

QUESTION 13

The Names of God

Now that we have considered what pertains to our cognition of God, we must proceed to a consideration of the names of God. For each thing is named by us insofar as we know it. On this topic there are twelve questions: (1) Can God be named by us? (2) Are some of the names said of God predicated of him substantively? (3) Are some of the names said of God said of Him properly, or are all the names attributed to Him metaphorically? (4) Are the many names said of God synonyms? (5) Are some names said univocally of God and creatures, or are they all said equivocally? (6) Assuming that the names are said analogously, are they said in the primary sense (*per prius*) of God or of creatures? (7) Are some names said of God from a given point in time? (8) Is the name 'God' the name of a nature or of an operation? (9) Is the name 'God' a shareable name? (10) Is the name 'God' taken univocally or equivocally in signifying God through nature, according to participation, and according to opinion? (11) Is the name 'He Who Is' ('*Qui est*') an especially proper name of God? (12) Can affirmative propositions be formulated about God?

Article 1

Does any name befit God?

It seems that no name befits God:

Objection 1: In *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 1, Dionysius says, "There is no name for Him, or even a conjecture." And Proverbs 30:4 says: "What is His name, and what is the name of His son, if you know?"

Objection 2: Every name is predicated either abstractly (*in abstracto*) or concretely (*in concreto*). But names that signify concretely do not belong to God because He is simple; and names that signify abstractly do not belong to Him because they do not signify anything that is a complete subsistent being. Therefore, no name can be said of God.

Objection 3: Names signify a substance with a quality, whereas verbs and participles signify temporally, and pronouns signify either demonstratively or relatively. But none of these belong to God. For He exists without qualities and, indeed, without any accident; and He exists without time; and He cannot be sensed, so that He might be pointed at; nor can He be signified relatively, since relative [pronouns] refer back to antecedents that are names or participles or demonstrative pronouns. Therefore, God cannot be named by us in any way.

But contrary to this: Exodus 15:3 says, "The Lord is as a man of war, Almighty is His name."

I respond: According to the Philosopher, spoken words are signs of acts of intellectual understanding (*signa intellectuum*), and acts of intellectual understanding are likenesses of things (*rerum similitudines*). And so it is clear that spoken words are used to signify things by the mediation of the intellect's conception (*mediante conceptione intellectus*). Therefore, insofar as we can have a cognition of a thing through an act of intellectual understanding, it can be named by us.

Now it was shown above (q. 12, a. 12) that in this life we cannot see God through His essence, but that instead we have cognition of Him from creatures (a) in His status as a principle, (b) through the way of preeminence, and (c) through the way of negation (*secundum habitudinem principii et per modum excellentiae et remotionis*). Therefore, God can be named by us from creatures, but not in such a way that the name signifying Him expresses what the divine essence is—i.e., not in the way that the name 'man' expresses by its signification the essence of man as such. For 'man' signifies the definition of a man, thus making clear his essence, since the conception (*ratio*) that the name signifies is the definition.

Reply to objection 1: The reason that God is said not to have a name, or to be beyond naming, is that His essence is beyond that which we understand intellectually about God and which we signify by spoken words.

Reply to objection 2: Since we come to the cognition of God from creatures and on this basis name Him, the names that we attribute to God signify in a mode that belongs to material creatures, the cognition of which is connatural to us, as was explained above (q. 12, a. 4).

Among creatures of this sort, the ones that are complete and subsistent are composite, whereas in their case form is not a complete subsistent thing, but is instead that by which something is such-and-such. Because of this, all the names that we impose to signify something complete (*completum*) and subsistent signify concretely (*in concretione*), since they belong to composite things. On the other hand, the names that are imposed to signify simple forms signify something not as subsistent but as that by which something is such-and-such; for instance, ‘whiteness’ signifies that by which something is white.

Therefore, since God is both simple and subsistent, we attribute to him both (a) *abstract* names, in order to signify His simplicity, and (b) *concrete* names, in order to signify His subsistence and completeness (*perfectionem*), even though both sorts of names fall short of His mode of being—just as, in this life, our intellect does not know Him as He is.

Reply to objection 3: To signify “a substance with a quality” is to signify a suppositum with a determinate nature or form in which it subsists. Hence, since, as has just been explained, some names are said of God concretely (*in concretione*) in order to signify His subsistence and completeness, it follows that some names that signify “a substance with a quality” are said of God.

On the other hand, verbs and participles that co-signify a time are said of Him because eternity includes all of time. For just as we are able to apprehend and signify simple subsistent things only in the mode of composite things, so we can understand and verbally express eternity only in the mode of temporal things. This is because our intellectual understanding is connatural with composite and temporal things.

Pronouns are said of God insofar as they refer demonstratively to that which is understood, not to that which is sensed. For to the extent that something is understood by us, it falls under demonstrative reference.

And just as it is in this way that names and participles and demonstrative pronouns are said of God, so too it is in this way that God can be signified by relative pronouns.

Article 2

Is any name said of God substantively?

It seems that no name is said of God substantively (*substantialiter*):

Objection 1: Damascene says, “It must be the case that each of the things said of God does not signify what He is according to His substance, but rather expresses either what He is not, or some relation, or something that follows from His nature or operation.”

Objection 2: In *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 1, Dionysius says, “You will find all the hymns of the holy theologians dividing the names of God in a clear and praiseworthy manner according to the beneficent processions of the supreme deity.” His meaning is that the names that the holy doctors use in praise of God are distinguished in accord with what proceeds from God Himself (*secundum processum ipsius Dei*). But that which signifies what proceeds from a given thing does not signify anything

pertaining to its essence. Therefore, the names said of God are not said of Him substantively.

Objection 3: A thing is named by us insofar as it is understood. But in this life we cannot understand God according to His substance. Therefore, neither can any name imposed by us be said of God according to His substance.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* 6 Augustine says, “But in the case of God, to be is the same as to be powerful or to be wise or whatever else you might say of that simplicity, by which His substance is signified.” Therefore, all names of this sort signify the divine substance.

I respond: As regards those names which are said of God *negatively* or which signify His *relation to creatures*, it is clear that they do not signify His substance in any way. Rather, they signify either (a) the denial of something of Him or (b) His relation to another (or, better, another’s relation to Him).

However, as regards the names that are said of God *affirmatively* and *non-relationally* (*absolute*)—such as ‘good’, ‘wise’, and others of this sort—there are differing opinions.

Some have claimed that even though all these names are said affirmatively of God, we nonetheless find that they deny something of God rather than posit something in Him. Thus, they claim that when we say that God is living, what we signify is that God does not exist in the way that non-living things do; and all the other cases should be dealt with in a similar way. This is the position of Rabbi Moses.

Others claim that these names are imposed to signify a relation of God to created things. For instance, when we say that God is good, the meaning is that God is a cause of goodness in things. And the same line of reasoning holds in the other cases.

