” (vs. 7). The decree to the Son continues by declaring God the Father will “make the nations your inheritance,” “the ends of the earth your possession” (vs. 8), and that the Son will “rule them with an iron scepter” and “dash them to pieces like pottery” (vs. 9). The psalm ends by warning the kings of the earth the Messiah’s wrath can flare up in a moment but those who take refuge in him will be blessed. Thus the emphasis on placing the Messiah into his office and on his official work as the Messiah runs not only through the whole psalm but also the specific decree in vs. 7-9.

The precise difficulty of vs. 7, the crux of the matter, is to understand the second cola of Hebrew poetry as synonymous parallelism, in which “today I have begotten you” would merely restate “You are my Son” and deal only with the Messiah’s person, or as synthetic parallelism, in which vs. 7b would intensify “You are my Son,” refer to the Messiah’s work and office, and lead into the remainder of the decree in vs. 8-9. Two theological difficulties present themselves in vs. 7, and both understandings easily solve one difficulty but must use an extended or metaphorical understanding for the other, namely: “When is ‘today’?” and: “How did the Father ‘beget’ the Son?” If one understands this in the traditional dogmatic sense of the eternal generation, then the “begetting” is self-explanatory, but then, since there was no time in which the Messiah was not God’s Son, the word “today” must be expanded not to refer to a specific day but to the doctrine

of “God’s eternal present,” *i.e.*, since God lies outside of time and is in fact timeless, then to him, everything is an “eternal present.” The other understanding, which seems to be the minority view in dogmatics, is that the entire context of the psalm refers to events which were fulfilled at a specific time, and therefore, although God’s “eternal present” is a correct doctrine, it does not fit with the context. “Today” must therefore refer to some time²⁰ in which the Messiah was officially placed into his office. This more neatly fits the understanding of “today,” but then “beget” must be understood as “to be placed officially into view” – and it is debated if this word actually can ever have this meaning.²¹ The fact that this verb is Qal instead of the normal Hifil demonstrates clearly this is not a normal “begetting” since it would be heresy to speak of a “God the Mother.” The standard BDB lexicon lists this as “begetting” in the figurative sense as “formally installing [a] king into theocratic rights.”²² Psalm 2:7b is undoubtedly difficult especially since determining the difference between synthetic and synonymous parallelism is far from a black and white science.

Acts 13:33

Paul cites Psalm 2:7 in his sermon at Pisidian Antioch as part of his argument that Jesus is the Messiah. He establishes from the life, death, and resurrection of Christ that the words of the prophets read in the synagogue have been fulfilled. He then summarizes the good news of the gospel message: “What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’” (vs. 33). Paul then immediately proves the fulfillment of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead in vs. 34-35 through Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 16:10. The most difficult exegetical understanding here is the referent of ἀνίστημι in vs. 35: whether it refers to “raising up” in the sense of the “bringing up from the dead” or in the sense of “causing to appear for a role or function.”²³ However, in context, “raising from the dead” is always followed with the adjectival prepositional phrase ἐκ νεκρῶν when Paul wishes to make it explicit.

²⁰ This will be explained later under “Evaluation,” but explanations have ranged from the baptism, to the resurrection, to the exaltation in general, or to numerous other understandings.

²¹ Gawrisch states it quite boldly: “There is no parallel in the Scriptures, however, for a figurative use of the word תָּבַע” [“Review Article,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 87.4 (Fall 1990), 299].

²² Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 408.

²³ Contrast BDAG’s meanings 2 and 4. This passage is grouped with the following passages and is listed under meaning 2.

In the previous context of vs. 23-31, Paul was dealing with the entire message of salvation as promised to the fathers of Israel. It seems difficult to establish how vs. 35-36 would advance Paul's argument if he had already proven the resurrection from Psalm 2:7 (as BDAG lists this usage of ἀνίστημι), particularly in view that there seems to be a slight break in subject matter with vs. 34.²⁴ Thus, it seems best to understand ἀναστήσας in the sense of "cause to appear for a role or function."

Hebrews 1:5

The writer to the Hebrews opens his letter to the Christians in Rome under the duress of persecution and the threat to revert back to the *religia licita* of Judaism by eloquently establishing the supremacy of the Son of God. Through him God made the universe, and in fact, he is the χαρακτήρ of God's ὑπόστασις.²⁵ The writer then moves from emphasizing Christ's being to his work: he provided purification for sin and sat down at the right hand of the Father. Thus he became superior to the angels as his name is superior to theirs. Then the writer cites Psalm 2:7 as support in vs. 5: "For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'?" The writer then puts forth 2 Sa 7:14/1 Ch 17:13, Dt 32:43, Ps 104:4, Ps 45:6-7, Ps 102:25-27, and Ps 110:1 to show how Christ is superior to the angels, who are just "ministering spirits" sent to serve believers. These passages seem to alternate between emphasizing Christ's work as King (vs. 8-9), then his eternal nature as the Son of God (vs. 10-12), and then back to his office as King in the exaltation (vs. 13).

