

QUESTION 31

Things Pertaining to the Oneness or to the Plurality in God

Next we have to inquire about the things that pertain to oneness or plurality in God.

On this topic there are four questions: (1) What does the name 'Trinity' signify? (2) Can one say that the Son is other than the Father? (3) Can the exclusive expression ['alone'], which seems to exclude others, be used to modify a name pertaining to God's essence? (4) Can the exclusive expression be used to modify a term pertaining to a divine person?

Article 1

Is there a Trinity in God?

It seems that there is not a Trinity in God:

Objection 1: In the case of God, every name signifies either the substance or a relation. But the name 'Trinity' does not signify the substance, since in that case it would be predicated of the individual persons. Nor does it signify a relation, since it is not a name that is predicated with respect to another. Therefore, the name 'Trinity' should not be used in the case of God.

Objection 2: The name 'Trinity' seems to be a collective name, since it signifies a multitude. But such a name is inappropriate in the case of God, since the oneness implied by a collective name is a minimal oneness, whereas in God there is maximal oneness. Therefore, the name 'Trinity' does not belong to God.

Objection 3: Every group of three is a triplet. But in God there is no tripleness (*triplicitas*), since tripleness is a species of inequality. Therefore, there is no Trinity in God.

Objection 4: Whatever exists in God exists in the oneness of the divine essence, since God is His essence. Therefore, if there is a Trinity in God, it will exist in the oneness of the divine essence. And so in God there will be three essential onenesses—which is heretical.

Objection 5: In everything said of God, the concrete term is predicated of the corresponding abstract term. For instance, the divinity (*deitas*) is God, and the Paternity is the Father. But the Trinity cannot be said to be three, since if it were, then there would be nine realities in God—which is erroneous. Therefore, the name 'Trinity' should not be used in the case of God.

But contrary to this: The Athanasian creed says, "Oneness in Trinity and Trinity in Oneness is to be revered."

I respond: In the case of God, the name 'Trinity' signifies a determinate number of persons. So given that a plurality is posited in God, one should use the name 'Trinity', since this name signifies determinately the same thing that 'plurality' signifies indeterminately.

Reply to objection 1: According to the etymology of the word, the name 'Trinity' seems to signify the single essence of the three persons. For a trinity (*trinitas*) is, as it were, the oneness of three (*trium unitas*). However, according to the proper meaning of the word, it signifies instead the number of persons with a single essence. Because of this, we cannot say that the Father is the Trinity; for He is not three persons.

Moreover, 'Trinity' does not signify the relations that belong to the persons; rather, it signifies the number of persons who are related to one another. For this reason, the name does not itself make reference to another.

Reply to objection 2: A collective name implies two things, viz., (a) a plurality of supposita and (b) a oneness with respect to some ordering. For instance, a people is a multitude of men collected under some ordering. On the first point, the name 'Trinity' is consistent with other collective names. However,

it differs on the second point, since in the divine Trinity there is not only a oneness with respect to an ordering but, along with this, a oneness of essence as well.

Reply to objection 3: ‘Trinity’ is predicated absolutely [and not relationally], since it signifies the number of persons, viz., three. But as is clear from Boethius in the *Arithmetica*, the term ‘tripleness’ signifies a proportion of inequality, since it is a species of unequal proportion. And so in God there is a trinity, but no tripleness.

Reply to objection 4: ‘Divine Trinity’ conveys both the number and the persons who are numbered. Therefore, when we say ‘Trinity in Oneness’, we are not positing a number in the oneness of the essence, as if the one essence were being taken three times. Rather, we are positing the numbered persons in the oneness of a nature, in the sense in which the supposita of a given nature are said to exist ‘in’ that nature. By contrast, we say ‘Oneness in Trinity’ in the sense in which a nature is said to exist ‘in’ its supposita.