But both of these positions seem wrong, and for three reasons:

First, neither of these positions can explain why certain names are said of God rather than others. For example, He is a cause of bodies in the same way that He is a cause of good things. So if, when God is called good, nothing is signified other than that He is a cause of good things, one could likewise claim that God is a body because He is a cause of bodies. Again, in saying that He is a body, one would be denying that He is merely a being in potentiality, like primary matter.

Second, it follows that all the names said of God would be said of Him in a derived sense (*per posterius*), in the way that ‘healthy’ is said in a derived sense of medicine by virtue of the fact that it signifies merely that medicine is a cause of health in an animal, which is called ‘healthy’ in the primary sense (*per prius*).

Third, the positions in question are contrary to the intention of those who speak about God. For when they say that God is living, they mean something other than that He is a cause of our life or that He differs from non-living bodies.

And so we must respond in another way by claiming that (a) names of this sort do indeed signify the divine substance and are predicated of God substantively, but that (b) they fall short in their representation of Him (*deficiunt a repraesentatione ipsius*). This is clear as follows:

Names signify God according to the way in which our intellect has cognition of Him. But when our intellect has a cognition of God from creatures, it has a cognition of Him in accord with the way in which creatures represent Him. Now it was shown above (q. 4, a. 2) that God, as a being who is perfect absolutely speaking and in all respects, contains within Himself all the perfections of creatures. Hence, each creature represents Him, and is similar to Him, to the extent that it has some perfection—not in the sense that it represents Him as something of the same species or genus, but rather in the sense that it represents Him as a supreme principle whose effects fall short of His form, but to whom His effects nonetheless bear some sort of similarity in the way that the forms of lower bodies represent the power of the sun. This was explained above (q. 4, a. 3) when we were discussing God’s perfection. So, then, the names mentioned above signify God’s substance, albeit imperfectly, in the same way that creatures represent God’s substance. Thus, when God is said to be good, the meaning is not that God is a cause of goodness or that God is not evil; rather, the meaning is that what we call goodness in creatures preexists

in God and does so in some higher mode. Hence, from this it follows not that ‘good’ belongs to God insofar as He causes goodness, but rather, just the opposite, that because God is good, He diffuses His goodness to things—in accord with Augustine’s claim in *De Doctrina Christiana* that “because He is good, we exist.”

Reply to objection 1: Damascene is claiming that these names do not signify what God is because none of them expresses perfectly what God is; instead, each signifies Him imperfectly, just as creatures represent Him imperfectly.

Reply to objection 2: In the signification of names, it is sometimes the case that *that because of which* a name is imposed to signify differs from *what* the name is imposed to signify. For instance, the name ‘rock’ (*lapis*) is imposed *because* a rock hurts the foot (*laedit pedem*). However, it is imposed not to signify what ‘hurts the foot’ signifies, but instead to signify a certain species of corporeal thing; otherwise, everything that hurts the foot would be a rock.

Therefore, one should claim that divine names of the sort in question are, to be sure, imposed because of what proceeds from God. For just as creatures represent God, though imperfectly, according to the diverse processions of perfections [from God], so too our intellect has cognition of God and names God with respect to each of these processions. Yet these names are not imposed to signify the processions themselves—as if it were the case that when God is said to be living, the meaning is that life proceeds from Him. Rather, they are imposed to signify the very principle of things insofar as life preexists in Him, though in a more eminent way than is understood or signified by us.

Reply to objection 3: In this life we cannot have a cognition of God’s essence as it is in itself. Rather, we have a cognition of it insofar as it is represented in the perfections had by creatures. And this is how the names imposed by us signify God’s essence.

Article 3

Are some names said of God properly, or are all names attributed to Him metaphorically?

It seems that no name is said of God properly:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1), all the names that we say of God are taken from creatures. But the names of creatures are said metaphorically of God, as when God is said to be a rock or a lion or something of that sort. Therefore, all the names said of God are said metaphorically.

Objection 2: No name is properly said of a thing that is such that the name is more truly denied of it than predicated of it. But according to Dionysius in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 2, all names such as ‘good’, ‘wise’, etc., are more truly denied of God than predicated of Him. Therefore, none of these names is said of God properly.

Objection 3: The names of corporeal things are said only metaphorically of God, since He is incorporeal. But all names of the sort in question imply certain corporeal conditions, since they signify temporally and with composition and with other things of this sort, which are conditions of corporeal things. Therefore, all names of this sort are said of God metaphorically.

But contrary to this: In *De Fide* 2 Ambrose says, “There are some names that point clearly to what is proper to God, and there are some that express the clear truth about God’s majesty. By contrast, there are other names that are transferred to God because of some likeness.” Therefore, not all names are said of God metaphorically; instead, some are said properly.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 2), we have cognition of God from the perfections that

proceed from Him to creatures. To be sure, these perfections exist in God in a more eminent manner than in creatures. However, our intellect apprehends them in the way in which they exist in creatures, and it signifies them by names in accord with how it apprehends them.

Therefore, there are two things to consider regarding the names we attribute to God, viz., (a) the perfections that are signified, e.g., goodness, life, etc., and (b) the mode of signifying.

With regard to *what is signified* by names of this sort, these perfections belong properly to God—indeed, they belong more properly to Him than to the creatures themselves, and they are said of God in the primary sense (*per prius*).

On the other hand, as regards *the mode of signifying*, these names are not said of God properly, since they have a mode of signifying that belongs to creatures.

Reply to objection 1: Perfections that proceed from God to creatures are signified by some of these names in such a way that the imperfect way in which the creature participates in the divine perfection is itself included in what the name signifies. For instance, ‘rock’ signifies something that exists materially. Names of this sort can be predicated of God only metaphorically.

On the other hand, some names signify the perfections themselves absolutely speaking, without including in their signification any mode of participation. Examples are ‘being’, ‘good’, ‘living’, and others of this sort. Such names are said of God properly.

Reply to objection 2: Dionysius is claiming that names of this sort are denied of God because what is signified by the name belongs to Him not in the mode by which the name signifies it, but instead in a more excellent mode. Hence, in the same place Dionysius says that God lies beyond every substance and every life.

Reply to objection 3: The names that are said of God properly do not imply corporeal conditions in the very thing signified by the name; rather, they imply corporeal conditions with respect to their mode of signifying. By contrast, the names that are said of God metaphorically imply a corporeal condition in the very thing that they signify.

Article 4

Are the names said of God synonyms?

It seems that the names said of God are synonymous names (*nomina synonyma*):

Objection 1: Names are called synonyms when they signify exactly the same thing. But the names said of God signify exactly the same thing in God, since God’s goodness is His essence, and so is His wisdom. Therefore, these names are exact synonyms (*omnino synonyma*).

Objection 2: Someone might reply that these names signify the same reality, but do it according to diverse concepts (*secundum rationes diversas*).

Against this: A concept is empty when nothing in reality corresponds to it. Therefore, if these concepts are many and the reality is one, it seems that the concepts are empty.

Objection 3: A thing which is one both in reality and in concept (*unum re et ratione*) is one to a greater degree than a thing which is one in reality and many in concept. But God is maximally one. Therefore, it seems that He is not one in reality and many in concept. And thus the names said of God do not signify diverse concepts, and so they are synonyms.

But contrary to this: All synonyms, when strung together, produce something silly—as, e.g., if someone were to say, “Clothes garments.” Therefore, if all the names said of God were synonyms, then it could not be fitting to say “good God” or anything else of this sort. Yet in Jeremiah 32:18 it is written,

“Most mighty, great, and powerful, Lord of hosts is Your name.”

I respond: Names of the sort in question, when said of God, are not synonyms.

This would be easy to see if we were claiming that names of this sort are used to deny something of God or to designate His status as a cause with respect to creatures. For in that case there would be diverse concepts associated with those names corresponding to the diverse things that were being denied or to the diverse effects that were being connoted.

But even given that it has already been explained (a. 2) that names of this sort signify the divine substance, albeit imperfectly, it is still obvious, on the basis of what was said above (aa. 1-2), that these names have diverse concepts. For the concept signified by a name is the intellect’s conception of the reality signified by the name. But since our intellect has cognition of God from creatures, in order to understand God it forms concepts proportioned to the perfections that proceed from God to creatures. These perfections preexist in God in a simple and unified way, whereas they are received in creatures in a fragmented and diversified way. Therefore, corresponding to the diverse perfections of creatures there is a simple unified principle, represented in various and multiple ways by the diverse perfections of the creatures; and in the very same way, corresponding to the various and multiple concepts of our intellect there is a unified and altogether simple being that is imperfectly understood by means of conceptions of the sort in question.

So even though the names attributed to God signify a single reality, they are nonetheless not synonyms; for they signify that reality under many and diverse concepts.

Reply to objection 1: The answer to the first objection is clear from what has been said. For names are called synonyms when they signify a single thing under a single concept (*significant unum secundum unam rationem*). Names that signify diverse concepts of a single thing do not signify that one thing *per se* and primarily, since, as has been explained (a. 1), a name signifies a thing only through the mediation of a conception of the intellect.

Reply to objection 2: The many concepts associated with these names are not hollow and empty, because corresponding to all of them there is some one simple thing, represented by all of them in a diversified and imperfect way.

Reply to objection 3: The very fact that what exists in a diversified and multiplied way in other things exists in a simple and unified way in God attests to God’s perfect oneness. And the fact that He is one in reality and many in concept stems from the fact that our intellect apprehends Him in a multiplicity of ways, just as things represent Him in a multiplicity of ways.

Article 5

Are the names said of both God and creatures said of them univocally?

It seems that what is said of both God and creatures is said of them univocally:

Objection 1: Whatever is equivocal is traced back to something univocal, in the same way that what is many is traced back to what is one. For instance, if the name ‘dog’ is said equivocally of something that barks and of a fish, then it must be said of some things univocally, viz., of everything that barks. Otherwise, there would be an infinite regress.

Now some agents are univocal, agreeing with their effects in both name and definition, e.g., a man generates a man, whereas other agents are equivocal, e.g., the sun generates something that is hot, even though it itself is hot only equivocally.

Therefore, it seems that the first agent, to which all other agents are traced back, is a univocal

agent. And so what is said of both God and creatures is predicated univocally.

Objection 2: No likeness is found among equivocals. Therefore, since, according to Genesis 1:26 (“Let us make man to our image and likeness”), God has some likeness with a creature, it seems that something is said univocally of God and creatures.

Objection 3: As *Metaphysics* 10 says, a measure is homogenous with that which is measured by it. But, as it says in the same place, God is the first measure of all beings. Therefore, God is homogenous with creatures. And so something can be said univocally of God and creatures.

But contrary to this:

1. Whatever is predicated of given things according to the same name but not the same concept is predicated of them equivocally. But no name belongs to God according to the same concept by which it is said of a creature. For instance, wisdom in creatures is a quality, but not in God; and when the genus is varied, it changes the concept, since the genus is part of the definition. Moreover, the same line of reasoning holds for the other cases. Therefore, whatever is said of both God and creatures is said equivocally.

2. God is more distant from creatures than any creatures are from one another. But because of the distance between certain creatures, it turns out that nothing can be predicated univocally of them; for instance, nothing can be predicated univocally of things that do not agree in some genus. Therefore, *a fortiori*, nothing is predicated univocally of God and creatures; instead, everything is predicated equivocally.

I respond: It is impossible for anything to be predicated univocally of God and creatures. For any effect that does not measure up to the full power of its agent cause receives a likeness of the agent that is not of the same nature as the agent, but falls short of it. The result is that what exists in the effects in a fragmented and diversified way exists in the cause in a simple and unified way. For instance, by its unified power the sun produces many and varied forms in lower bodies. In the same way, as was explained above (a. 4), all the perfections that exist in created things in a fragmented and diversified way preexist in God in a unified way.

So, then, when a name pertaining to a perfection is said of a creature, it signifies that perfection as something distinct in definition from other perfections. For instance, when the name ‘wise’ is said of a man, we signify a perfection distinct from the man’s essence and from his power and from his *esse*, etc. By contrast, when we predicate this name of God, we do not mean to signify anything distinct from His essence or from His power or from His *esse*. And so when the name ‘wise’ is said of a man, it in some sense circumscribes and comprehends the thing that is signified. But this is not the case when ‘wise’ is said of God; instead, the thing signified is left as something that is uncomprehended and that exceeds the signification of the name. From this it is clear that the name ‘wise’ is not said of both God and the man according to same concept. Moreover, this line of reasoning applies to all other such cases. Hence, no name is predicated univocally of God and creatures.

But neither are such names predicated in a purely equivocal way, as some have claimed. For if this were so, then it would be impossible to know or demonstrate anything about God from creatures; instead, there would always be a fallacy of equivocation. And this is contrary to the philosophers, who prove many things demonstratively about God, and also contrary to the Apostle, who says in Romans 1:20, “The invisible things of God . . . are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.”

Therefore, one should say that names of the sort in question are said of God and creatures according to an analogy, i.e., a proportion. This can occur in two ways among names: either (a) because many things have a proportion to one thing, as when ‘healthy’ is said of medicine and of urine insofar as both are ordered and proportioned to the health of an animal, the latter as a sign of health and the former as a cause of health; or (b) because the one thing has a proportion to the other, as when ‘healthy’ is said

of medicine and of an animal, insofar as medicine is a cause of the health that exists in the animal. It is in this latter way that certain things are said analogously—and neither univocally nor purely equivocally—of God and creatures. For, as was explained above (a. 1), we cannot name God except from creatures. And so whatever is said of God and creatures is said insofar as the creature is ordered toward God as toward a principle and cause in which the perfections of all things preexist in a most excellent way.

This mode of commonality falls between pure equivocation and simple univocity. For in things that are said analogously there is not just one concept, as there is in the case of univocals. Nor are the concepts totally diverse, as in the case of equivocals. Rather, the name is said in many ways, so that it signifies diverse relations to some one thing—just as ‘healthy’, when said of urine, signifies a sign of the health of an animal, whereas, when said of medicine, it signifies a cause of that same health.

Reply to objection 1: Even though the equivocal is traced back to the univocal in the case of predications, nonetheless, in the case of actions a non-univocal agent necessarily precedes a univocal agent. For a non-univocal agent is a universal cause of a whole species, in the way that the sun is a cause of the generation of all men. By contrast, a univocal agent is not a universal agent cause of a whole species (otherwise, it would be a cause of itself, since it itself is contained in the species); rather, it is a particular cause with respect to *this* individual, which it constitutes as something that participates in the species. Therefore, a universal cause of a whole species is not a univocal agent. But a universal cause is prior to a particular cause.

However, even though this universal agent is not a univocal agent, it is nonetheless not altogether equivocal, since if it were, it would not effect anything that is similar to itself. Rather, it can be called an analogous agent—just as, in the case of predication, all univocal things are traced back to one primary thing which is not univocal but analogous, viz., *being*.

Reply to objection 2: The likeness of a creature to God is imperfect, because, as was said above (q. 4, a. 3), a creature does not represent God as being the same in genus with itself.

Reply to objection 3: God is not a measure that is proportioned to the things that are measured. Hence, God and creatures do not have to be contained in a single genus.

Reply to argument 1 and argument 2 for the contrary: The arguments on behalf of the contrary position show only that names of the sort in question are not predicated univocally of God and creatures. They do not, however, show that these names are predicated equivocally.

Article 6

Are names said in the primary sense of creatures rather than of God?

It seems that names are said in the primary sense (*per prius*) of creatures rather than of God:

Objection 1: We name a thing according to the way in which we have cognition of it; for, according to the Philosopher, names are signs of acts of understanding. But we have cognition of creatures prior to cognition of God. Therefore, the names imposed by us apply in the primary sense to creatures rather than to God.

Objection 2: According to Dionysius in *De Divinis Nominibus*, we name God from creatures. But names transferred from creatures to God—e.g., ‘lion’, ‘rock’, etc.—are said in the primary sense of creatures rather than of God. Therefore, all the names that are said of both God and creatures are said in the primary sense of creatures rather than of God.

Objection 3: As Dionysius says, all names that are said in common of God and creatures are

said of God as a cause of all things. But what is said of something because it is a cause is said of that thing in a derived sense. For example, ‘healthy’ is said in the primary sense of an animal rather than of medicine, which is a cause of health. Therefore, names of this sort are said in the primary sense of creatures rather than of God.

But contrary to this: Ephesians 3:14-15 says, “I bend my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all paternity in heaven and on earth is named.” And the same line of reasoning seems to hold for the other names that are said of God and creatures. Therefore, these names are said in the primary sense of God rather than of creatures.

I respond: In the case of all names that are said of many things analogously, there must be some one thing with respect to which they are all said, and so that one thing must be posited in the definition of all of them. And since, as *Metaphysics* 4 says, the concept signified by the name is the definition, the name is said in the primary sense of that which is posited in the definition of the others, and it is said in a derived sense of the others in accord with the ordering by which they approach that first thing to greater or lesser degrees. For instance, ‘healthy’ as said of an animal is found both (a) in the definition of ‘healthy’ as said of medicine, which is called healthy because it causes health in an animal, and (b) in the definition of ‘healthy’ as said of urine, which is called healthy because it is a sign of an animal’s health.

So, then, all the names that are said metaphorically of God are said in the primary sense of creatures rather than of God. For as said of God, they signify only likenesses to such creatures. In the same way, ‘smiling’, as said of a meadow, signifies—according to a likeness of proportion—nothing other than that when a meadow is blossoming, it is attractive like a man is when he is smiling. So, too, the name ‘lion’, as said of God, signifies only that God operates in His works as powerfully as a lion does in its works. And so it is clear that when such names are said of God, their signification can be defined only by reference to what is said of creatures.

Now as regards those other names, which are not said of God metaphorically, the same line of reasoning would also hold for them if, as some have claimed, they were said of God only insofar as He is a cause. For on such a view, when God is said to be good, this would mean only that God is a cause of goodness in creatures, and so the name ‘good’, as said of God, would include in its meaning the goodness of creatures. In that case, ‘good’ would be said in the primary sense of creatures rather than of God.

However, it was shown above (a. 2) that names of this sort are said of God with respect to His essence and not of God simply as a cause. For when it is said that God is good or wise, what is signified is not only that He is a cause of wisdom or goodness, but that these perfections preexist in Him in a more eminent way.

Accordingly, one should claim that as regards *the reality that is signified* by such names, these names are said in the primary sense of God rather than of creatures. For perfections of this sort emanate from God to creatures. On the other hand, as regards the imposition of the names, they are imposed by us in the first place (*per prius*) on creatures, which we have cognition of first. Hence, as was explained above (a. 3), they have a *mode of signifying* that belongs to creatures.

Reply to objection 1: This objection has to do with the imposition of the name.

Reply to objection 2: As has been explained, it is not the case that the same line of reasoning holds both for names that are said metaphorically of God and for the other names.

Reply to objection 3: This objection takes for granted that these names are said of God only as a cause—in the way that ‘healthy’ is said of medicine—and not with respect to His essence.

Article 7

Are names that imply a relation to creatures said of God from a given point in time?

It seems that names implying a relation to creatures are not said of God from a given point in time:

Objection 1: As is commonly claimed, all names of the sort in question signify the divine substance; thus, Ambrose says that the name ‘Lord’ is a name of power, which is God’s substance, and that the name ‘Creator’ signifies God’s action, which is His essence. But the divine essence is eternal and not temporal. Therefore, names of this sort are said of God from eternity and not from a given point in time.

Objection 2: Anything to which something belongs from a given point in time can be said to become such-and-such; for instance, that which is white from a given point in time becomes white. But it does not befit God to become such-and-such. Therefore, nothing is predicated of God from a given point in time.

Objection 3: If some names are said of God from a given point in time because they imply a relation to creatures, then, it seems, the same account will hold for all names that imply a relation to creatures. But some names that imply a relation to creatures are said of God from eternity; for example, according to Jeremiah 31:3 (“I have loved you with an everlasting love”), He knew and loved a creature from eternity. Therefore, the other names that imply a relation to creatures, e.g., ‘Lord’ and ‘Creator’, are likewise said of God from eternity.

Objection 4: Names of the sort in question signify a relation. Therefore, that relation must be either something in God or something just in the creature. But it is impossible for it to exist only in the creature. For if this were so, then God would be called ‘Lord’ because of the [corresponding] opposite relation that exists in the creature. But nothing is denominated from its own opposite. Therefore, it follows that the relation is also something in God. But nothing can exist in God from a given point in time, since He Himself is beyond time. Therefore, it seems that names of this sort are not said of God from a given point in time.

Objection 5: Something is predicated relationally because of a relation; for instance, ‘lord’ is predicated because of lordship, just as ‘white’ is predicated because of whiteness. Therefore, if the relation of lordship exists in God not as a real being but only as a being of reason (*non secundum rem sed solum secundum rationem*), then it follows that God is not really a lord—which is patently false.

Objection 6: In relatives that are not simultaneous in nature, the one can exist without the other existing; for instance, according to the *Categories*, what is knowable exists even when knowledge of it does not exist. But relatives that are said of God and creatures are not simultaneous in nature. Therefore, it is possible for something to be predicated relationally of God with respect to a creature even when no creatures exist. And so names of this sort, such as ‘Lord’ and ‘Creator’, are said of God from eternity and not from a given point in time.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* 5 Augustine says that the relational name ‘Lord’ belongs to God from a given point in time.

I respond: Some names implying a relation to a creature are said of God from a given point in time and not from eternity.

To see this clearly, note that some have claimed that relations are not real beings but only beings of reason. This seems false, because things themselves have a natural ordering to and connection with one another. Still, notice that because a relation requires two terms or extremes (*extrema*), there are three possible cases in which a relation might be either a real being (*res naturae*) or a being of reason (*res*

rationis):

Sometimes a relation is only a being of reason on the part of both extremes, viz., when the ordering or connection can exist between them only because of reason's apprehension—as, e.g., when we say that the same thing is the same as itself. For insofar as reason apprehends some one thing twice, it counts it as two and in this way apprehends a certain relation of the thing to itself. The same holds for all relations between a being and a non-being; such relations are formed by reason insofar as it apprehends a non-being as a kind of extreme. Again, the same holds for all relations that follow upon an act of reason, e.g., *genus* and *species*, etc.

By contrast, some relations are real beings on the part of both extremes, viz., when there is a connection between two things insofar as something belongs to both of them in reality. This is clear, for instance, in the case of all relations that follow upon quantity, e.g., *large* and *small*, *double* and *half*, etc.; for quantity exists in both of the extremes. The same holds for relations that follow upon action and passion, e.g., *mover* and *moveable*, *father* and *son*, etc.

Sometimes, however, the relation is a real being in one of the extremes and only a being of reason in the other extreme. This happens whenever the two extremes do not belong to the same order. For instance, sensation and knowledge are related to the sensible thing and the knowable thing, which, insofar as they are entities with natural *esse*, lie outside the order of sensible *esse* and intelligible *esse*. And so there is a real relation in the knowledge and sensation, insofar as they are ordered toward knowing or sensing real entities. However, these real entities, considered just in themselves, lie outside the order of knowing and sensing, and so in them there is no real relation to the knowledge and sensation; instead, there is only a relation of reason, insofar as the intellect apprehends them as the extremes of the relations of knowledge and sensation. This is why, in *Metaphysics* 5, the Philosopher claims that these entities receive the predication of the relational names ['sensible' and 'knowable'] not because they themselves are related to the others, but rather because the others are related to them. In the same way, 'to the right' is said of a column only because it is positioned to the right of the animal. Hence, a relation of this sort is a real relation not in the column, but in the animal.

Therefore, because God lies outside the whole order of creatures, and because all creatures are ordered toward Him and not vice versa, it is clear that creatures have real relations to God, whereas in God there are no real relations of Him to creatures, but only relations of reason, insofar as the creatures are related to Him. And so nothing prevents names of the sort in question, which imply a relation to a creature, from being predicated of God from a given point in time, not because of any change in Him, but because of a change in the creature—just as the column is to the right of the animal not because of a change that involves the column, but because the animal has moved.

Reply to objection 1: Some relational names—e.g., 'lord', and 'servant', 'father' and 'son', etc.—are imposed to signify the relations themselves (*ipsas habitudines relativas*), and these are called relatives *secundum esse*. On the other hand, some relational names—e.g., 'mover' and 'moved', 'head' and 'having a head', etc.—are imposed to signify things that certain relations follow upon, and these are called relatives *secundum dici*.

This distinction, then, must be taken into account in the case of God's names, too. For some of them, e.g., 'Lord', signify the relation itself to a creature. And names of this sort signify God's substance indirectly rather than directly, because they presuppose it. For instance, lordship presupposes the power that is the divine substance. On the other hand, some of these names signify the divine essence directly. For instance, 'Savior', 'Creator' and others of this sort signify God's action, which is His essence, and derivatively imply a relation (*ex consequenti important habitudinem*).

Both sorts of names are said of God from a given point in time as regards the relations they imply either principally or as a consequence, but not insofar as they signify His essence, whether directly or indirectly.

Reply to objection 2: Relations that are said of God from a given point in time exist in God only as beings of reason, and so it is not being said of God either that He becomes such-and-such or that He is made such-and-such—except according to reason and without any change existing in Him, as, e.g., “Lord, you have become our refuge.”

Reply to objection 3: Operations of the intellect and will exist within the one who is operating, and names signifying relations following upon an act of intellect or will are said of God from eternity. However, names such as ‘Savior’ and ‘Creator’, which follow upon these acts as they proceed (in our way of understanding it) to outward effects are said of God from a given point in time.

Reply to objection 4: Relations signified by names that are said of God from a given point in time exist in God only according to reason, whereas the opposite relations exist in reality in the creatures. And it is not inappropriate that God should be denominated from relations which really exist in the creature, insofar as our intellect understands along with them the opposed relations in God. For God receives the predication of relational names with respect to a creature because the creature is related to Him—just as the Philosopher claims in *Metaphysics* 5 that an intelligible thing receives the predication of a relational name because the knowledge is related to it.

Reply to objection 5: God is related to a creature in virtue of the fact that the creature is related to Him. Since the relation of subjection to God really exists in the creature, it follows that God is a Lord not only according to reason, but in reality. For He is called ‘Lord’ in the sense that the creature is subject to Him.

Reply to objection 6: To determine whether or not relatives are simultaneous in nature, one must consider the signification of the relational names themselves rather than the ordering of the things of which the relational names are said. For if the one name includes the other within its conception and vice versa, then they are simultaneous in nature—e.g., ‘double’ and ‘half’, ‘father’ and ‘son’, and others of this sort. On the other hand, if the one includes the other within its conception but not vice versa, then they are not simultaneous in nature. This is the way in which ‘knowledge’ and ‘knowable’ are related. For ‘knowable’ is said according to potentiality, whereas ‘knowledge’ is said according to habit or act. Hence, the knowable, given the way in which it is signified, exists before the knowledge of it. However, if ‘knowable’ is taken according to act, it is simultaneous with ‘knowledge’ taken according to act; for nothing is [actually] known unless there is [actual] knowledge of it.

Thus, even though God is prior to creatures, nonetheless, because the signification of ‘lord’ includes having a servant and vice versa, the two relational names ‘lord’ and ‘servant’ are simultaneous in nature. Hence, God was not a Lord before He had a creature subject to Him.

Article 8

Is the name ‘God’ the name of a nature or an operation?

It seems that the name ‘God’ is not the name of a nature:

Objection 1: In [*De Fide Orthodoxa*] 1 Damascene says, “‘God’ (*théos*) is taken either from *théein*, i.e., to course through and nurture all things, or from *aithein*, i.e., to burn (for God is our fire who consumes all malice), or from *theásthai*, i.e., to consider all things.” But all of these pertain to operation. Therefore, the name ‘God’ signifies an operation and not a nature.

Objection 2: A thing is named by us insofar as it is known. But God’s nature is unknown to us. Therefore, the name ‘God’ does not signify God’s nature.

But contrary to this: In *De Fide* 1 Ambrose says that ‘God’ is the name of a nature.

I respond: *What* a name is imposed to signify is not always the same as *that because of which* the name is imposed to signify. For just as we know the substance of a thing from its properties or operations, so sometimes we denominate the substance of the thing from some operation or property of it. For instance, we denominate the substance of a rock (*lapis*) from one of its actions, viz., that it hurts the foot (*laedit pedem*); still, the name ‘rock’ is imposed to signify the substance of the rock and not this action.

On the other hand, if the things in question are known to us in themselves—e.g., cold, heat, whiteness, etc.—then we do not denominate them from other things. Hence, in such cases what a name signifies is the same as that because of which it is imposed to signify.

Therefore, since God is not known to us in His nature, but is instead known to us from His operations and effects, it is possible for us to name Him from these operations and effects, as was explained above (a. 1). Hence, as regards that because of which the name is imposed to signify, the name ‘God’ is the name of an operation. For this name is imposed because of His universal providence over things, since everyone who talks about God intends to name God from the fact that He has universal providence over things. Thus, in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 12, Dionysius says, “The deity is the one who oversees all things with perfect providence and goodness.” Nonetheless, the name ‘God’, having been taken from this operation, is imposed to signify God’s nature.

Reply to objection 1: All the things Damascene posited pertain to the providence because of which the name ‘God’ is imposed to signify.

Reply to objection 2: Insofar as we can have cognition of the nature of a given thing from its properties and effects, we are able to signify it by a name. Hence, because from its properties we can have cognition of the substance of a rock in itself, by knowing what (*quid est*) a rock is, the name ‘rock’ signifies the very nature of a rock as it is in itself. For it signifies the definition of a rock, through which we know what a rock is. For, as *Metaphysics* 4 says, the concept that the name signifies is the definition (*ratio quam significat nomen est definitio*).

However, from God’s effects we cannot have cognition of God’s nature as it is in itself, i.e., we cannot have cognition of it in such a way as to know of it what it is; instead, as was explained above (q. 12, a. 12), we know it through the ways of preeminence and causality and negation (*per modum eminentiae et causalitatis et negationis*). And so the name ‘God’ signifies God’s nature. For the name is imposed to signify something which exists above all things, which is a principle of all things, and which is denied of all things. For this is what those who name God intend to signify.

Article 9

Is the name ‘God’ a shareable name?

It seems that the name God is shareable (*communicabilis*):

Objection 1: If the thing signified by a name is shared, then the name itself is shared. But, as has been explained (a. 8), the name ‘God’ signifies God’s nature, which can be shared by others, according to 2 Peter 1:4 (“He has given us great and precious promises: that by these we may be made partakers of the divine nature”). Therefore, the name ‘God’ is shareable.

Objection 2: It is only proper names that cannot be shared. But the name ‘God’ is an appellative name and not a proper name; this is clear from the fact that it has a plural form, according to Psalm 81:6 (“I have said: you are gods”). Therefore, the name ‘God’ is shareable.

Objection 3: As has been explained (a. 8), the name ‘God’ is imposed because of an operation.

But other names imposed on God because of His operations or effects are shareable, e.g., ‘good’, ‘wise’, etc. Therefore, the name ‘God’ is shareable as well.

But contrary to this: In speaking of the name ‘God’, Wisdom 14:21 says, “They gave the incommunicable name to stones and wood.” Therefore, the name ‘God’ is unshareable.

I respond: A name can be shareable in two ways: (a) *properly (proprie)* and (b) *through a likeness (per similitudinem)*. A name is *properly* shareable insofar as the entire signification of the name is shareable by many, whereas a name is shareable *through a likeness* insofar as it is shareable with respect to some of the things included in the name’s signification. For instance, the name ‘lion’ is properly shareable by all those things in which the nature signified by the name ‘lion’ is found, whereas it is shareable through a likeness by things that participate in some feature of lions—say, audacity or courage—and that are called lions metaphorically.

Now to determine which names are properly shareable, we must take into account that every form that exists in a singular suppositum that individuates it is shareable by many, either in reality or at least conceivably (*vel secundum rem vel secundum rationem saltem*). For instance, human nature is common to many both in reality and conceivably, whereas the nature of the sun is common to many not in reality, but only conceivably; for the nature of the sun can be conceived of as existing in many supposita. This is because the intellect understands the nature of a given species by abstraction from the singular. Hence, the question of whether the nature actually exists in just one suppositum or in many supposita lies beyond our conception (*intellectus*) of the nature of the species. So if we keep the conception of the nature of the species fixed, that nature can be conceived of as existing in many.

However, a singular thing, by the very fact that it is singular, is divided off from all other things. Hence, every name imposed to signify a singular thing as such is unshareable both in reality and conceivably; for it is impossible for us even to conceive of more than one of *this* individual. Hence, no name that signifies an individual as such is properly shareable by many; rather, it is shareable only through a likeness—in the way, for instance, that someone can be called an Achilles metaphorically because he has one of Achilles’s properties, e.g., courage.

On the other hand, in the case of forms that are individuated not by some suppositum but by themselves (because they are subsistent forms), if they are conceived of as they exist in themselves, then they cannot be shared either in reality or conceivably—though perhaps they can be shared through a likeness, in the way just explained for individuals. However, because simple forms that subsist *per se* cannot be understood by us as they exist in themselves, but are instead understood by us in the manner of composite entities that have forms in matter, it follows that, as was explained above (a. 1), we impose on them concrete names that signify a nature in some suppositum. Hence, as far as the nature of the names is concerned (*quantum pertinet ad rationem nominum*), the same explanation holds both for the names that we impose to signify the natures of composite entities and for the names that we impose to signify simple subsistent natures.

So since, as has been said (a. 8), the name ‘God’ is imposed to signify God’s nature, and since, as was shown above (q. 11, a. 3), God’s nature is not multipliable, it follows that the name ‘God’ is not shareable in reality, though it is shareable according to opinion—in the way that the name ‘sun’ would be shareable according to the opinion of someone who claimed that there were many suns. This is why Galatians 4:8 says, “You served them who, by nature, are not gods”; and a Gloss adds, “They were gods not by nature, but in the opinion of men.”

Still, the name ‘God’ is shareable through a sort of likeness— not according to its entire signification, but according to some part of it. For instance, they are called gods who participate in something divine through a likeness, in keeping with the verse “I have said: you are gods” (Psalm 81:6).

However, if there were a name imposed to signify God not on the part of the nature but on the part of the suppositum—i.e., insofar as He is thought of as a *this-something (hoc aliquid)*—then that

name would not be shareable in any way at all, as perhaps is the case with God's four-letter name (*tetragrammaton*) among the Hebrews. The same thing would hold if someone were to impose on the sun a name that designated just *this* individual.

Reply to objection 1: The divine nature is shareable only through participation in a likeness.

Reply to objection 2: The reason that the name 'God' is an appellative name, and not a proper name, is that it signifies the divine nature as existing in one who has that nature—even though God Himself is in reality neither universal nor particular. For names correspond not to the mode of being that is found in things, but rather to the mode of being insofar it is found in our cognition.

Nonetheless, according to the truth of the matter, the name 'God' is unshareable in the sense explained for the case of the name 'sun'.

Reply to objection 3: The names 'good', 'wise', etc. are imposed because of the perfections that proceed from God to creatures, but they are not imposed to signify God's nature. Rather, they are imposed to signify the perfections themselves absolutely speaking. And so, according to the truth of the matter, they are shareable by many. The name 'God', however, is imposed to signify God's nature because of an operation proper to God that we continually experience.

Article 10

Is the name 'God' taken univocally or equivocally when 'God' is predicated through His nature, according to participation, and according to opinion?

It seems that the name 'God' is said univocally of God when it is predicated through His nature, according to participation, and according to opinion (*dicatur per naturam et per participationem et secundum opinionem*):

Objection 1: Where there is diversity of signification, there is no contradiction between affirming and denying, since equivocation obstructs the contradiction. But a Catholic who claims that an idol is not God contradicts a Pagan who claims that the idol is God. Therefore, the name 'God' is being taken univocally in the two claims.

Objection 2: Just as an idol is God according to opinion but not according to the truth, so too the enjoyment of carnal pleasures is called happiness according to opinion but not according to the truth. But the name 'happiness' is predicated univocally of happiness according to opinion and happiness according to the truth. Therefore, the name 'God' is likewise predicated univocally of God according to the truth and God according to opinion.

Objection 3: Univocal names have a single concept (*ratio una*). But when a Catholic claims that there is one God, he means by the name 'God' an omnipotent being who is to be venerated above all things; and a Gentile has the same thing in mind when he claims that an idol is God. Therefore, the name 'God' is predicated univocally in the two claims.

But contrary to this:

1. As *Perihermenias* 1 says, what exists in the intellect is a likeness of what exists in reality. But 'animal' is predicated equivocally of a real animal and a picture of an animal. Therefore, the name 'God' is predicated equivocally of God according to the truth and God according to opinion.

2. No one can signify what he does not have a cognition of. But a Gentile does not have a cognition of the divine nature. Therefore, when he claims that an idol is God, he does not signify the true divine nature. But this nature is what the Catholic signifies when he claims that there is one God. Therefore, the name 'God' is predicated equivocally, and not univocally, of God according to the truth

and God according to opinion.

I respond: As regards the three significations mentioned above, the name ‘God’ is taken neither univocally nor equivocally, but analogously. This is clear as follows:

Univocal names have altogether the same concept, and equivocal names have altogether diverse concepts, whereas in the case of analogous names what is required is that the name taken with one signification be used in the definition of the same name taken with the other significations. For instance, ‘being’ as said of a substance is used in the definition of ‘being’ as said of an accident. Likewise, ‘healthy’ as said of an animal is used in the definition of ‘healthy’ as said of urine and medicine; for urine is a sign, and medicine a cause, of the health that exists in the animal.

So, too, in the present case. The name ‘God’, insofar as it is taken for the true God, is used in the definition of ‘God’ insofar as ‘God’ is predicated according to opinion or participation. For when we call someone God according to participation, we mean by the name ‘God’ something that has a likeness of the true God. Likewise, when we call an idol God, by the name ‘God’ we mean to signify something which men think to be God.

And so it is clear that the significations of the name differ from one another, but that one of the significations is included in the other significations. Hence, it is manifest that the name ‘God’ is predicated analogously.

Reply to objection 1: The multiplicity of names has to do not with the *predication* of a given name but rather with its *signification*. For instance, whatever the name ‘man’ is predicated of, whether truly or falsely, it is said with one sense. But the name ‘man’ would be predicated with multiple senses if we intended to signify diverse things by it—say, if someone intended to signify by the name ‘man’ that which is truly a man and someone else intended to signify by the same name a rock or something else.

Hence, it is clear that a Catholic who claims that an idol is not God contradicts a pagan who asserts this, since both of them are using the name ‘God’ to signify the true God. For when the pagan says that the idol is God, he is not using this name to signify God according to opinion; if he were, then he would be asserting a truth, since even Catholics sometimes use the name with this signification, as when it is said [in Psalm 95:51], “All the gods of the Gentiles are demons.”

Reply to objection 2 and objection 3: Something similar should be said in reply to the second and third objections. For these arguments are premised on a diversity of *predications* of the name and not on a diversity of its *significations*.

Reply to argument 1 for the contrary: ‘Animal’ as predicated of a true animal and a picture of an animal is not predicated wholly equivocally. Rather, the Philosopher is taking ‘equivocal’ in a broad sense that includes ‘analogous’. For he sometimes says even of ‘being’, which is predicated analogously, that is predicated equivocally of the different categories.

Reply to argument 2 for the contrary: Neither the Catholic nor the pagan knows the very nature of God as it exists in itself. Rather, as was explained above (q. 12, a. 12), both of them know Him according to some notion of causality or preeminence or negation. Accordingly, it is possible that when the Gentile claims that an idol is God, he is taking the name ‘God’ with the same signification that the Catholic is taking it with when he claims that the idol is not God. However, if there were someone who did not know God according to any notion at all, then he would not be naming God—unless, perhaps, he were doing so in the way that we utter names whose signification we do not know.

Article 11

Is the name ‘He Who Is’ an especially proper name of God?

It seems that the name ‘He Who Is’ (*Qui est*) is not an especially proper name of God:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 9), the name ‘God’ is an unshareable name. But the name ‘He Who Is’ is not an unshareable name. Therefore, the name ‘He Who Is’ is not an especially proper name of God.

Objection 2: In *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 3, Dionysius says, “The name ‘good’ makes manifest everything that proceeds from God.” But it belongs especially to God to be a universal principle of things. Therefore, it is the name ‘good’, and not the name ‘He Who Is’, that is especially proper to God.

Objection 3: Every divine name seems to imply a relation to creatures, since we have cognition of God only through creatures. But the name ‘He Who Is’ implies no relation to creatures. Therefore, the name ‘He Who Is’ is not especially proper to God.

But contrary to this: In Exodus 3:13-14, Moses asks, “If they shall say to me: ‘What is His name?’, what shall I say to them?” And the Lord answers him, “Thus shall you say to them: ‘He Who Is has sent me to you.’” Therefore, the name ‘He Who Is’ is a maximally proper name of God.

I respond: There are three reasons why the name ‘He Who Is’ is an especially proper name of God:

First, because of its *signification*. For it does not signify any particular form, but instead signifies *esse* itself. Hence, since, as was shown above (q. 3, a. 4), God’s *esse* is His very essence—something that is true of nothing else—it is clear that of all names, this name denominates God in an especially proper way. For each thing is denominated from its form.

Second, because of its *universality*. For all other names are such that either (a) they are less common than it, or (b) if they are convertible with it, they still add something conceptual to it and thus in some way inform it and make it more determinate. Now in this life our intellect cannot have cognition of the very essence of God as it is in itself; instead, whatever determinations our intellect makes regarding what it understands about God, it falls short of the way that God exists in Himself. And so names are predicated of God by us in a more proper way to the extent that they are less determinate and more common and absolute. Hence, Damascene says, “‘He Who Is’ is more central than all the names that are said of God. For since it includes everything within itself, it signifies the *esse* itself as a certain infinite and uncircumscribed sea of substance.” For every other name determines some particular mode of the substance of a thing, whereas the name ‘He Who Is’ does not determine any mode of being, but is related indeterminately to all modes of being. And so it names “an infinite sea of substance.”

Third, because of its *cosignification*. For it signifies *esse* in the present, and this is said in an especially proper way of God, whose *esse*, as Augustine puts it in *De Trinitate* 5, knows no past or future.

Reply to objection 1: The name ‘He Who is’ is a more proper name than the name ‘God’ both with respect to that because of which it is imposed, viz., *esse*, and also with respect to its mode of signifying and co-signifying, as has been explained. But with respect to *what* it is imposed to signify, the name ‘God’ is more proper, because it is imposed to signify God’s nature. A still more proper name is the four-letter name (*tetragrammaton*), which is imposed to signify the unshareable and, if one may say it, singular substance of God

Reply to objection 2: The name ‘good’ is the principal name of God insofar as He is a cause, but it is not the principal name of God absolutely speaking. For, absolutely speaking, *esse* is

conceptually prior to *cause*.

Reply to objection 3: It is not necessary that all the divine names should imply a relation to creatures. Rather, it suffices that all the divine names should be imposed because of some perfection that proceeds from God to creatures. But the first among these perfections is *esse* itself, from which the name ‘He Who Is’ is taken.

Article 12

Is it possible to formulate affirmative propositions about God?

It seems that affirmative propositions cannot be formulated about God:

Objection 1: In *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 2, Dionysius says, “Negations are true of God, but affirmations are incongruous.”

Objection 2: In *De Trinitate* Boethius says, “A simple form cannot be a subject.” But, as was shown above (q. 3, a. 7), God is a maximally simple form. Therefore, He cannot be a subject. But anything about which an affirmative proposition is formulated is taken as a subject. Therefore, it is impossible for an affirmative proposition to be formulated about God.

Objection 3: Every act of intellective understanding is false that understands a thing otherwise than it is. But, as was proved above (q. 3, a. 7), God has *esse* without any composition. Therefore, since every affirmative act of the intellect understands something involving composition, it seems that a true affirmative proposition cannot be formulated about God.

But contrary to this: What is false does not underlie the Faith. But some affirmative propositions are part of the Faith, e.g., that God is three and one, and that He is omnipotent. Therefore, true affirmative propositions can be formulated about God.

I respond: True affirmative propositions can be formulated about God.

To see this clearly, note that in every true affirmative proposition the predicate and the subject must signify something that is in some sense the same in reality and diverse in concept. This is clear both in the case of propositions that have an accidental predicate and propositions that have a substantial predicate. For it is clear that a man and a white thing are the same in subject and differ in concept, since the concept *man* is different from the concept *white*. And the same holds when I say, ‘A man is an animal’, since the very thing that is a man is truly an animal. For in the same suppositum there exists a sentient nature, by virtue of which he is called an animal, and a rational nature, by virtue of which he is called a man. Hence, the predicate ‘animal’ and the subject ‘man’ are the same in suppositum but conceptually diverse.

But this holds in a certain sense even in the case of propositions in which the same thing is predicated of itself. For that which the intellect posits as the subject points to a suppositum, whereas that which it posits as the predicate points to the nature of a form that exists in the suppositum. Accordingly, predicates are said to be taken formally and the subjects are said to be taken materially. And the plurality of subject and predicate corresponds to this conceptual diversity, whereas the intellect signifies the identity of the thing through the very composition of subject and predicate.

Now God, considered in Himself, is altogether one and simple. But our intellect has cognition of Him by means of diverse conceptions, because it is unable to see Him as He is in Himself. Still, even though it understands Him under diverse conceptions, it nonetheless knows that one and same reality, absolutely speaking, corresponds to all these conceptions. Therefore, the intellect represents the conceptual plurality (*pluralitatem quae est secundum rationem*) by means of the plurality of predicate

and subject, whereas it represents the unity by means of the composition of predicate and subject.

Reply to objection 1: Dionysius says that affirmations about God are ‘incongruous’ (or ‘inappropriate’, according to an alternative translation) because, as was explained above (a. 3), no name belongs to God with respect to its mode of signifying.

Reply to objection 2: Our intellect cannot apprehend simple subsistent forms as they exist in themselves; instead, it apprehends them according to the mode of composite things, in which there is something that is a subject and something that exists in the subject. And so it apprehends a simple form in the manner of a subject and then attributes something to it.

Reply to objection 3: The proposition, ‘An act of intellective understanding is false that understands a thing otherwise than it is’ has two meanings, because the adverb ‘otherwise’ can modify the verb ‘understands’ either with respect to the thing that is understood or with respect to the one who understands.

If it modifies the verb with respect to the thing that is understood, then the proposition is true and its meaning is that if any act of intellect understanding understands a thing to be otherwise than it is, then it is false. But this reading is not relevant to the present case, since our intellect, in formulating a proposition about God, does not assert that He is composite, but asserts that He is simple.

On the other hand, if ‘otherwise’ modifies the one who understands, then the proposition is false, since the mode of the act of intellect in understanding is different from the mode of the thing in being. For it is clear that our intellect understands the material things that are lower than it in an immaterial mode—not that it understands them to be immaterial, but rather that it has an immaterial mode in understanding them. And, similarly, when it understands simple things that are higher than it, it understands them according to its own mode, viz., in a composite way—yet not in such a way that it understands them to be composite. And so our act of understanding is not false when it formulates a [propositional] composition about God.