The difficulty in Hebrews 1:5 is whether Psalm 2:7 is referring primarily to Christ's person in vs. 3a or his work in vs. 3b. It would seem, however, that the flow of thought is leading away from his person and onto specific steps of the exaltation which were fulfilled at specific points in history in vs. 3b-4. But whether Psalm 2:7 supports the entire exaltation of Christ in general or to just specific points along the exaltation is debated among exegetes.²⁶

²⁴ *i.e.*, "The fact that God raised him from the dead ... is stated with these words." Vs. 35, "So it is stated elsewhere," is undoubtedly closely united with vs. 34, and if Paul meant to include all three Old Testament citations to prove the same point, it would seem logical that he would have started vs. 34 in the same way as vs. 35: διότι καὶ ἐν ἑτέρω λέγει, as a mere listing of three passages in "bullet-point fashion" to prove his original point.

²⁵ The NIV's translation here "exact representation of his being" could be misunderstood in view of modern English usage of "represent." But the point here is that the fullness of God's essence and being resides in Christ. See footnote 4 for the linguistic usage.

²⁶ Paul Ellingworth lists six understandings of when σήμερον was fulfilled and contents the general "exaltation" fits best, which the context "points strongly to." [*The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1993), 114].

Hebrews 5:5

The writer to the Hebrews extends the supremacy of the Son of God in chapters 4-5 to his role as the Great High Priest. He has “gone through the heavens” (4:14) and is not a high priest unable to sympathize with the weakness of humans, but remained sinless as he was tempted. When the high priest offered sacrifices for the sins of humans in the Old Testament, he did not take it upon himself to do so, but he was called by God, as Aaron was. Likewise, Christ did not take it upon himself to offer himself once for all as the Great High Priest, but God did so. The author then cites Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4 as proof of the office of the high priesthood “in the order of Melchizedek” (vs. 6).

Evaluation

The usage of Psalm 2:7 is difficult enough within its context, not to mention adding three other contexts on top of that. This is a very difficult exegetical question, wrought with numerous dogmatic and exegetical problems throughout. Well-intentioned, orthodox theologians can disagree here, and each can cite legitimate reasons why. Even our seminary dogmatics notes list these passages inconsistently²⁷ under both contexts: the eternal generation and Christ’s appointment to his office under Christology. It seems best, however, to this author,²⁸ to understand the phrase “You are my Son, today I have begotten you,” as primarily referring not to the eternal generation of the second person of the Trinity but rather to the official commissioning of the Son of God into his office as Prophet, Priest, and King as it took place on the day of his baptism.

Since the overarching context of Psalm 2 is the commissioning of the Messiah into his office as King and that context refers to events which do not take place in eternity but rather at a specific time in history, it seems best not to understand this as referring to the person of the Messiah but rather his office. It is one thing to say dogmatically that God’s Son has been God’s Son from eternity. That is of course true and not debatable. But that is not the issue here. It becomes much more difficult to establish this linguistically and exegetically based on the overall

²⁷ Unless one contends we are asking the wrong question, since this entire discussion is fruitless as both are one and the same since the passage refers to both. More on this later, especially footnote 46.

²⁸ I give my interpretation here in all humility and with due respect to the great theologians who take it in a different sense. In no way am I undermining the work of Pieper, Hoenecke, Chemnitz, Koehler, Lange, *et al.* who understand it as the eternal generation or even of Ellingworth, Brug, Morris, *et al.* who understand it in a mediating sense of both Christ’s person and work.

context of this one passage. The immediately preceding context in vs. 6 speaks of Christ's installation as King, and even the rest of the decree itself builds up to the rule of Christ as King.²⁹

Since God dwells outside of time, those who understand "today" in a general sense³⁰ as God's "eternal present" often point to such passages as 2 Peter 3:8 and Hebrews 13:8. However, the passages which support God's eternal present do not merely use the word "today." Since this lies beyond our understanding, it must be explained with either an affirmation or a negation of a list of different temporal adverbs. Merely using the word "today" itself does not linguistically establish the anthropomorphism. The Bible uses phrase like, "the same yesterday *and today and forever*" or "a day is like a thousand years *and a thousand years are like a day.*" The word "today" is never devoid of more context when it speaks to us mere humans about God's timelessness. Thus, this is a dogmatic term, determined by all the contexts of Scripture, helpful in understanding God's attributes, not so much a linguistic argument which can be imported as a meaning for "today" unless there is further explanation. Since "today" is used all by itself in Psalm 2:7 and not in a wider phrase like 2 Peter 3:8 or Hebrews 13:8, it would seem best to understand it as a moment fulfilled at one specific point in history, as the wider context shows.