Reply to objection 5: When one says, ‘The Trinity is three’, what is signified, because of the number implied [in ‘Trinity’], is the multiplication of the same number by itself. For when I say ‘three’, it implies a distinction within each of the supposita that belongs to that of which ‘three’ is predicated. And so one cannot say that the Trinity is three, since if the Trinity were three, then it would follow that there are three supposita that are Trinities. In the same way, when one says ‘God is three’, it follows that there are three supposita that are divinities (*deitates*).

Article 2

Is the Son other than the Father?

It seems that the Son is not other (*alius*) than the Father:

Objection 1: ‘Other’ is a relational term indicating a diversity of substance. Therefore, if the Son is other than the Father, then it seems that He is diverse from the Father. But this is contrary to Augustine in *De Trinitate* 7, where he claims that when we say ‘three persons’, we do not intend to imply a diversity.

Objection 2: If two things are ‘other’ than one another, then they differ from one another in some way. Therefore, if the Son is other than the Father, then it follows that He differs from the Father. But this is contrary to Ambrose in *De Fide* 1, where he says, “The Father and the Son are one in divinity (*deitas*); nor is there a difference of substance or any other sort of diversity.”

Objection 3: ‘Alien’ (*alienum*) comes from ‘other’ (*aliud*). But the Son is not alien to the Father; for in *De Trinitate* 7 Hilary says that among the divine persons nothing is diverse, nothing is alien, and nothing is separable. Therefore, the Son is not other than the Father.

Objection 4: ‘Other [person]’ (*alius*) and ‘other [thing]’ (*aliud*) signify the same thing and differ only in their co-signification of grammatical gender. Therefore, if the Son is a person other (*alius*) than the Father, it seems to follow that He is a thing other (*aliud*) than the Father.

But contrary to this: In *De Fide ad Petrum* Augustine says, “The essence of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is one, and in that essence it is not the case that the Father is one [thing] (*aliud*) and the Son another [thing] (*aliud*) and the Holy Spirit yet another [thing] (*aliud*)—even though, speaking of the persons, the Father is one [person] (*alius*) and the Son is another [person] (*alius*) and the Holy Spirit is yet another [person] (*alius*).”

I respond: Since, as Jerome puts it, heresy arises from words that are used incorrectly, it follows that when we speak of the Trinity, we must proceed with caution and modesty. For as Augustine says in

De Trinitate 1, “There is no other place where error is more dangerous, where questions are asked more rigorously, or where anything more fruitful is found.”

In what we say about the Trinity, there are two opposed errors we must avoid by steering carefully between them, viz., (a) the error of Arius, who claimed that there is a trinity of substances along with the trinity of persons, and (b) the error of Sabellius, who claimed that there is a oneness of person along with the oneness of essence.

Now to escape the error of Arius, we should avoid the name ‘diverse’ (*nomen diversitatis*) and the name ‘different’ (*nomen differentiae*) in speaking of God, so as not to deny the oneness of the essence. We can, however, use the name ‘distinct’ (*nomen distinctionis*) because of the relational oppositions. Hence, wherever we find ‘diverse’ or ‘different’ applied to the persons in some authoritative text, ‘diverse’ or ‘different’ is being used for ‘distinct’. Again, so as not to deny the simplicity of God’s essence, we should avoid the name ‘separate’ (*nomen separationis*) and the name ‘divided’ (*nomen divisionis*), which suggest the parts in a whole. Again, so as not to deny the equality of the persons, we should avoid the name ‘disparate’ (*nomen disparitatis*). Again, so as not to deny the similarity of the persons, we should avoid the names ‘alien’ (*alienus*) and ‘discrepant’ (*discrepans*). For in *De Fide* Ambrose says that there is no discrepancy between the Father and the Son, but a single divinity. And according to Hilary, as quoted above, in God there is nothing alien and nothing separable.

