

QUESTION 28

The Divine Relations

Now we have to consider the divine relations. On this topic there are four questions: (1) Are there any real relations in God? (2) Are these relations the divine essence itself, or do they come from the outside? (3) Can there be a plurality of relations in God that are really distinct from one another? (4) How many of these relations are there?

Article 1

Are there any real relations in God?

It seems that there are no real relations in God:

Objection 1: In *De Trinitate* Boethius says, “When one turns the [accidental] categories into divine predications, all the ones that can be predicated are changed to the category of substance, whereas relational predicates (*ad aliquid*) cannot be predicated at all.” But whatever really exists in God can be predicated of Him. Therefore, real relations do not exist in God.

Objection 2: In the same book Boethius says, “In the Trinity, the relation of the Father to the Son is similar to the relation of both to the Holy Spirit, viz., the relation of what is the same to what is the same.” But a relation of this sort is merely a relation of reason, since every real relation requires two really distinct extremes. Therefore, the relations posited in God are not real relations, but only relations of reason.

Objection 3: The relation of paternity is a relation had by a principle. But when one says ‘God is the principle of creatures’, this implies merely a relation of reason and not a real relation. Therefore, neither is Paternity in God a real relation. And for the same reason, the other relations posited in God are not real relations, either.

Objection 4: In God the generation involves the procession of an intellectual Word. But relations that follow upon an operation of the intellect are relations of reason. Therefore, Paternity and Filiation, which are predicated of God because of the generation, are only relations of reason.

But contrary to this: ‘Father’ is predicated only because of the Paternity, and ‘Son’ is predicated only because of the Filiation. Therefore, if Paternity and Filiation are not real relations in God, it follows that God is not really a Father or really a Son, but a Father and Son only according to our mode of understanding. But this is the Sabellian heresy.

I respond: There are real relations in God. To see this clearly, note that it is only among things that are predicated relationally that some are predicated just with respect to reason and not with respect to reality. This does not occur in the other genera [of accidents], because the other genera, e.g., *quantity* and *quality*, when taken according to their proper concept, signify something that inheres in an entity. By contrast, things that are predicated relationally, when taken according to their proper concept, signify only a connection to something else.

To be sure, such a relation sometimes exists in reality (*in ipsa natura rerum*)—as, e.g., when by their nature the things in question are ordered to one another and have an inclination toward one another. Relations of this sort must be real. For instance, in a heavy body there is an inclination and ordering toward the center of the earth, and thus a relation to the center of the earth exists within the heavy body itself. And the same thing holds in other cases of this sort.

On the other hand, sometimes the relation signified by what is predicated relationally exists only in the apprehension of reason insofar as it connects one thing to another, and in such a case there is only a relation of reason—as, for instance, when reason connects *man* to *animal* as a species to a genus.

However, when something proceeds from a principle of the same nature as itself, then both of them—viz., what proceeds and that from which it proceeds—must belong to the same ordering, and so they must have real relations with respect to one another. Therefore, since, as has been shown (q. 27, a. 3), the processions in God involve an identity of nature, the relations associated with the divine processions must be real relations.

Reply to objection 1: The reason why what is predicated relationally, when taken according to the proper concept of what is predicated relationally, is not predicated at all of God is that the proper concept of what is predicated relationally is taken not from that in which the relation inheres, but rather from that thing's connection to another. Therefore, in this passage Boethius wished to claim not that no relation exists in God, but rather that, according to the proper concept of a relation, a relation would be predicated of God not as something inhering in God, but rather in the manner of a connection to something distinct from Himself.

Reply to objection 2: The relation that is implied by the name 'same as itself' is merely a relation of reason, if 'same' is taken absolutely. For a relation of this sort cannot consist in anything but a certain ordering, formulated by reason, of a given thing to itself, insofar as there are two separate thoughts of that thing. However, it is different when the things in question are said to be the same not in number but in nature, i.e., one in genus or in species.

Therefore, Boethius is not assimilating the relations that exist in God to the relation of identity in every respect; rather, he is assimilating them to the relation of identity only to the extent that God's substance is not diversified—just as a substance is not diversified by the relation of identity.

Reply to objection 3: Since a creature proceeds from God with a diverse nature, God is outside the order of all creatures and does not by His nature have a relation to creatures. For, as was explained above (q. 14, a. 8 and q. 19, a. 4), He produces creatures not by a necessity of nature, but through His intellect and will. And this is why in God there are no real relations to creatures. However, in the creatures there is a real relation to God, since creatures are contained under God's ordering and by their nature depend on God.