Although this is the minority opinion, there have been others who have understood Psalm 2 in this sense. Franzmann asks, "If the second line refers to the Son's being 'begotten from the Father in eternity,' (called the 'aeterna generatio' [*sic*] by theologians), what connection is there between it and the statement of the Father in verse 6 that he has installed or set or inaugurated his King upon his holy mountain, Zion, that is, the New Testament church of Christ?"³¹ Meyer also contends that Psalm 2:7 "does not refer to the internal relation between Father and Son, but rather to the act which Jesus calls his 'sending,' *e.g.*, John 5:36: 'The Father has sent me.' A study of the line of thought running through the Psalm will show this, and the use which the New Testament makes of the statement corroborates it."³² Schaller similarly explains that although Psalm 2:7 seems to be "a direct assertion of the eternal generation," it "appears as an emphatic re-assertion of Christ's appointment to the offices of Savior and King, if the context be

²⁹ Even though Chemnitz elsewhere lists vs. 7 under the eternal generation, he does list vs. 6 and vs. 8 as scriptural support for the communication of the majesty of Christ, as he rules and is head over the Church according to both natures [*The Two Natures in Christ*, J.A.O. Preus, trans. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 319, 337].

³⁰ Linguistically, הַיּוֹם normally occurs *in the plural* to indicate a more general usage of time (cf. BDB, entries 4-6, s.v. הַיּוֹם.)

³¹ Franzmann, *Bible History Commentary*, 1324. For the opposing answer to this question, cf. Gawrisch, "A Review Article," *WLQ*, 299-300.

³² Meyer, "The Holy Trinity," 540.

considered. Not a communication of divine nature, but a divine authorization for certain specified activities is indicated in this text.”³³ Leupold also warns against an interpretation of the eternal generation: “In the very nature of the case there just cannot be a reference to the eternal generation of the Son by the Father even though the words as such, apart from their connection, could easily convey such a meaning. But such an interpretation of these words would be dogmatic construction in an unwholesome sense.”³⁴

The weakness of this interpretation is then the figurative understanding of $\tau\lambda\eta$, which is admittedly difficult to establish linguistically. However, 2 Samuel 7:12 does seem to give some justification for this usage, particularly in view of the LXX’s usage of $\acute{\alpha}\nu\lambda\iota\sigma\tau\eta\mu\iota$ (the same word in Ac 13:33) to refer to God raising up and establishing the kingdom of the Messiah.³⁵ The interplay between “I will be his father, and he will be my son” in vs. 14 also seems to indicate more about his office than his person in and of itself.³⁶ August Pieper writes, “*Und in Aktor. 13,33 das ἀναστήσας nicht von der Auferweckung Jesu, sondern von seiner Sendung zu verstehen und es für das hebräische $\tau\lambda\eta$ zu nehmen, ist angesichts des Kontextes dieser Stelle ein mutiges Stück.*”³⁷ Keil/Delitzsch also explain $\tau\lambda\eta$ “intends an operation of divine power exalted above both, and indeed, since it refers to a setting up ($\gamma\delta\sigma$) in the kingship, the begetting into a royal existence, which takes place in and by the act of anointing ($\mu\sigma\chi$).”³⁸

Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 5:5 seem to be the clearest indication of this passage referring to Christ’s appointment to his office at his baptism³⁹ due to the parallels to 2 Samuel 7, and the

³³ John Schaller, *Biblical Christology: A Study in Lutheran Dogmatics* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1919), 27.

³⁴ H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1959), 51.

³⁵ This cogent argument for understanding the usage of Ps 2:7 in this sense in Ac 13:33 is owed to Prof. Joel Fredrich in his exegetical course on the Book of Acts (unpublished class notes, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN, fall semester 2009). The promise that God would raise up the seed of David was the overarching promise throughout the whole Old Testament, even with other more specific messianic promises as in Ps. 2. C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch [*Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 56] also makes this same connection in their commentary.

³⁶ See for example: John Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 1-72* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 131.

³⁷ August Pieper, *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 12, 130.

³⁸ Keil/Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 56.