On the other hand, to escape the error of Sabellius, we should avoid the name ‘singular’ (*singularitas*), so as not to deny the communicability of the divine essence. Thus, in *De Trinitate* 7 Hilary says, “It is a sacrilege to say that the Father or the Son is the singular God.” We should also avoid the name ‘unique’ (*unicus*), so as not to deny the number of persons. Hence, in the same book Hilary says that the meanings of ‘singular’ and ‘unique’ are excluded from God. Still, we say ‘the unique Son’, since there are not many Sons in God. Yet we do not say ‘the unique God’, since the divinity (*deitas*) is common to a plurality. We should also avoid the name ‘mixed together’ (*confusus*), lest the ordering of the nature be denied of the persons. Thus, in *De Fide* 1 Ambrose says, “What is one is not mixed together, nor can what is indifferent be multiple.” Again, we should avoid the name ‘solitary’ (*solitarius*), so as not to deny the fellowship of the three persons. For in *De Trinitate* 4 Hilary says, “We must confess that God is neither solitary nor diverse.”

Now the name ‘other [person]’ (*alius*), taken in the masculine, implies only a distinction of suppositum. Hence, it is appropriate for us to say that the Son is other (*alius*) than the Father. For He is another suppositum of the divine nature, just as He is another person and another hypostasis.

Reply to objection 1: Since ‘other’ (*alius*) is a particular name, it has to do with the suppositum, and so a distinction of substance, in the sense of hypostasis or person, is sufficient for its meaning. By contrast, diversity requires a distinction of substance in the sense of essence. And so we cannot say that the Son is diverse from the Father, even though He is other than the Father.

Reply to objection 2: Difference (*differentia*) implies a distinction among forms. But there is just one form in God, as is clear from Philippians 2:6 (“Who being in the form of God”). And so the name ‘different’ does not properly belong to ‘God’, as is clear from the adduced passage.

Still, Damascene uses the name ‘different’ (*nomen differentiae*) in speaking of the divine persons, insofar as a relational property is signified in the manner of a form. Hence, he says that the hypostases differ from one another not according to substance, but according to determinate properties. However, as has been explained, ‘different’ is being used here for ‘distinct’.

Reply to objection 3: What is alien is extraneous and dissimilar. But this is not what is implied by ‘other’. And so we say that the Son is other than the Father, even though we do not say that the Son is alien from the Father.

Reply to objection 4: The neuter (*aliud*) is indeterminate (*informe*), whereas the masculine (*alius*), and likewise the feminine (*alia*), are determinate and distinct. And so it is appropriate that the

common essence should be signified by the neuter (*aliud*), while a determinate suppositum in a common nature is signified by the masculine (*alius*) and the feminine (*alia*). Hence, even in human affairs, if someone asks ‘Who is he?’, the answer is ‘Socrates’, which is the name of a suppositum. On the other hand, if someone asks ‘What is he?’, the answer is ‘A rational and mortal animal’.

And so since in God the distinction is according to the persons and not according to the essence, we say that the Father is other (*alius*) than the Son, but not that He is other (*aliud*). Conversely, we say that the Father and the Son are one [essence] (*unum*), but not that they are one [person] (*unus*).

Article 3

Can the exclusive expression ‘alone’ be used to modify a term pertaining to God’s essence?

It seems that the exclusive expression ‘alone’ (*solus*) should not be used to modify a term pertaining to God’s essence:

Objection 1: According to the Philosopher in *Sophistical Refutations 2*, “He is alone who is not with another.” But God is with the angels and the souls of the blessed. Therefore, we cannot say that God is alone.

Objection 2: Whatever modifies a term pertaining to God’s essence can be predicated of each of the persons *per se* and of all of them together. For instance, since it is appropriate to say ‘wise God’, we can also say ‘The Father is a wise God’ and ‘The Trinity is a wise God’. But in *De Trinitate 7* Augustine says, “We should give heed to the position that says that it is not the case that the Father is true God alone.” Therefore, one cannot say ‘God alone’.

Objection 3: If the expression ‘alone’ modifies a subject term pertaining to the essence, then the predicate will pertain either to a person or to the essence. But it does not pertain to a person, since ‘God alone is Father’ is false, given that men are also fathers. Nor does it pertain to the essence. For if ‘God alone creates’ were true, then it would follow, so it seems, that ‘The Father alone creates’ is also true, since whatever is said of God can be said of the Father. But this proposition is false, since the Son is also a creator. Therefore, in the case of God the expression ‘alone’ cannot modify a term pertaining to the essence.