By contrast, the divine processions are processions in the very same nature. Hence, the two lines of reasoning are not parallel.

Reply to objection 4: Relations which exist between things that are understood and which follow upon just the operation of the intellect are merely relations of reason, since it is reason that formulates these relations between the two things that are understood.

By contrast, the relations which follow upon the operation of the intellect and which exist between the word that proceeds intellectually and that from which it proceeds are not just relations of reason, but real relations. For the intellect, and reason itself, is a certain entity, and it has a real relation to that which proceeds intellectually—just as a corporeal entity has a real relation to that which proceeds from it corporeally. And it is for this reason that Paternity and Filiation are real relations in God.

Article 2

Are the relations in God the same as His essence?

It seems that the relations in God are not the same as His essence:

Objection 1: In *De Trinitate* 5 Augustine says, "Not everything that is predicated of God is predicated as substance. For some things, e.g., 'the Father' with respect to the Son, are predicated as relations, and these are not predicated as substance." Therefore, the relations are not the divine essence.

Objection 2: In *De Trinitate* 7, Augustine says, “Everything that receives a relational predication is an entity independently of that relation; for instance, it is a man who is a master and a man who is a servant.” Therefore, if there are relations in God, there must be something in God over and beyond the relations. But this can be nothing other than the essence. Therefore, the essence is distinct from the relations.

Objection 3: As is explained in the *Categories*, the *esse* of a relation is to be connected to another. Therefore, if the relations are God’s essence itself, it follows that the *esse* of God’s essence is to be connected to another. But this is incompatible with the perfection of God’s *esse*, which, as was shown above (q. 3, a. 4), is maximally absolute and subsistent *per se*. Therefore, it is not the case that the relations are the same as God’s essence itself.

But contrary to this: Every entity which is not God’s essence is a creature. But real relations belong to God. Therefore, if the relations are not God’s essence, then they will be creatures, and it will not be the case that the adoration of *latria* should be given to them. But this is contrary to what is sung in the Preface of the Mass [of the Holy Trinity], “Let the distinctness of the Persons and their equality in majesty be adored.”

I respond: On this topic Gilbert de la Porrée is said to have erred and afterwards, at the Council of Rheims, to have recanted his error. For he had claimed that the relations in God are ‘bystanders’ (*assistentes*), i.e., extrinsically affixed [to the divine essence].

To see this matter clearly, note that in each of the nine genera of accidents there are two things to take into account:

(a) One of them is the *esse* that belongs to each accident insofar as it is an accident. The *esse* common to all of them is to exist in a subject (*inesse subjecto*). For the *esse* of an accident is *inesse*.

(b) The other thing that can be taken into account in each case is the proper concept of each of the things in those genera. Now in the genera other than *relation*, e.g., *quantity* and *quality*, the proper concept of the genus is also taken from its comparison with its subject. For quantity is called the measure of the substance, and quality is called the disposition of the substance. By contrast, the proper concept of a relation is taken not from its comparison with the subject in which it exists, but rather from a comparison with something outside that subject.

Thus, if, in the case of created things, we consider relations *insofar as they are relations*, then they are found to be ‘bystanders’ and not intrinsically affixed. They signify, as it were, a certain connection that touches the thing itself that is related and reaches out from that thing to the other. By contrast, if we consider a relation *insofar as it is an accident*, then, so considered, it inheres in its subject and has accidental *esse* in it. Gilbert de la Porrée was thinking of a relation only in the former way.

However, anything that has accidental *esse* among created things has substantial *esse* when it is transferred to the case of God. For there is nothing that exists in God in the way that an accident exists in a subject; instead, whatever exists in God is His essence. Therefore, corresponding to the fact that among created things a relation has accidental *esse* in a subject, a real relation that exists in God will have the *esse* of the divine essence and will be altogether the same as the essence. On the other hand, because it is predicated relationally, what is signified is not its connection with the essence, but rather its connection with its relational opposite.

So it is clear that a real relation existing in God is the same in reality as His essence and differs from the essence only conceptually, insofar as the relation implies a connection with its relational opposite—something that is not implied by the name ‘essence’. Therefore, it is clear that in God the *esse* of the relation and the *esse* of the essence do not differ, but are instead one and the same.