³⁹ F.F. Bruce points to the variant in Luke 3:22 which contains the full text of Ps 2:7 as further proof this points to “the day when God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and power and invested Him with His messianic dignity” (*Acts*, 276). Contra: cf. Darrell Bock [*Acts, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 456] who points the fulfillment as the resurrection, as does Pohill, who writes, “In the context Paul seems to have been implying the day of Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus was indeed the Son of God from all eternity and

distinction between the use of ἀνίστημι in vs. 33 and 34.⁴⁰ Although Psalm 2 does point out Jesus' relationship to the Father as "one of intimate sonship," the usage here in Acts 13 shows Jesus as he "now functions as the Promised One installed to carry out his divinely appointed role."⁴¹ Hebrews 5:5 is the most explicit in referring to the Messiah' appointment to the office of High Priest by the Father (vs. 4-5a).

Hebrews 1:5 is the hardest to establish since the wider context refers to both Christ's person and work,⁴² but the immediately preceding context refers to specific times in which Christ was exalted to his office. Most commentators explain the fulfillment as the enthronement of Christ when he was openly declared as the Son of God,⁴³ although a connection to his baptism need not be completely dismissed.⁴⁴ Thus the καί of vs. 10 is best to be understood as adverbial ("also"), extending the argument to a different degree, not epexegetical ("namely"), since it is separated by vs. 6-9. Franzmann writes, "It is evident at once that the context as to time is not eternity. The author takes our minds to a point of time in history, namely, when God's Son (v. 1) had made atonement for sins, . . . and when in token of his perfectly accomplished work he had sat down at God's right hand, in other words, began his rule as King of kings."⁴⁵

Summary

But the issue still remains: "Are we even asking the right question here?" Are David, Paul, and the writer to the Hebrews, be he Apollos or whoever else, fussing in heaven right now as to the distinction of "today"? Are not Christ's person and work so closely connected that all understandings are in view in all four passages? This would seem to be a better understanding⁴⁶

recognized as such throughout his earthly life (Luke 1:35; 3:22; 9:35). But it was through the resurrection that he was exalted to God's right hand, enthroned as Son of God, and recognized as such by believing humans" [*Acts, The New American Commentary*, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 304]. This then would influence their understanding of ἀνίστημι as well, contra Bruce's understanding in the following footnote.

⁴⁰ I prefer to understand vs. 33 in the sense of BDAG s.v ἀνίστημι #4 and vs. 34 #2. F.F. Bruce agrees that this does seem to be the sense of ἀνίστημι, although he cites Mishrash examples of the rabbinic understanding of the resurrection [*Commentary on the Book of the Acts, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 275].

⁴¹ Bock, *Acts*, 456.

⁴² See previous discussion under "Passages Examined in Context" for specific examples.

⁴³ O'Brien, *Hebrews*, 67. O'Brien does not definitely give his opinion, but he does seem to concur with this sentiment, although he did consistently stress that the use of Ps 2 is to "Christ's nature and status." Cf. his discussion on p. 64-67.

⁴⁴ Cf. the "Summary:" I prefer to understand that even here the fulfillment can reside in Christ's baptism since his office as King did not stop with the baptism but continued into the enthronement and exaltation to God's right hand.

⁴⁵ Franzmann, *Bible History Commentary*, 1326.

⁴⁶ See for example Brug (*Psalms 1-72*, 131): "We know about Jesus' eternal sonship only because the Father proclaimed it on earth. For these reasons, both of these scriptural truths should be emphasized when expounding

than only recognizing this as the eternal generation due to all four contexts of the messianic office of Christ. It is true we know Jesus is true God from eternity because the Father revealed it to us in his baptism and resurrection. But we also know the Father and the Spirit are true God from eternity because the Bible says so, even though the deity of those two persons were not accompanied by outward actions as with Christ, *e.g.*, his resurrection and baptism. We know of the other *opera ad intra*, *e.g.*, the unbegottenness of the Father or the spiration of the Holy Spirit, simply because Scripture proclaims them. Thus, one must not insist it would be impossible to know of one specific act of the *opera ad intra*, the eternal generation, without a public proclamation since we do know of the other *opera ad intra* without a specific public proclamation and display. It seems in these passages the eternal generation and the public proclamation of such can remain distinctive and an emphasis on a specific day can remain.