But contrary to this: 1 Timothy 1:17 says, “To the king of ages, immortal, invisible, who is God alone.”

I respond: The expression ‘alone’ can be taken either categorically or syncategorematically.

Now an expression is called *categoric* when it posits the signified thing in an absolute way with respect to some suppositum, e.g., ‘white’ with respect to a man, when one says ‘a white man’. If the expression ‘alone’ is taken in this sense, then it cannot modify any term at all in the case of God. For it would posit solitariness (*solitudo*) with respect to the term it modified, and so it would follow that God is all alone by Himself (*solitarius*)—which is contrary to what was said above (a. 2).

On the other hand, an expression is called *syncategoric* when it implies an ordering of the predicate to the subject, e.g., the expression ‘all’ or ‘none’, and, similarly, the expression ‘alone’, which excludes every other suppositum from association with the predicate. For instance, when one says ‘Socrates alone is writing’, the meaning is not that Socrates is all alone by himself, but rather that no one is joining him in writing—even if there are many others with him. And in this sense nothing prevents the expression ‘alone’ from modifying a term pertaining to God’s essence, insofar as it excludes all things other than God from association with the predicate. For instance, we say ‘God alone is eternal’, because nothing besides God is eternal.

Reply to objection 1: Even though the angels and the souls of the blessed are always with God, still, if there were no plurality of persons in God, it would follow that God is all alone or by Himself. For solitariness is not negated by association with something that is extraneous to one's nature. For instance, someone is said to be alone in the garden, even if there are many plants and animals there. Similarly, God would be said to be all alone or by Himself if there were no plurality of persons in God—even if angels and men existed along with Him. Therefore, the companionship of angels and souls does not rule out absolute solitariness on the part of God, and *a fortiori* it does not rule out relative solitariness with respect to some predicate.

Reply to objection 2: Properly speaking, the expression 'alone' is not posited as part of the predicate, which is taken formally. For 'alone' has to do with the subject (*suppositum*) insofar as it excludes another suppositum from that to which it is joined. (By contrast, when the adverb 'only' (*tantum*) is used as an exclusive expression, it can be posited as part of either the subject or the predicate. For instance, we say both (a) 'Only (*tantum*) Socrates is running', i.e., no one else is running, and (b) 'Socrates is only (*tantum*) running', i.e., he is doing nothing else.)

Hence, one cannot properly say 'The Father is God alone' or 'The Trinity is God alone'—unless, perhaps, something implicit is being understood on the part of the predicate, so that the meaning is 'The Trinity is the God who is God alone'. Accordingly, 'The Father is the God who is God alone' could also be true, if the relative pronoun were referring back to the predicate and not to the subject.

Now when Augustine says that it is not the case that the Father is God alone, but that the Trinity is God alone, he is speaking expositively, as if to say that when [the Apostle] says 'to the king of ages, the invisible, who is God alone', one should explain this as referring not to the person of the Father, but to the Trinity alone.

Reply to objection 3: The expression 'alone' can be joined in both ways to a term pertaining to the essence, since the proposition 'God alone is Father' has two readings.

For 'Father' can serve to predicate the *person* of the Father, and in this sense the proposition is true, since no man is that person.

Alternatively, 'Father' can predicate just the *relation*, and in this sense the proposition is false, since the relation of paternity is also found among other beings, even if not univocally.

Similarly, 'God alone creates' is true, but 'therefore, the Father alone creates' does not follow from this. For, as the logicians put it, the exclusive expression 'immobilizes' the term it modifies, so that one cannot descend from it to a suppositum. For this is invalid: 'Man alone is a rational mortal animal; therefore, Socrates alone is a rational mortal animal'.

Article 4

Can the exclusive expression 'alone' be used to modify a term pertaining to a person?

It seems that the exclusive expression 'alone' can be used to modify a term pertaining to a person, even if the predicate is a common term:

Objection 1: At John 17:3, speaking to the Father, our Lord says, "That they may know You, the only true God." Therefore, the Father alone is true God.

