

# CALLING FATHERS “FATHER”: USURPING THE NAME OF GOD?

• Jean-Pierre Batut •

“In this perspective, human fatherhood and motherhood appear not as ends in themselves, but as mysteries of effacement before the fatherhood of God and the motherhood of the Church.”



We know that in the Scriptures, calling God “Father” is absolutely central. We also recall that, far from coming first in salvation history, this usage only becomes normative at the end of a long process that caused it to pass, according to Paul Ricoeur’s felicitous expression, “from fantasy to symbol.”<sup>1</sup> God’s fatherhood only emerges with decisive clarity when we learn that he is the Father, which we cannot do without the manifestation of the one who alone can claim the title of Son. The entire Old Testament prepares this revelation, as the title “first-born son,” given to Israel (Ex 4:22), bears witness: the chosen people is itself a figure of Christ.

## 1. *A different God*

The length of the process mentioned above can also be explained by the need to purify the divine title from all anthropomorphic dross. Paganism is characterized less by the plurality of gods

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Ricoeur, “La paternité, du fantasme au symbole,” in *Le conflit des interprétations* (Seuil, 1969).

than by the impossibility of conceiving an authentic relation of creation between God and the world, which alone would allow us to affirm both that creation bears the mark of God and that God nonetheless transcends all that exists. As long as this idea of transcendence is lacking, the universe and humanity itself are derived from the divine according to a continuity that can be translated into genealogical terms: the supreme god is at the same time the “father of gods and men.”<sup>2</sup>

According to this perspective, it is logical if the pagan gods are sexual gods. They couple and bear the children of other gods, so much so that their genealogy can be recounted in the form of a recitation like Hesiod’s *Theogony*. But the God of Israel is a different God: he has no consort, no feminine partner, because he himself transcends the distinction between masculine and feminine. This celibate God is a God quite complicated to conceive of and to live by, as we witness in the example of the Jews of Elephantine, who lived around 400 B.C.: in contact with the neighboring Egyptian cults, they could not resist the temptation to adore, alongside the God of Israel, a feminine Anath-Iahu or Anath-Bethel, which represented an attempt at compromise on the point the most difficult to admit, and at the same time the most decisive in the Jewish conception of God.

The God of Israel tolerates no equal who corresponds to him: “There is no other God beside me!” A chief consequence of this unicity is that the world that has come forth from his hands can in no way have been “engendered” by him: it exists by virtue of an incomparable divine act that will be called “creation.” This is why the verb *bara* (to create, Gn 1:1) refers only to the act of creation, which we can say consists in the causing to exist, from nothing, another than oneself, whereas the act of engendering consists in causing to exist from oneself, another oneself.

The capacity to create remains therefore in strict relation with the transcendence of God. We will have to wait for the New Testament to add that it is in an equally strict relation with his fatherhood, precisely because this fatherhood is itself transcendent. To create and to engender are two different acts of the power of God, but he created as Father because he created everything in Christ (Col 1:16), the Model and Beginning of all creation (Rev 3:14).

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. Homer, who gives this title to Zeus in the *Iliad* 1, 544ff.

2. *From the origin received to the origin given*

If God is not sexed, sexuality is not divine: neither cults of fecundity nor sacred prostitutes will be tolerated in Israel. Paradoxically, however, this redefinition of sexuality confers upon it a new importance, inscribed in the very act of the Creator. First of all, as with everything that came from the hands of God, sexuality can only be good: there is no place for a Manichean view of creation, no opposition between matter and spirit. But the divine injunction, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it" (Gn 1:28), goes further still, deciphering the distinction of the sexes in the double form of a blessing and a mission. Sexuality does not distance man from God; it is (with travail) the seal of the stewardship of the world that the Creator has entrusted to him. It is a mystery of the covenant, in which the human couple in its fruitfulness finds itself appointed "pro-creators" by the unique Creator, who hands over to man the charge of prolonging his work on earth: God will no longer create without passing through man. This is why, if Genesis does not yet speak of God the Father, it is nonetheless the "book of paternities," according to the apt expression of Paul Beauchamp, for God chose to conduct history and further his covenant with men according to the rhythm of human generations: the child is certainly not a creation of his parents, but neither is he "the pure emanation of the divine."<sup>3</sup>

The condition of being sexed is the place of a limitation: I am not the other. But by this very fact, it is the place of an encounter, from which a new life is born. The illusory self-sufficiency of the androgynous being, which in a mythical mindset could have been considered a mark of superiority, highlights to the contrary that "it is not good for man to be alone" (Gn 2:18). In this way, the logic of the covenant is inscribed within man and woman just as deeply as between humanity and God. God gives them the gift of being father and mother, and they give this gift to one another themselves. The sacrament of difference is that of communion: that by which one differs from the other is at the source of their common fruitfulness.

