

THE TRINITY IS ONE GOD

BOETHIUS

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THE TRINITY IS ONE GOD

NOT THREE GODS

A TREATISE BY

ANICIUS MANLIUS SEVERINUS

MOST HONOURABLE, OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS ORDER OF

EN-CONSULS, PATRICIAN

TO HIS FATHER-IN-LAW, QUINTUS AURELIUS

MEMMIUS SYMMACHUS

MOST HONOURABLE, OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS ORDER OF

EX-CONSULS, PATRICIAN

Introduction to the Source of the Text

I HAVE long pondered this problem with such mind as I have and all the light that God has lent me. Now, having set it forth in logical order and cast it into literary form, I venture to submit it to your judgment, for which I care as much as for the results of my own research. You will readily understand what I feel whenever I try to write down what I think if you consider the difficulty of the topic and the fact that I discuss it only with the few I may say with no one but yourself. It is indeed no desire for fame or empty popular applause that prompts my pen; if there be any external reward, we may not look for more warmth in the Verdict than the subject itself arouses. For, a part from yourself, wherever I turn my eyes, they fall on either

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the apathy of the dullard or the jealousy of the shrewd, and a man who casts his thoughts before the common herd I will not say to consider but to trample under foot, would seem to bring discredit on the study of divinity. So I purposely use brevity and wrap up the ideas I draw from the deep questionings of philosophy in new and unaccustomed words which speak only to you and to myself, that is, if you deign to look at them. The rest of the world I simply disregard: they cannot understand, and therefore do not deserve to read. We should not of course press our inquiry further than man's wit and reason are allowed to climb the height of heavenly knowledge.¹ In all the liberal arts some limit is set beyond which reason may not reach. Medicine, for instance, does not always bring health to the sick, though the doctor will not be to blame if he has left nothing undone which he ought to do. So with the other arts. In the present case the very difficulty of the quest claims a lenient judgment. You must however examine whether the seeds sown in my *mind* by *St. Augustine's writings*² have borne fruit. And now let us begin our inquiry.

I.

There are many who claim as theirs the dignity of the Christian religion; but that form of faith is valid and only valid which, both on account of the universal character of the rules and doctrines affirming its authority, and because the worship in which they are expressed has spread throughout the world, is called catholic or universal. The belief of this religion concerning the Unity of the Trinity is as follows: the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. Therefore Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, not three Gods. The cause of this union is absence of difference: ³ difference cannot be avoided by those who add to or take from the Unity, as for instance the Arians, who, by graduating the Trinity according to merit, break it up and convert it to Plurality. For the essence of plurality is otherness; apart from otherness plurality is unintelligible. In fact, the difference between three or more things lies in genus or species or number. Difference is the necessary correlative of sameness. Sameness is predicated in three ways: By genus; e.g. a man and a horse, because of their common genus, animal. By species; e.g. Cato and Cicero, because of their common species, man. By number; e.g. Tully and Cicero, because they are one and the same man. Similarly, difference is expressed by genus, species, and number. Now numerical difference is caused by variety of accidents; three men differ neither by genus nor species but by their accidents, for if we mentally remove from them all other accidents, ⁴ still each one occupies a different place which cannot possibly be regarded as the same for each, since two bodies cannot occupy the same place, and place is an accident. Wherefore it is because men are plural by their accidents that they are plural in number.

II.

We will now begin a careful consideration of each several point, as far as they can be grasped and understood; for it has been wisely said, ⁵ in my opinion, that it is a scholar's duty to study the real nature of anything before he formulates his belief about it.

Speculative Science may be divided into three kinds: ⁶ Physics, Mathematics, and Theology. Physics deals with motion and is not abstract or separable (i.e.); for it is concerned with the forms of bodies together with their constituent matter, which forms cannot be separated in reality from their bodies. ⁷ As the bodies are in motion the earth, for instance, tending downwards, and fire tending upwards, form takes on the movement of the particular thing to which it is annexed.

Mathematics does not deal with motion and is not abstract, for it investigates forms of bodies apart from matter, and therefore apart from movement, which forms, however, being connected with matter cannot be really separated from bodies.

Theology does not deal with motion and is abstract and separable, for time Divine Substance is without either matter or motion. In Physics, then, we are bound to use scientific, in Mathematics, systematical, in Theology, intellectual concepts; and in Theology we will not let ourselves be diverted to play

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with imaginations, but will simply apprehend that Form which is pure form and no image, which is very Being and the source of Being For everything owes its being to Form. Thus a statue is not a statue on account of the brass which is its matter, but on account of the form whereby the likeness of a living thing is impressed upon it: the brass itself is not brass because of the earth which is its matter, but because of its form. Likewise earth is not earth by reason of unqualified matter, ⁸ but by reason of dryness and weight, which are forms. So nothing is said to be because it has matter, but because it has a distinctive form. But the Divine Substance is Form without matter, and is therefore One, and is its own essence. But other things are not simply their own essences, for each thing has its being from the things of which it is composed, that is, from its parts. It is This and That, i.e. it is the totality of its parts in conjunction; it is not This or That taken apart. Earthly man, for instance, since he consists of soul and body, is soul and body, not soul or body, separately; therefore he is not his own essence. That on the other hand which does not consist of This and That, but only of This, is really its own essence, and is altogether beautiful and stable because it is not grounded in any alien element. Wherefore that is truly One in which is no number, in which nothing is present except its own essence. Nor can it become the substrate of anything, for it is pure Form, and pure Forms cannot be substrates. ⁹ For if humanity, like other forms, is a substrate for accidents, it does not receive accidents through the fact that it exists, but through the fact that matter is subjected to it. Humanity appears indeed to appropriate the accident which in reality belongs to the matter underlying the conception Humanity. But Form which, is without matter cannot be a substrate, and cannot have its essence in matter, else it would not be form but a reflexion. For from those forms which are outside matter come the forms which are in matter and produce bodies. We misname the entities that reside in bodies when we call them forms; they are mere images; they only resemble those forms which are not incorporate in matter. In Him, then, is no difference, no plurality arising out of difference, no multiplicity arising out of accidents, and accordingly no number.

III.

Now God differs from God in no respect for there cannot lie divine essences distinguished either by accidents or by substantial differences belonging to a substrate. But where there is no difference, there is no sort of plurality and accordingly no number; here, therefore, is unity alone. For whereas we say God thrice when we name the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, these three unities do not produce a plurality of number in their own essences, if we think of what we count instead of what we count with. For in the case of abstract number a repetition of single items does produce plurality; but in the case of concrete number the repetition and plural use of single items does not by any means produce numerical difference in the objects counted. There are as a fact two kinds of number. There is the number with which we count (abstract) and the number inherent in the things counted (concrete). "One" is a thing the thing counted. Unity is that by which oneness is denoted. Again "two" belongs to the class of things as men or stones; but not so duality; duality is merely that whereby two men or two stones are denoted; and so on. Therefore a repetition of unities ¹⁰ produces plurality when it is a question of abstract, but not when it is a question of concrete things, as, for example, if I say of one and the same thing, "one sword, one brand, one blade." ¹¹ It is easy to see that each of these names denotes a sword; I am not numbering unities but simply repeating one thing, and in saying "sword, brand, blade," I reiterate the one thing and do not enumerate several different things any more than I produce three suns instead of merely mentioning one thing thrice when I say "Sun, Sun, Sun."

So then if God be predicated thrice of Father, Sun, and Holy Spirit, the threefold predication does not result in plural number. The risk of that, as has been said, attends only on those who distinguish Them according to merit. But Catholic Christians, allowing no difference of merit in God, assuming Him to be Pure Form and believing Him to be nothing else than His own essence, rightly regard the statement "the Father is God, the Son is God the Holy Spirit is God, and this Trinity is one God," not as an enumeration of different things but as a reiteration of one and the same thing, like the statement, "blade and brand are one sword" or "sun, sun, and sun are one sun."

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Let this be enough for the present to establish my meaning and to show that not every repetition of units produces number and plurality. Still in saying "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," we are not using Synonymous terms. "Brand and blade" are the same and identical, but

"Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" though the same, are not identical. This point deserves a moment's consideration. When they ask, "Is the Father the same as the Son?" Catholics answer "No." "Is the One the same as the Other?" The answer is in the negative. There is not, therefore, complete indifference between Them; and so number does come in number which we explained was the result of diversity of substrates. We will briefly debate this point when, we have done examining how particular predicates can be applied to God.

IV.

There are in all ten categories which can be universally predicated of things, namely, Substance, Quality, Quantity, Relation, Place, Time, Condition, Situation, Activity, Passivity. Their meaning is determined by the contingent subject; for some of them denote real substantive attributes of created things, others belong to the class of accidental attributes. But when these categories are applied to God they change their meaning entirely. Relation, for instance, cannot be predicated at all of God; for substance in Him is not really substantial but super-substantial. So with quality and the other possible attributes, of which we must add examples for the sake of clearness.

When we say God, we seem to denote a substance; but it is a substance that is supersubstantial. When we say of Him, "He is just," we mention a quality, not an accidental quality rather a substantial and, in fact, a supersubstantial quality.¹² For God is not one thing because He is, and another thing because He is just; with Him to be just and to be God are one and the same. So when we say, "He is great or the greatest, we seem to predicate quantity, but it is a quantity similar to this substance which we have declared to be supersubstantial; for with Him to be great and to be God are all one. Again, concerning His Form, we have already shown that He is Form, and truly One without Plurality. The categories we have mentioned are such that they give to the thing to which they are applied the character which they express; in created things they express divided being, in God, conjoined and united being in the following manner. When we name a substance, as man or God, it seems as though that of which the predication is made were itself substance, as man or God is substance. But there is a difference: since man is not simply and entirely man, and therefore is not substance after all. For what man is he owes to other things which are not man. But God is simply and entirely God, for He is nothing else than what He is, and therefore is, through simple existence, God. Again we apply just, a quality, as though it were that of which it is predicated; that is, if we say "a just man or just God," we assert that man or God is just. But there is a difference, for man is one thing, and a just man is another thing. But God is justice itself. So a man or God is said to be great, and it would appear that man is substantially great or that God is substantially great. But man is merely great; God is greatness.

The remaining categories are not predicable of God nor yet of created things.¹³ For place is predicated of man or of God a man is in the market—place; God is everywhere but in neither case is the predicate identical with the object of predication. To say "A man is in the market" is quite a different thing from saying "he is white or long," or, so to speak, encompassed and determined by some property which enables him to be described in terms of his substance; this predicate of place simply declares how far his substance is given a particular setting amid other things.

It is otherwise, of course, with God. "He is everywhere" does not mean that He is in every place, for He cannot be in any place at all but that every place is present to Him for Him to occupy, although He Himself can be received by no place, and therefore He cannot anywhere be in a place, since He is everywhere but in no place. It is the same with the category of time, as, "A man came yesterday; God is ever." Here again the predicate of "coming yesterday" denotes not something substantial, but something

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happening in terms of time. But the expression "God is ever" denotes a single Present, summing up His continual presence in all the past, in all the present however that term be used and in all the future. Philosophers say that "ever" may be applied to the life of the heavens and other immortal bodies. But as applied to God it has a different meaning. He is ever, because "ever" is with Him a term of present time, and there is this great difference between "now," which is our present, and the divine present. Our present connotes changing time and sempiternity; God's present, unmoved, and immoveable, connotes eternity. Add semper to eternity and you get the constant, incessant and thereby perpetual course of our present time, that is to say, sempiternity. ¹⁴

It is just the same with the categories of condition and activity. For example, we say "A man runs, clothed," "God rules, possessing all things." Here again nothing substantial is asserted of either subject; in fact all the categories we have hitherto named arise from what lies outside substance, and all of them, so to speak, refer to something other than substance. The difference between the categories is easily seen by an example. Thus, the terms "man" and "God" refer to the substance in virtue of which the subject is man or God. The term "just" refers to the quality in virtue of which the subject is something, viz. just; the term "great" to the quantity in virtue of which He is something, viz. great. No other category save substance, quality, and quantity refer to the substance of the subject. If I say of one "he is in the market" or "everywhere," I am applying the category of place, which is not a category of the substance, like "just" in virtue of justice. So if I say, "he runs, He rules, he is now, He is ever," I make reference to activity or time if indeed God's "ever" can be described as time but not to a category of substance, like "great" in virtue of greatness.

Finally, we must not look for the categories of situation and passivity in God, for they simply are not to be found in Him.

Have I now made clear the difference between the categories? Some denote the reality of a thing; others its accidental circumstances; the former declare that a thing is something; the latter say nothing about its being anything, but simply attach to it, so to speak, something external. Those categories which describe a thing in terms of its substance may be called substantial categories; when they apply to things as subjects they are called accidents. In reference to God, who is not a subject at all, it is only possible to employ the category of substance.

V.

Let us now consider the category of relation, to which all the foregoing remarks have been preliminary; for qualities which obviously arise from the association of another term do not appear to predicate anything concerning the substance of a subject. For instance, master and slave¹⁵ are relative terms; let us see whether either of them are predicates of substance. If you suppress the term slave, ¹⁶ you simultaneously suppress the term master. On the other hand, though you suppress the term whiteness, you do not suppress some white thing, ¹⁷ though, of course, if the particular whiteness inhere as an accident in the thing, the thing disappears as soon as you suppress the accidental quality whiteness. But in the case of master, if you suppress the term slave, the term master disappears. But slave is not an accidental quality of master, as whiteness is of a white thing; it denotes the power which the master has over the slave. Now since the power goes when the slave is removed, it is plain that power is no accident to the substance of master, but is an adventitious augmentation arising from the possession of slaves.

It cannot therefore be affirmed that a category of relation increases, decreases, or alters in any way the substance of the thing to which it is applied. The category of relation, then, has nothing to do with the substance of the subject; it simply denotes a condition of relativity, and that not necessarily to something else, but sometimes to the subject itself. For suppose a man standing. If I go up to him on my right and stand beside him, he will be left, in relation to me, not because he is left in himself, but because I have come up to him on my right. Again, if I come up to him on my left, he becomes right in relation to me, not because he is right in himself, as he may be white or long, but because he is right in virtue of my approach. What he is depends entirely on me, and not in the least on the essence of his being.

Accordingly those predicates which do not denote the essential property of a thing cannot alter, change or disturb its nature in any way. Wherefore if Father and Son are predicates of relation, and, as we have said, have no other difference but that of relation, and if relation is not asserted of its subject as though it were time subject itself and its substantial quality, it will effect no real difference in its subject, but, in a phrase which aims at interpreting what we can hardly understand, a difference of persons. For it is a canon of absolute truth that distinctions in incorporeal things are established by differences and not by spatial separation. It cannot be said that God became Father by the addition to His substance of some accident; for he never began to be Father, since the begetting of the Son belongs to His very substance; however, time predicate father, as such, is relative. And if we bear in mind all the propositions made God in the previous discussion, we shall admit that God the Son proceeded from God the Father, and the Holy Ghost from both, and that They cannot possibly be spatially different, since They are incorporeal. But since the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and since there are in God no points of difference distinguishing Him from God, He differs from none of the Others. But where there are no differences there is no plurality; where is no plurality there is Unity. Again, nothing but God can be begotten of God, and lastly, in concrete enumerations the repetition of units does not produce plurality. Thus the Unity of the Three is suitably established.

VI.

But since no relation can be affirmed of one subject alone, inasmuch as a predicate wanting relation is a predicate of substance, the manifoldness of the category of relation, Trinity is secured through the

category of relation, and the Unity is maintained through the fact that there is no difference of substance, or operation, or generally of any substantial predicate. So then, the divine substance preserves the Unity, the divine relations bring about the Trinity. Hence only terms belonging to relation may be applied singly to Each. For the Father is not the same as the Son, nor is either of Them the same as the Holy Spirit. Yet Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each the same God, the same in justice, in goodness, in greatness, and in everything that can be predicated of substance. One must not forget that predicates of relativity do not always involve relation to something other than the subject, as slave involves master, where the two terms are different. For equals are equal, like are like, identicals are identical, each with other, and the relation of Father to Son, and of both to Holy Spirit is a relation of identicals. A relation of this kind is not to be found in created things, but that is because of the difference which we know attaches to transient objects. We must not in speaking of God let imagination lead us astray; we must let the Faculty of pure Knowledge lift us up and teach us to