Objection 2: Matthew 11:27 says, "No one knows the Son but the Father." This signifies the same thing as 'The Father alone knows the Son'. But 'knows the Son' is a common term. Therefore, we reach the same conclusion as before.

Objection 3: The exclusive expression does not exclude anything that pertains to our

understanding of the term to which it is joined. Hence, it does not exclude a part or a universal. For this is invalid: ‘Socrates alone is white; therefore, his hand is not white.’ Nor is this valid: ‘Socrates alone is white; therefore, no man is white’. But one person is understood in the other; for instance, ‘the Father’ is understood in ‘the Son’, and vice versa. Therefore, the fact that someone says ‘The Father alone is God’ does not exclude the Son or the Holy Spirit. And so it seems that this sentence is true.

Objection 4: [In the *Gloria*] the Church sings, “You alone are the most high, Jesus Christ.”

But contrary to this: The sentence ‘The Father alone is God’ has two exponents, viz., ‘The Father is God’ and ‘No one other than the Father is God’. But this second exponent is false, since the Son, who is God, is other than the Father. Therefore, ‘The Father alone is God’ is false. And the same holds for the other similar cases.

I respond: When we say ‘The Father alone is God’, this proposition can have several readings.

For if the proposition is positing solitariness with respect to the Father, then it is false, since ‘alone’ is being taken categorematically.

On the other hand, if ‘alone’ is being taken syncategorematically, then once again the proposition can have more than one reading.

For if ‘alone’ is excluding others from the subject’s form, then it is true, since it has the sense, ‘The lone Father is God’, i.e., ‘He, along with whom no one else is the Father, is God’. This is the way Augustine expounds it *De Trinitate* 7 when he says, “We do not say ‘the Father alone’ by reason of the fact that He is separated from the Son or the Holy Spirit; rather, when we say this, we signify that they are not the Father along with Him.” Still, this reading does not reflect the normal way of speaking unless something implicit is being understood, so that the meaning is ‘He who alone is called the Father is God’.

However, the proper sense of the proposition excludes others from association with the predicate. So taken, the proposition is false if it excludes another (*alius*) in the masculine, whereas it is true if it excludes another (*aliud*) only in the neuter. For the Son is [a person] other (*alius*) than the Father, but not [an essence] other (*aliud*) than the Father—and the same holds for the Holy Spirit.

However, since, as has been explained, the expression ‘alone’ properly modifies the subject, it is more prone toward excluding another [person] (*alius*) than another [essence] (*aliud*). Hence, the meaning of a sentence such as ‘The Father alone is God’ should not be stretched. Instead, the sentence should be expounded piously whenever it is found in the authoritative writings.

Reply to objection 1: As Augustine explains, when we say ‘You alone are true God’, this is understood to mean not the person of the Father, but the whole Trinity.

An alternative reply is that if it is understood to mean the person of the Father, then because of the oneness of the essence the other persons are not excluded as long as ‘alone’ is being taken to exclude just another [essence] (*aliud*), as has been explained.

Reply to objection 2: A similar reply holds for this objection. When something pertaining to the essence is said of the Father, then in virtue of the oneness of the essence it is not the case that the Son and the Holy Spirit are excluded.

Still, notice that in the cited passage the expression ‘no one’ (*nemo*) is not the same as ‘no man’ (*nullus homo*), despite the fact that ‘no one’ might seem to have this signification. (For if it did, then the person of the Father could not be the object of the exception.) Instead, ‘no one’ is being taken, according to common usage, as distributed over every rational nature.

Reply to objection 3: The exclusive expression does not exclude things, e.g., parts and universals, that belong to the meaning of the [excepted] term, as long as these things do not differ from it in suppositum. However, the Son differs from the Father in suppositum, and so the arguments are not parallel.

Reply to objection 4: [In the *Gloria*] we do not say absolutely speaking that the Son alone is the most high, but rather that He is the most high “with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.”