Difference plays a positive role vis-à-vis God himself. Whereas God is Father precisely because he is without origin, man and woman are father and mother precisely inasmuch as they have

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<sup>3</sup>X. Lacroix, *Passeurs de vie. Essai sur la paternité* (Paris: Bayard, 2004), 271.

an origin. Their sexed condition, with the incompleteness it involves, reminds them that they are not their own origin. Human life thus runs from origin to origin, from the origin received to the origin given, from filiation to fatherhood and motherhood, through the conjugal relation. One has to have been originated in order to become an originator: human fatherhood is, definitively, the fatherhood of a son.

### 3. *The analogy of fatherhood and the Letter to the Ephesians*

On this basis, we can raise the question of the analogy of fatherhoods. If divine fatherhood is defined not only as the fact of being Origin, but also of being the Origin without origin, if the Father that Jesus Christ revealed to us never passed from the stage of being a son to being a father, what can there be in common between his fatherhood and the “fatherhood of a son” that belongs to us? Let us listen to Claude Bruaire:

Far from being suitable for human procreation, fatherhood *as such* is a *univocal* concept that calls into question *our* fatherhoods. For it means, exactly, *the Father*, that is, *the father without father*. That which man will never be, simply because he is first of all a son, because he is not the absolute, creative Origin, the beginning without a beginning. Far from it being an anthropomorphism to call God our Father, it is by a clear theomorphism that every procreator usurps the divine Name.<sup>4</sup>

This intriguing and paradoxical proposal has the great merit of highlighting the impossibility of defining God’s fatherhood from human fatherhood. The French translation of that liturgical prayer notwithstanding, God does not love us “as a father”<sup>5</sup>—fortunately for us, since there are unworthy fathers, and children for whom the proclamation that God loves them as a father would not at all be good news. But in spite of all this, is it legitimate to speak of a

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<sup>4</sup>Claude Bruaire, *La raison politique* (Paris: Fayard, 1974), 261.

<sup>5</sup>Opening prayer for the Mass of the fifth Sunday of Easter. An ill-inspired translator rendered the Latin “*filios dilectionis tuae benignus intende*” with “look with kindness on those whom you love as a father.” A correct translation would have been: “look with kindness (*benignus intende*) on the sons of your love (*filios dilectionis tuae*)” that is, “those whom your love has made sons,” which is entirely different.

"usurpation" of the divine Name apropos of the "theomorphism" by which human fathers are attributed this name? Must we interpret the famous injunction of Mt 23:9 as a formal interdiction: "Call no one on earth your 'father,' since you have only one father, the Father in heaven"? If this is the case, wouldn't we have to go so far as to see in the act by which God reveals his fatherhood a definitive invalidation of all fatherhood here below?

Let us first clear up a misunderstanding regarding naming itself. Xavier Lacroix rightly draws our attention to the fact that there exists "a significant difference between *naming* God Father and *representing* him as such. Naming is not representing."<sup>6</sup> It preserves his mystery, and does so all the better when the proper Name of God becomes a common name when applied to man, designating a function exercised by proxy: just as the existence of priests according to the New Testament does not at all detract from the unicity of Christ, or the "multitude of children" (Heb 2:10) God gives himself in Jesus does not detract from his privilege of being the Only-Begotten Son (Jn 1:18), the sacramental diffraction of fatherhood takes nothing away from the unicity of its transcendent source.

This is as much as to say that, if naming is not representing, we are not in a nominalist perspective in which the name of "father" is given to a man in a manner wholly external to its divine sense. The Pauline text of Ephesians 3:14 firmly invalidates this view of things:

I bend my knee before the Father from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named.

Generally translated as "fatherhood," the Greek word *patria* that Paul uses means both line of descent or lineage, and the family or the community. The affirmation thus reinforces what we said above, that is, that which comes from God in his fatherhood is the capacity to give origin: proper and specific to the fatherhood of God is not "agenesis" (the absence of an origin), but the fact of being the Source giving rise to other sources. "The universe, immense and diverse as it is, the world of all living beings, *is inscribed in God's fatherhood, which is its source.*"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Lacroix, *Passeurs de vie*, 272.

<sup>7</sup>John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, 6.

#### 4. *The fourth-century debate about the fatherhood of God*

Why is God the source of all fatherhood? Precisely because he is more fundamentally Father (Origin) than Unbegotten (without origin). This affirmation was in substance that of the Council of Nicaea, which was convened in 325 to respond to one of the most serious heresies in the history of the Church.

At the beginning of the fourth century, the Alexandrian priest Arius, who took upon himself the task of championing monotheism against heresies that went so far as to confuse the divine persons, presented the fact of being without origin as the quasi-definition of God. Unfortunately, the Word could not enter into this definition, since Jesus, the incarnate Word, ceaselessly affirms that he is originated by the Father: “I live from the Father” (Jn 6:37); “I came out from the Father” (Jn 16:28). Very logically, Arius deduced that the Word—and thus Christ—could not be God to the same degree as the Unbegotten, but only an intermediate being between God and creatures.

Consequently, the begetting of the Word had to have been the fruit of a decision the Father made “one day”: it is an act of the will and not of nature. There was seen to be, then, no essential difference between the act by which God begot the Word and the act by which he created all things. The primacy of the Word on this understanding is fundamentally instrumental: he was willed with a view to creation, as the “firstfruits of the works of God” (Pr 8:22). Hand in hand with this went the notion that, if God begot “one day,” God was God before being Father: fatherhood is not essential to him. It is conceived according to the model of human fatherhood, and comes as an accidental relation to an already constituted subject. The fact of being Unbegotten alone is divine in God.

The Council of Nicaea responded in 325 to this radical calling into question of the Christian faith, with the affirmation that God is not first he who is without origin, but he who gives origin, in other words, the Father.<sup>8</sup> If this is the case, and there is no father without a son (since the title “father” is relational), the Word “born

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<sup>8</sup>In this, the council merely took up the language of the New Testament, where the Greek noun *Theos* (God), when preceded by a definite article, always designates the Father (see K. Rahner, “Dieu dans le Nouveau Testament. La signification du mot *Theos*,” *Écrits théologiques*, I, 13–111 [Paris, 1959]).

of the Father before all ages” could only be God, “consubstantial” with the Father from all eternity.

For Nicaea, fatherhood and sonship are constitutive of the Christian faith: there is in God He who is *nothing but* Fatherhood, and He who is *nothing but* Sonship. Unlike what happens with us, the Son will never become Father. Whereas, in our human experience, filiation and fatherhood are stages we pass through (for fatherhood itself is superseded when the child becomes father in turn), in God, they are persons, the Trinity’s subsistent modalities of being.<sup>9</sup>

In the light of this fatherhood and sonship, the finality of creation reveals itself to be entirely filial, in the face of a divine action that is paternal from the first instant. There is in God no change, no passage from less to more: with respect to us, he does not become father; it is we who become his children. This is why, when we say, “I believe in God the *Father* almighty, *Creator . . .*”, the distinction between “Father” and “Creator” is very largely conceptual. It means that he who is Father in himself manifests himself as Creator with regard to ourselves, in order to raise us up in the end, in his Son and by the gift of the Spirit, to the filial condition he willed for us from all eternity.

### 5. *Joseph and Mary*

Let us return to the question we raised about calling fathers “father.” Does this take away something from the uniqueness of the fatherhood of God? Does it become a kind of screen that hinders man from receiving revelation?

“To understand the meaning of an author, one must harmonize all the contradictory passages,” says Pascal.<sup>10</sup> Since the holy Scriptures have God for their author, it is from Scripture itself that we must seek the harmony between Eph 3:14 and Mt 23:9. In order to do this, we will have recourse to two episodes: the finding

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<sup>9</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas: “the divine fatherhood is God the Father, who is a divine Person” (*paternitas divina est Deus Pater qui est persona divina*—*Summa Theologica* I, 29, 4); “just as the Father is subsistent Fatherhood, the Son is subsistent Filiation” (*Paternitas igitur est persona Patris, et filiatio subsistens est persona Filii*—I, 30, 2).

<sup>10</sup>*Pensées*, no. 684

of the child Jesus in the Temple in Luke, and the crucifixion in John. We will look first at the text from Luke (2:48-49):

And when they saw him, [Joseph and Mary] were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you anxiously!" And he said to them, "Why then did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

No other text of Scripture gives us clearer proof of a fatherhood and motherhood *called into question* [révoquées]. They are such, we note, by a word of authority of the Son himself, who puts his father and mother "in their place." But we can make two remarks on this subject. First, this putting of father and mother "in their place" can be a "putting in place" of their role, without signifying a pure and simple invalidation. It is not an adolescent crisis that prompts Christ to question the authority of his parents, but a word of God that, as every divine word, has a Paschal function: it makes human relations pass through death in order to grant them a new life.

On the other hand, in affirming that he must be "in his Father's house," Jesus only challenges the fatherhood of Joseph, properly speaking. Mary's motherhood has no other with which to compete. Nevertheless, in proclaiming the absolute priority of the obedience due to the heavenly Father, Jesus in some way dismisses both without distinguishing between the human claims of Mary and of Joseph. We find here an anticipation of the difficult prayer of Gethsemane: "Not my will, but your will be done" (Mk 14:36). It is in already doing the will of the Father, in the face of and in spite of everything, that Jesus begins to manifest himself as the Son.

On the basis of this, we could be tempted to understand the episode of the finding of the twelve year-old Jesus as the narrative of a pure and simple rejection of fatherhood. Joseph, who after this disappears from the gospel horizon, has played his role: he no longer exists. The heavenly Father takes up his prerogatives, after appearing to have abandoned them for a moment to another. But Mary's word, "*your* father," dissuades us from such an interpretation by stressing that up to that day, Jesus himself used the title, "father," for Joseph. Are we to imagine that Christ used this title provisionally, only to take it back later? Or that Joseph from that moment ceases to be so called?



Even if the rest of the gospel is silent about Joseph, our consideration of Mary's continuing role warns us against such an interpretation. The episode of Jesus on the cross addressing his Mother (Jn 19:25–27) marks, in the Mother–Son relation, the second and decisive step in the Paschal itinerary that began with the finding in the Temple:

Standing by the cross of Jesus was *his* mother, and *his* mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw *the* mother and near her the disciple whom he loved, he said to *the* mother, "Woman, behold your son!" And then to the disciple, "Behold your mother!"

According to R. Laurentin, we have here a genuine transfer of maternity. At the beginning of this very dense passage, Mary still appears as she whom the gospel of John calls "the mother of Jesus." Her motherhood, as divine as it may be, is referred to no one else. But in the next sentence, by means of the passage from the possessive to the definite article, Mary becomes *the* Mother: the Mother par excellence, the Mother absolutely. This is precisely what allows Jesus to say to her, apropos of the beloved disciple, "Behold *your* son," and to say to the disciple, "Behold *your* Mother." The preface of the Mass in honor of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, recapitulates this passage as follows: "Receiving at the foot of the cross her Son's testament of love, [Mary] received as children all those whom Christ's death caused to be born to divine life."

As we see, on the cross Mary's motherhood is not suppressed, but immeasurably enlarged so as to extend to the whole of humanity, which is called to become the mystical Body of her Son. The incarnation of the Son of God destroys nothing—especially not the humanity he assumed—but saves everything by transfiguring it through the power of the resurrection. This happens, in the first place, to the human relations of fatherhood and motherhood.

In this way, Mary's motherhood shows itself to be related to that of the Church, and the fatherhood assumed by Joseph to be connected to the fatherhood of God. But while Mary's motherhood is assimilated to the motherhood of the Church to the point of coinciding with it, Joseph's fatherhood is never confused with the fatherhood of God. It is entirely a mystery of effacement before that from which it "is named," whereas motherhood is not named from anything else, but incarnates the human vocation and anticipates its

fulfillment: “Perfect image of the Church to come, dawn of the Church triumphant, [Mary] guides and sustains the hope of your pilgrim people,” as we hear in the preface to the feast of the Assumption.