This is a very difficult exegetical problem, and any interpretation should be given in August Pieper's thoroughly evangelical spirit to his colleague Stöckhardt in St. Louis:

Es wäre es besser gewesen, wenn er das auch in der Auslegung von Ps. 2,7 getan und Aktor. 13,33 zu seinem Recht hätte kommen lassen. Es gibt sich große Mühe, aus Ps. 2,7 nach althergebrachter Weise die wesentliche Gottessohnschaft Christi, von dem der Psalm handelt, zu deduzieren. Aber das wird ewig an dem "chok J'hovah," dessen Inhalt der folgende Satz ist, und am Zusammenhang, V. 6 und 8,9, der von der Einsetzung des Königs handelt, scheitern.⁴⁷

One could contend both understandings can be legitimately found in Psalm 2. It would seem to be arguably ambiguous. *But we must give the Holy Spirit his due.* In all three contexts of the New Testament, although Hebrews 1 a little less so, the writers under the Holy Spirit's inspiration seem to urge us away from the direction of the Messiah's person (*i.e.*, the eternal generation) and onto his work (*i.e.*, the commission into his office). The Holy Spirit's own interpretation of Psalm 2 in the New Testament must be given precedence over any human understanding. Although Franzmann perhaps comes off too strong, he does make a point:

In all three cases in which the New Testament authors cite Psalm 2:7, they do so to show that it was fulfilled through the whole redeeming life, suffering, and death of Jesus and through his resurrection and exaltation that followed; that through all these momentous

this text," Ellingworth (*Hebrews*, 114), who quotes Moffat: "When we ask what [the author] meant by *σήμερον*, we are asking a question which was not present to his mind," or Morris [*Hebrews, The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 18], who contends the author had no interest to specify which day he was referring to, and thus we should not concern ourselves with it either.

⁴⁷ A. Pieper, *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 130. I have emphasized the second subjunctive use for polite speech to show that perhaps the tone between Franzmann's work and Gawrisch's official reaction, for example, is not always the best stated or the best way to evangelically handle this difficult exegetical issue.

acts God ‘begot’ his Son, that is, set him forth, manifested him, certified him as the perfect, the only Savior of lost men. If that is the meaning which Paul and the author of Hebrews, writing under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, found in Psalm 2:7, would we dare to say that the writer of Psalm 2 meant to express a meaning or truth which is altogether different? We must shrink from doing so.⁴⁸

It appears the only way to connect all four contexts is to understand the emphasis and referent as the day of Christ’s baptism, not as a day in and of itself, but as the day in which the activity of the commissioning of Christ and his appointment to the office of Prophet, Priest, and King officially and publically took place. Of course Christ did not stop performing in his role throughout the rest of his earthly life and even into his exaltation in heaven where he now serves the Church in all three roles. But it is perhaps too much in the opposite direction to contend like Franzmann that these passages refer to the entire New Testament era, since linguistically that does not solve the issue of $\tau\omicron\iota$ / $\sigma\acute{\eta}\mu\epsilon\rho\omicron\nu$ any more definitively than God’s “eternal present.”

Thus all these passages should best be understood as referring to Christ’s work as he is appointed to his office of Prophet, Priest, and King at his baptism. The doctrine of the eternal generation is not lost, diminished, or ignored in the least. The full deity of the second person of the Trinity is still established from many other passages, including passages from the Old Testament, as shown above. But it seems Psalm 2:7 should perhaps not be too unequivocally listed as a *sedes doctrinae* for the eternal generation as it has been in the past. It is of course true dogmatically and practically in counseling and preaching that one cannot truly separate Christ’s person and work; who Jesus is directly influences what he came to do. But in this exegesis that is a logical secondary⁴⁹ extension in explaining what it means that Jesus is God’s Son. The only way to specifically tie all these contexts together linguistically and exegetically is to understand it in the sense explained above. The emphasis on the eternal generation and Christ’s person is a completely orthodox emphasis which is taught in the wider context of Scripture *from other*

⁴⁸ Franzmann, *Bible History Commentary*, 1326-1327. Although cited as supportive proof, the reasons for understanding this as referring to the baptism and not also to the resurrection and exaltation (*i.e.* Christ’s entire life), as Franzmann contends, are found under “Passages Examined in Context” and in the paragraph following. He essentially argues in a circle by saying that “today” cannot be the eternal present due to the context of acts fulfilled on one specific day, then understands “beget” as “publically set forth,” but since there were multiple displays over a course of time, “today” must be more than one specific day, *i.e.*, the whole New Testament era.

⁴⁹ Perhaps a semi-mediating stance (*i.e.*, slightly more emphasis to one specific day than Moffat, Brug, Morris, *et al.*) similar to O’Brien (*Hebrews*, 64-67) would be best, where one can find a specific referent, but still not question the fact that Jesus is God’s Son from eternity.

passages which can enlighten, but not necessarily directly parallel, the specific context of Jesus' official commissioning as Prophet, Priest, and King at his baptism.

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