

and the Spirit is always the Spirit. The Father is always represented as first in order; the Son is always represented as second in order; and the Spirit is always represented as third in order. This does not mean that the essence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit has in it levels of subordination; the essence of all three Persons is one and the same. But within the unparticularized essence of God, the particularized personal subsistences are characterized by an order and by specific personal interrelationships.

What, then, shall we say about the many creedal references to the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit? J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., in his Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion, has an excellent treatment of the scriptural passages from which these concepts were derived. In treating Psalm 2:7, where we find the words, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee," Buswell says:

We are thus justified in saying that the "begetting" of the Son referred to in Psalm 2:7, as interpreted in the New Testament, is not a literal generation of His being in any sense of the word, but is a reference to God's declaratory revelation of the eternal divine Sonship, particularly in Christ's resurrection from the dead.¹⁴

Buswell examines the word "firstborn" (PROTOTOKOS) and concludes that it means "virgin birth" (Luke 2:7), the "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5), "the one who has pre-eminence" (Romans 8:29 and Hebrews 1:6), "the one who originally brought forth" (Colossians 1:15). Then Buswell turns to the word "only begotten" (MONOGENES), and discovers that it has nothing to do with "begetting," but rather means "in a class by himself," "the only one of his kind," "unique." Buswell summarizes this study by saying:

We have above examined all the instances in which "begotten" or "born" or related words are applied to Christ, and we can say with confidence that the Bible has nothing whatsoever to say about "begetting" as an eternal relationship between the Father and the Son.¹⁵

From this Buswell concludes "I . . . believe that the 'eternal generation' doctrine should be dropped." However, he goes on to say something further: