

QUESTION 11

God's Oneness

Given what has gone before, the next thing to consider is God's oneness. On this topic there are four questions: (1) Does *one* add anything to *being*? (2) Are *one* and *many* opposed to each other? (3) Is God one? (4) Is God maximally one?

Article 1

Does *one* add anything to *being*?

It seems that *one* adds something to *being*:

Objection 1: Everything that belongs to a determinate genus is related by addition to *being*, since *being* encompasses every genus. But *one* belongs to a determinate genus, since it is the principle of number, which is a species of quantity. Therefore, *one* adds something to *being*.

Objection 2: That which divides something common is related by addition to that thing. But *being* is divided by *one* and *many*. Therefore, *one* adds something to *being*.

Objection 3: If *one* added nothing to *being*, then to call something one would be the same as calling it a being. But it is trivial to say that a being is a being. Therefore, it would be trivial to say that a being is one. But this is false. Therefore, *one* adds something to *being*.

But contrary to this: In the last chapter of *De Divinis Nominibus* Dionysius says, "There is nothing among the things that exist that does not participate in *one*." But this would not be the case if *one* added to *being* something which contracted it. Therefore, *one* is not related to *being* by addition.

I respond: *One* does not add any entity to *being*, but instead adds just the negation of division. For *one* signifies the same thing as *undivided being*.

From this it is clear that *one* is convertible with *being*. For every being is either simple or composite. A simple being is undivided both in actuality and in potentiality, whereas a composite being does not have *esse* as long as its parts are divided, but has it once the parts constitute and compose the composite being itself. Hence, it is clear that the *esse* of any given thing consists in undividedness. And so it is that each thing is such that insofar as it maintains its own *esse*, it also preserves its own oneness.

Reply to objection 1: Those who thought that the *one* which is convertible with *being* is the same as the *one* which is the principle of number were divided into contrary positions.

Pythagoras and Plato, noticing that the *one* which is convertible with *being* does not add any entity to *being* but instead signifies the substance of a being insofar as it is undivided, thought that this was also true of the *one* which is the principle of number. And since a number is composed of unities, they believed that numbers were the substances of all things.

Contrary to this, Avicenna, noting that the *one* which is the principle of number adds some entity to the substance of a being (otherwise, number as composed of unities would not be a species of quantity), believed that the *one* which is convertible with *being* adds some entity to the substance of a being, in the way that *white* adds an entity to *man*. But this is manifestly false, since each entity is one by its own substance. For if each entity were one through some other entity, then since the latter would again be one, if it were again one through some other entity, there would be an infinite regress. Hence, one should stop the regress at the first step.

Accordingly, one should say that the *one* which is convertible with *being* does not add any entity to a being, whereas the *one* which is the principle of number does add a further being that belongs to the genus of quantity.

Reply to objection 2: Nothing prevents what is divided in one way from being undivided in

another way; for instance, that which is divided in number is undivided in species. And so it is possible for something to be one in one way and many in another way.

Still, if something is undivided absolutely speaking—either (a) because it is undivided with respect to what pertains to its essence, even though it is divided with respect to things that lie outside its essence, as, e.g., that which is one in subject and many with respect to accidents, or (b) because it is undivided in actuality and divided in potentiality, as, e.g., that which is one as a whole and many with respect to its parts—then an entity of this sort will be one absolutely speaking and many in a certain respect.

If, by contrast, something is undivided in a certain respect and divided absolutely speaking—because, say, it is divided with respect to essence and undivided in concept or with respect to some principle or cause—then it will be many absolutely speaking and one in a certain respect. This is the case, for instance, with things that are many in number and one in species or one with respect to some principle.

Now *being* is divided by *one* and *many* in such a way that it is, as it were, one absolutely speaking and many in a certain respect, since a multitude would not itself be contained under *being* unless it were contained in some way under *one*. For in the last chapter of *De Divinis Nominibus*, Dionysius says, “There is no multitude that does not participate in *one*. For things that are many in their parts are one as a whole; and things that are many in their accidents are one in subject; and things that are many in number are one in species; and things that are many in species, are one in genus; and things that are many in their emanations are one in their principle.”

Reply to objection 3: The reason that it is not trivial for a being to be called one is that *one* adds something conceptually to *being*.

Article 2

Are *one* and *many* opposed to each other?

It seems that *one* and *many* are not opposed to each other:

Objection 1: No opposite is predicated of its opposite. But every multitude is in some sense one, as is clear from what has been said (a. 1). Therefore, *one* is not opposed to *multitude*.

Objection 2: No opposite is constituted out of its opposite. But a multitude is constituted out of ones. Therefore, *one* is not opposed to *multitude*.

Objection 3: A given thing has only one opposite. But *few* is opposed to *many*. Therefore, it is not the case that *one* is opposed to *many*.

Objection 4: If *one* were opposed to *multitude*, then it would be opposed to it as *undivided* is opposed to *divided*, and so it would be opposed to it as a privation to a disposition. But this seems absurd, since it would follow that *one* is posterior to *multitude* and defined in terms of it, even though *multitude* is defined in terms of *one*. Hence, there would be a circularity in the definitions, which is absurd. Therefore, it is not the case that *one* and *many* are opposites.

But contrary to this: If the definitions are opposed, then the things themselves are opposed. But the definition of *one* consists in *indivisibility*, whereas the definition of *multitude* contains *division*. Therefore, *one* and *many* are opposites.

I respond: *One* is opposed to *many*, but in various ways.

The *one* which is a principle of number is opposed to the *multitude* which is a number in the way that a measure is opposed to what it measures. For *one* has the nature of a first measure, and number is a multitude measured by *one*, as is clear from *Metaphysics* 10.

By contrast, the *one* which is convertible with *being* is opposed to *multitude* in the manner of a privation, in the way that *undivided* is opposed to *divided*.

Reply to objection 1: No privation negates *esse* completely, since, according to the Philosopher, a privation is a negation within a subject. But every privation does negate some *esse* or other. And so in the case of *being*, because of its commonality, it happens that any privation of *being* is grounded in *being*—something that does not occur with the privations of specific forms such as vision or whiteness, or other forms of this sort.

And what holds for *being* also holds for *one* and *good* insofar as they are convertible with *being*. For a privation of goodness is grounded in something that is good, and, similarly, a negation of unity is grounded in something that is one. Because of this, it happens that a multitude is in some sense one, and a thing that is evil is in some sense good, and a thing that is a non-being is in some sense a being. Still, it is not the case here that an opposite is being predicated of its opposite, since one of the two opposites is being predicated absolutely speaking and the other is being predicated in a certain respect. For example, something that is a being in a certain respect—as, e.g., a being in potentiality—is not a being absolutely speaking, i.e., a being in actuality. Again, something that is a being absolutely speaking in the genus of substance is not a being in a certain respect, i.e., something with accidental *esse*. Similarly, something that is good in a certain respect is evil absolutely speaking, or vice versa. And, likewise, something that is one absolutely speaking is many in a certain respect, and vice versa.

Reply to objection 2: There are two sorts of wholes. One sort of whole is homogeneous, i.e., composed of similar parts, whereas another sort of whole is heterogeneous, i.e., composed of dissimilar parts. In any homogeneous whole, the whole is constituted out of parts that have the same form as the whole. For instance, every part of a quantity of water is itself water; and the composition of a continuous thing out of its parts is also like this. On the other hand, in any heterogeneous whole, each part lacks the form of the whole. For instance, no part of a house is itself a house, and no part of a man is itself a man.

A multitude is a whole of the latter sort. Given that its parts do not have the form of the multitude, a multitude is composed of unities, as a house is composed of non-houses. However, the unities do not constitute the multitude in virtue of having the characteristic *undividedness* by which they are opposed to multitude. Rather, the unities constitute the multitude in virtue of having the nature of *being*—just as the parts of a house constitute the house in virtue of being certain corporeal beings, not in virtue of the fact that they are not themselves houses.

Reply to objection 3: *Many* is taken in two ways: (a) in one way, absolutely, and this is the sense in which it is opposed to *one*; (b) in a second way, insofar as it implies a certain excess, and this is the sense in which it is opposed to *few*. Thus, in the first sense, two things are many, but not in the second sense.

Reply to objection 4: *One* is opposed privatively to *many* insofar as part of the concept *many* is that the many things are divided. Hence, the division has to be prior to the unity—not absolutely speaking, but rather according to the nature of our apprehension. For we apprehend simple things through composite things. This is why we define a point as that which has no parts, or as the beginning of a line.

But *multitude*, even in concept, is consequent to *one*, since we do not grasp the divided things as having the nature of a multitude unless we attribute unity to the two things that have been divided. Hence, *one* is posited in the definition of *multitude*, but *multitude* is not posited in the definition of *one*. Rather, *division* falls under our understanding by the very negation of *being*. Thus, *being* is the first thing that falls under our understanding; second is the fact that *this* being is not *that* being, and so the second thing we apprehend is *division*; the third thing is *one*; and the fourth is *many*.

Article 3

Is God one?

It seems that God is not one:

Objection 1: 1 Corinthians 8:5 says, “For there are gods many and lords many.”

Objection 2: The *one* which is the principle of number cannot be predicated of God, since no quantity is predicated of God. Likewise, the *one* which is convertible with *being* cannot be predicated of God, either. For it implies a privation, and every privation is an imperfection that cannot belong to God. Therefore, we should not say that God is one.