Reply to objection 1: This passage from Augustine does not mean that the Paternity or any other relation that exists in God is not in its *esse* the same as God’s essence. Rather, it means that the relation

is not predicated in the manner of a substance, i.e., as existing in the thing of which it is predicated, but is instead predicated as connected to another.

It is for this reason that only two categories are said to exist in God. For the categories other [than substance and relation] imply a connection to that of which they are predicated, both (a) with respect to their *esse* and (b) with respect to the concept of their proper genus. But nothing that exists in God can have a connection other than the relation of identity to that in which it exists or of which it is predicated—and this because of God's utter simplicity.

Reply to objection 2: Among created things, that which is predicated relationally contains not only a connection to another but also some absolute entity. The same holds true in the case of God, though in a different way. For that which is found in a creature over and beyond what is contained in the relational name's signification is another entity; by contrast, in God there is no other entity, but one and the same entity—though that entity is not perfectly expressed by the name of the relation in the sense of being comprehended by that name's signification. For as was explained above when we were talking about the divine names (q. 13, a. 2), more is contained in the perfection of God's essence that can be signified by any name. Hence, it does not follow that in God there is some other real entity besides the relation; rather, all that follows is that there is something more after just the meaning of the names has been taken into account.

Reply to objection 3: If nothing were contained in God's perfection besides what a relational name signifies, then it would follow that His *esse* is imperfect, since He would have a connection to something else. In the same way, if nothing were contained there over and beyond what the name 'wisdom' signifies, then there would not be anything subsistent. However, from the fact that the perfection of God's essence is greater than can be comprehended by the signification of any name, it does not follow that if a relational name (or any other name) predicated of God does not itself signify something perfect, then God's essence has imperfect *esse*. For, as was explained above (q. 4, a. 2), God's essence includes within itself the perfection of every genus.

Article 3

Are the relations that exist in God distinct in reality from one another?

It seems that the relations that exist in God are not distinct in reality from one another:

Objection 1: Things that are the same as one and the same thing are the same as one another. But every relation that exists in God is the same in reality as God's essence. Therefore, the relations are not distinct in reality from one another.

Objection 2: Just as Paternity and Filiation are distinct from God's essence in the meaning of their names, so too are God's goodness and power. But it is not the case that because of this distinctness in meaning there is a real distinction between God's goodness and His power. Therefore, neither is there a real distinction between the Paternity and the Filiation.

Objection 3: In God there are no real distinctions except according to origin. But one relation does not seem to originate from another. Therefore, the relations are not distinct from one another in reality.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* Boethius says, "Substance in God contains the oneness, whereas relation multiplies the Trinity." Therefore, if the relations are not distinct in reality from one another, then only a conceptual Trinity, and not a real Trinity, will exist in God. But this is the Sabellian error.

I respond: When one thing is attributed to another, then everything that is part of the concept of the former must be attributed to the latter. For instance, if *man* is attributed to someone, then *rational* must be attributed to him as well.

Now part of the concept of a relation is the connection of one thing to another, according to which the two things are relationally opposed. Therefore, since, as has been explained (a. 1), there are real relations in God, there must be real oppositions in Him. But a relational opposition includes within its concept the distinction [between the opposites]. Hence, it must be the case that there are real distinctions within God—not, to be sure, real distinctions within the absolute entity, viz., the essence, which has utter unity and simplicity, but rather real distinctions among the relations.

Reply to objection 1: According to the Philosopher in *Physics* 3, the claim in question—viz., that things that are the same as one and the same thing are the same as one another—holds for those things that are the same both in reality and conceptually, e.g., a tunic and a garment, but not for those things that differ conceptually. Hence, in the same place he claims that even though [in any given case] the action and the passion are the same as the motion, it nonetheless does not follow that the action is the same as the passion. For ‘action’ implies the condition of being that because of which there is motion in a moveable thing, whereas ‘passion’ implies the condition of being something that comes from another.

Similarly, even though the Paternity and the Filiation are the same in reality as the divine essence, nonetheless in their proper concepts they imply opposite relations. Hence, they are distinct from one another.

Reply to objection 2: ‘Power’ and ‘goodness’ do not imply in their concepts any sort of opposition. Hence, the two arguments are not parallel.

Reply to objection 3: Even though the relations do not, properly speaking, arise or proceed from one another, nonetheless, they are understood through the opposition that stems from the procession of one thing from another.

Article 4

Are there just four real relations in God, viz., the Paternity, the Filiation, the Spiration, and the Procession?

It seems that there are not just four real relations in God, viz., the Paternity, the Filiation, the Spiration, and the Procession:

Objection 1: In God one can think of the relation of the one who understands to what is understood and the relation of the one who wills to what is willed. These seem to be real relations and yet are not included among the ones just mentioned. Therefore, there are not just four real relations in God.

Objection 2: Real relations in God stem from the intellectual procession of the Word. But, as Avicenna says, intellectual relations are multiplied to infinity. Therefore, there are infinitely many real relations in God.

Objection 3: As was explained above (q. 15, a. 2), the ideas exist in God from eternity. But as was said there, the ideas are distinguished from one another only by their relation to things. Therefore, in God there a great number of eternal relations.

Objection 4: Equality, similarity, and identity are relations, and they exist in God from eternity. Therefore, in God there are more relations that exist from eternity than those just mentioned.

But contrary to this: It seems that there are fewer than four relations. For according to the

Philosopher in *Physics* 3, “The road from Athens to Thebes is the same as the road from Thebes to Athens.” Therefore, by parity of reasoning it seems that the relation of the Father to the Son, which is called Paternity, is the same as the relation of the Son to the Father, which is called Filiation. And so it is not the case that there are four relations in God.

I respond: According to the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 5, every relation is based either (a) on quantity, e.g., *double* and *half*, or (b) on action and being acted upon (*passio*), e.g., *making* and *being made*, *father* and *son*, *master* and *servant*, etc. Now since there is no quantity in God (for, as Augustine puts it, He is great without quantity), it follows that there cannot be real relations in God unless they are based on action. However, they cannot be based on actions by which something external proceeds from God, since, as was explained above (a. 1 and q. 13, a. 7), the relations of God to creatures are not real relations in Him. Thus, it follows that there cannot be real relations in God except because of actions by which there is an internal—and not external—procession in God.

Now, as was explained above (q. 27, a. 5), there are just two processions of this sort, one of which stems from the action of the intellect and is the procession of the Word, and the other of which stems from the action of the will and is the procession of the Love. But with respect to each of these processions there have to be two opposite relations, one of which belongs to what proceeds from the principle and the other of which belongs to the principle itself.

Now the procession of the Word is called a generation in keeping with the proper concept in accord with which generation belongs to living things. But the relation that belongs to the principle of generation among perfect living things is called Paternity, whereas the relation that belongs to what proceeds from the principle is called Filiation. On the other hand, as was explained above (q. 27, a. 4), the procession of the Love does not have a fitting name, and so neither do the relations that are taken from it. However, the relation that belongs to the principle of this procession may be called Spiration, whereas the relation that belongs to what proceeds may be called Procession—even though these two names properly pertain to the processions or origins themselves and not to the relations.

Reply to objection 1: In those cases in which the act of intellect differs from what is understood and the act of will differs from what is willed there can be a real relation both of the knowledge to the thing known and of the willing to the thing willed. But in the case of God the act of intellect is wholly the same as what is understood, since it is in understanding Himself that He understands all other things, and the same holds for the act of willing and what is willed. Hence, in God relations of this type are not real relations, just as relations of the same thing to itself are not real relations.

However, the relation to the Word is a real relation, since the Word is thought of as proceeding by means of the intellectual action and not as the thing which is understood. For when we ourselves understand a stone, that which the intellect conceives on the basis of the thing that is understood is called a word.

Reply to objection 2: In our own case intellectual relations are multiplied to infinity because by one act a man understands a stone, and by another act he understands that he understands the stone, and by yet another act he understands this last act of understanding—and in this way acts of understanding are multiplied to infinity and, as a result, so are the intellectual relations. But there is no room for this sort of thing in God, since He understands all things by just a single act.

Reply to objection 3: The relations among the ideas exist insofar as they are understood by God. Hence, from the fact that there are many such relations it does not follow that there are many relations in God. All that follows is that God knows many relations.

Reply to objection 4: Equality and similarity are not real relations in God, but are instead merely relations of reason, as will become clear below (q. 42, a. 1).

Reply to argument for the contrary: Even though the path from the one terminus to the other is

the same as the path from the latter to the former, it is still the case that the relations are diverse. Hence, from this premise one cannot conclude that the relation of the Father to the Son is the same as the relation of the Son to the Father. Rather, one could draw this conclusion only about something non-relational (*absolutum*), if it lay in between them.