In order to understand why Mary’s motherhood and Joseph’s fatherhood are treated so differently, it is enough to remember that in Jesus’ double filial relation to Mary and Joseph, there is only one *incarnate* filial relation, his relation to his Mother. Joseph’s fatherhood is only representative: in other terms, it is *priestly*. Human fatherhood and motherhood are of course both images of the unique fatherhood of God, but they are such asymmetrically. If Mary is in her motherhood a figure of the Church, Joseph in his turn is a figure of the priest, who effaces himself before Him whom he represents (that is, both Christ the High Priest and the Father whom he makes present—“Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father”) and who, in effacing himself, communicates him sacramentally to men.

#### 6. *From the intention of fatherhood to fatherhood as sacrament*

Is this revelation? Certainly, but it is prepared by what we can observe by reflecting on human fatherhood. This latter is in fact less a work of the flesh than the result of an interlocution. In attaining fatherhood, a man must learn to become a father, and, in order to learn this, his name must be given to him. In large part, it is the child who makes a father by giving him this name. As for the father, he must, again by a word, acknowledge his child. It is this which makes someone say to a psychoanalyst, in reflections situated on the frontier of psychology and theology:

Human fatherhood is spiritual: the father according to the flesh is not at all father through the work of the flesh, but in the measure in which he takes on that which is conceived from him.<sup>11</sup>

In mentioning the Father’s adoption of humanity as sons in Christ, we left aside the manner in which this transformation is effected. The Scriptures of the New Testament insist on the fact that it is the

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<sup>11</sup>J. Gagey, “De la paternité spirituelle,” *Vie Spirituelle* 589 (March–April 1972), 206–07.

result of a word, as was creation: "You are my Son, and today I have begotten you." Addressed first to Christ as communicating his divine prerogatives to his humanity,<sup>12</sup> this word is none other than the eternal word of begetting now spoken in time, so as from now on to be communicable to men: "He who conquers shall have this heritage," we read in the last chapter of Revelation: "I will be his God and he shall be my son" (21:7).

From the beginning of history, a dialogue has been taking place between God and man. Their relation is established immediately on the basis of election and in the logic of the covenant, that is, in an exchange ordered to a community of existence. The Letter to the Ephesians translates this in its inaugural hymn by affirming that "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . chose us in him from before the foundation of the world" (1:3–4). This election takes place before all creation: we were created because we had been chosen. In other words, the word of creation translates within time and space a word of election pronounced outside time and space.

What can be the place of this word if not the word of begetting that the Father pronounces from all eternity, addressed to his Son? Paul explains as much by adding that through the election of which we are the object in Christ, the Father "predetermined that we will be his adoptive children in Jesus Christ" (1:5). It is, then, perfectly clear that for God, "creation *ad extra* is in fact ordered by the intention to be Father."<sup>13</sup>

If we consider fatherhood from here below, we will note that it is precisely this intention to be father that bestows upon fatherhood its human characteristics. The sexual instinct itself is woven through with the intention to be father, and sexuality is human to the extent that it is capable of uttering a word of fatherhood in the very midst of desire. But if this is the case, we can go so far as to say that the spiritual character of human fatherhood, far from being secondary, is in fact primary, for the father according to the flesh is not such primarily through the work of the flesh, but in

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<sup>12</sup>This verse, taken from Psalm 2, originally signifies election and adoption. But the Christian tradition understood it as addressed first to Christ, from the resurrection (Acts 13:33), the Transfiguration (Mt 17:5), the baptism (Mt 3:17 and parallels), and finally, in the preexistence.

<sup>13</sup>Gagey, "De la paternité spirituelle," 209.

the measure in which he takes up this work in a word of acknowledgement. It is for this reason, moreover, that human fatherhood, like the divine fatherhood, has as its mission the generation and education of consciousnesses and freedoms: “the father does not make the child, he helps it to constitute itself.”<sup>14</sup>

Human fatherhood is, then, first *representative*, it is first priestly. For this reason, it is spiritual before being carnal, and precisely in this is in the image of the fatherhood of God.

### 7. *Fatherhood in the tradition of the Church*

In our time, when the argument of tradition tends to fall on deaf ears, it is doubtless not enough to invoke the two thousand-year practice of the Church—at least in Catholic cultures. Nevertheless, this practice cannot be dismissed as null and void, inasmuch as its manifest goal was never to hypostasize human fatherhood, but rather to relativize it by referring it to a new, spiritual manner of exercising fatherhood. Évelyne Sullerot notes this with finesse:

Neither the father nor patriarchy, nor even the family and its traditional bonds, were reinforced by Christianity, but a quite other idea of fatherhood: that of the father not through the flesh but through the spirit, the master who guides his disciple, the spiritual director who cares for the soul of his student, the educator who transmits instruction and morality to his child or another's. Those who were called the “Fathers of the Church” . . . reinforce this notion of true fatherhood, which is not to beget offspring, but to keep the child away from wild beasts, to ensure its growth in humanity. Soon enough in all the Church, priests were called “Father” or “Abbé,” and they in turn called “my son” or “my daughter” those Christians, even older than themselves, who came to the Church in search of the food of the spirit. And at home, the father of the family had to transmit the message of the Church, so true was it that “he is unworthy of the name of father who, having begotten a child into the world, takes no care to beget him also for heaven.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Gagey, “De la paternité spirituelle,” 212.

<sup>15</sup>Évelyne Sullerot, *Quels pères? Quels fils?* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), 50–51, citing Luis de Granada, *Guide des pécheurs*.

The spiritual reference to begetting from above, of which the heavenly Father alone is capable, confirms the ministerial status of human fatherhood. Far from it that man is unworthy of the name of "father"; rather, he will be declared worthy of it on the condition that he knows to cede his place to an Other who is Father in the strong sense, begetting to his own life those who were born "of blood and the flesh" (Jn 1:13). So that this begetting from "above" (Jn 3:3) might be accomplished, the child will be entrusted to the Church, who will confer on it baptism, and the human parents, through the Christian education they will give to their progeny, will make themselves servants of God, helping the new child of the Father to live according to its new condition. In this perspective, human fatherhood and motherhood appear not as ends in themselves, but as mysteries of effacement before the fatherhood of God and the motherhood of the Church.

That which exists at the heart of the family finds itself in yet clearer form in the traditional titles of address for priests or monks. It is striking that such men are all the more readily called "Father" when, in the natural sense, they have no children. Because their fatherhood is not particularized on any individual, it can be a pure sign of the universal fatherhood of God: it is sign only in the total non-possession of one who is called in a vocation to beget no one, accepting to be nothing to anyone in order to be a sign of God for everyone.

The Napoleonic return of the Roman *paterfamilias*, who is theoretically omnipotent vis-à-vis his progeny and his wife, is obviously not the fruit of Christianity, but the resurgence of a cultural mode of behavior fundamentally foreign to Christian faith, reversing its terms in an idolization of human fatherhood. But as Hilary of Poitiers wrote long ago, "you were not shown that the father is God, but that God is Father!"<sup>16</sup> What the revelation of divine fatherhood calls into question is none other than paternalism and the continually renewed confusion of authority with power. But what this revelation saves by converting is the divine image contained in human fatherhood, and its capacity to become *sacrament*—a visible sign of an invisible reality, and a medium that makes communication with this reality possible.

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<sup>16</sup>*De Trinitate* III, 21.

*Conclusion*

Of course, as Novatian, the first theologian of the Latin language, stresses, “God is He to whom it is proper to be incapable of being compared with anything.”<sup>17</sup> We can ask ourselves nonetheless whether the concern for purity that makes us fear anthropomorphism is not a two-edged sword. It would not be hard to show that a God who is ever more transcendent is a God ever more totalitarian—and, all things considered, ever more anthropomorphic. The avowed anthropomorphisms God himself used to reveal himself to us are the most adequate means we have to speak about him—on the condition that we respect the analogy.

With respect to God’s fatherhood, the issue comes down to one of adequation between the language of Scripture and our own language: we are, then, more in the analogy of faith than in the analogy of being. In this type of analogy, in the end, we merely restore to God what belongs to him—his own words.

To pertain to God, *God* must produce from within himself the relation between temporal truths and his divinity. He chooses our truth to express his truth. But this action by God—and this is important—is no arbitrary act as the Nominalists would have it. Rather his act of appropriating our truths is founded in the fact that our truth already belongs to God, just as our being belongs more to him than to us, since we are entirely his creations, the product of his decision to create.<sup>18</sup>

—*Translated by Michelle K. Borrás.*

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<sup>17</sup>Novatian, *Liber de Trinitate*, 2, PL 3, 891.

<sup>18</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 109.