But contrary to this: Deuteronomy 6:4 says, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one.”

I respond: There are three ways to demonstrate that God is one.

First, from *His simplicity*: That in virtue of which a singular thing is a *this-something* cannot, it is clear, be communicated in any way to many. For instance, that in virtue of which Socrates is a man can be communicated to many, but that in virtue of which he is *this* man can be communicated only to one thing. Therefore, if Socrates were a man in virtue of that by which he is *this* man, then just as there cannot be more than one Socrates, so there could not be more than one man. But this very thing is true of God, since, as was shown above (q. 3, a. 3), God Himself is His own nature. Accordingly, then, *God* is the same as *this God*. Therefore, it is impossible for there to be more than one God.

Second, from *the unlimitedness of His perfection*: It was shown above (q. 4, a. 2) that God includes within Himself the total perfection of being. Now if there were more than one God, then they would have to differ from one another. Therefore, something would belong to the one that did not belong to the other. If this something were a privation, then the first God would not be absolutely perfect, whereas if it were a perfection, then the other God would not have it. Therefore, it is impossible for there to be more than one God. Hence, compelled, as it were, by the truth itself, the ancient philosophers, when they posited an infinite principle, posited just one such principle.

Third, from *the unity of the world*: All the things that exist are ordered to one another, with some subject to others. But diverse things do not belong to the same ordering unless they are ordered by some one thing. For it is better that many things be brought into a single ordering by one thing than by many, since one thing is a cause of one thing *per se*, whereas many things are a cause of one thing only *per accidens*, viz., insofar as they are in some sense one. Therefore, since that which is first is the most perfect and a *per se* (and not *per accidens*) [principle], there must be just one first being that brings all things into a single ordering. And this is God.

Reply to objection 1: The gods are called many in light of the error of those who worshiped many gods, thinking the planets and other stars to be gods, or even particular parts of the world. Hence, he adds, “Yet to us there is but one God . . .”

Reply to objection 2: The *one* which is the principle of number is not predicated of God, but is instead predicated only of those things that have their *esse* in matter. For the *one* which is the principle of number belongs to the genus of mathematical entities, which have *esse* in matter but are abstracted from matter conceptually.

On the other hand, the *one* which is convertible with *being* is metaphysical in the sense that it does not depend on matter with respect to its *esse*.

And even though there is no privation in God, nonetheless, according to the mode of our apprehension, we have cognition of Him only by way of privation and negation. And so there is nothing to prevent certain ‘that’-clauses (*dicta*) from being predicated privatively of God, e.g., that He is incorporeal or that He is infinite. And in the same way it is said of God that He is one.

Article 4

Is God maximally one?

It seems that God is not maximally one:

Objection 1: *One* is predicated in virtue of a privation of division. But a privation does not admit of *more* and *less*. Therefore, God is not called one to a greater degree than the other things that are one.

Objection 2: Nothing seems to be more indivisible than that which is indivisible in both actuality and potentiality, e.g., a point, or oneness itself. But something is called one to a greater degree insofar as it is more indivisible. Therefore, God is not one to a greater degree than is oneness or a point.

Objection 3: That which is good through its essence is maximally good; therefore, that which is one through its essence is maximally one. But, as the Philosopher makes clear in *Metaphysics* 4, every being is one through its essence. Therefore, every being is maximally one. Therefore, God is not one to a greater degree than other beings.

But contrary to this: Bernard says, “Among all the things that are called one, the unity of the divine Trinity stands at the summit.”

I respond: Since *one* is *undivided being*, in order for something to be maximally one, it must be both maximally a being and maximally undivided. But both of these belong to God.

God is maximally a being insofar as He does not have any *esse* that is limited by some nature which receives it. Instead, He is subsistent *esse* itself, unlimited in any way.

Moreover, He is maximally undivided insofar as He is divided neither in actuality nor in potentiality according to any mode of division whatsoever. For, as was shown above (q. 3, a. 7), He is simple in every way.

Hence, it is clear that God is maximally one.

Reply to objection 1: Even though a privation, taken in itself, does not admit of *more* and *less*, still, to the extent that its opposite admits of *more* and *less*, the privative terms themselves are predicated to greater and lesser degrees. So, then, to the extent that something is divided (or divisible) either more or less or in no way at all, it is called less or more or maximally one.

Reply to objection 2: A point and the oneness which is the principle of number are not maximally beings, since they do not have *esse* except in some subject. Hence, neither of them is maximally one. For just as, because of the difference between a subject and its accident, the subject is not maximally one, so neither is the accident maximally one.

Reply to objection 3: Even though every being is one through its substance, still, not every substance is equal at making for unity. For the substance of some things is composed of many things, whereas the substance of other things is not.