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know all things as far as they may be known.¹⁸

I have now finished the investigation which I proposed. The exactness of my reasoning awaits the standard of your judgment; your authority will pronounce whether I have seen a straight path to the goal. If, God helping me, I have furnished some support in argument to an article which stands by itself on the firm foundation of Faith, I shall render joyous praise for the finished work to Him from whom the invitation comes. But if human nature has failed to reach beyond its limits, whatever is lost through my infirmity must be made good by my intention.

¹ Cf. The discussion of human ratio and divine intellegia in *Cons. v. pr. 4 and 5*.

² e.g. Aug. *De Trin.*

³ The terms *differentia, numerus, species*, are used expertly, as would be expected of the author of the *In Isag. Porph. Commenta*. See S. Brandt's edition of that work (in the *Vienna Corpus*, 1906), s.v. *differencia*, etc.

⁴ This method of mental abstraction is employed more elaborately in *Tr. iii.* (*vide infra*, p. 44) and in *Cons. v. pr. 4*, where the notion of divine foreknowledge is abstracted in imagination.

⁵ By Cicero (*Tusc. v. 7. 19*).

⁶ Cf. the similar division of philosophy in *Isag. Porph.* ed. Brandt, pp 7 ff.

⁷ Sb. Though they may be separated in thought.

⁸, of Aristotle. Cf. (*Alexander Aphrod. De Anima, 17. 17*); (*id. De anima libri mantissa, 124. 77*).

⁹ This is Realism. Cf. "Sed si rerum ueritatem atque integritatem perpendas, non est dubium quin uere sint. Nam cum res omnes quae uere sunt sine his quinque (*i.e.* genus species differentia propria accidentia) esse non possint, has ipsas quinque res uere intellectas esse non dubites". *Isag. In Porph. ed. pr. i.* (M. P.L. lxiv. Col. 19, Brandt, pp. 26 ff.). The two passages show that Boethius is definitely committed to the Realistic position, although in his Comment. In Porphy. A se translatum he holds the scales between Plato and Aristotle, "quorum diiudicare sententias aptum esse non duxi" (cp. Haureau, *Hist. De la philosophie scolastique*, i. 120). As a fact in the *Comment. in Porph.* he merely postpones the question, which in the *De Trin.* he settles, Boethius was ridiculed in the Middle Ages for his caution.

¹⁰ e.g. if I say "one, one, one," I enounce three unities.

¹¹ The same words are used to illustrate the same matter in the Comment. in Arist. 2nd ed. (Meiser) 56. 12.

¹² Gilbert de la Porree in his commentary on the *De Trin.* Makes Boethius's meaning clear. "Quod igitur in illo substantiam nominamus, non est subiectionis ratione quod dicitur, sed ultra omnem quae accidentibus est subiecta substantiam est essentia, absque omnibus quae possunt accidere solitaria omnino" (Migne, P.L. lxiv. 1283). Cf. Aug. *De Trin.* vii. 10.

¹³ *i.e.* according to their substance.

¹⁴ The doctrine is Augustine's, cf. *De Ciu. Dei*, xi. 6, xii. 16; but Boethius's use of *sempiternitas*, as well as his word-building, seem to be peculiar to himself. Claudianus Mamertus, speaking of applying the categories to God, uses *sempiternitas* as Boethius uses *aeternitas*. Cf. *De Statu Animae* i. 19. Apuleius seems to use both terms interchangeably, e.g. *Asclep.* 29–31. On Boethius's distinction between time and eternity see *Cons. v.*

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pr. 6, and Rand, *Der dem B. zugeschr. Trakt. De fide*, pp. 425 ff, and Brandt in *Theol. Littzg.*, 1902, p. 147.

¹⁵*Dominus* and *seruus* are similarly used as illustration, *In Cat.* (Migne, P.L. lxiv. 217).

¹⁶ *i.e.* which is external to the master.

¹⁷ *i.e.* which is external to the whitened thing.

¹⁸ Cf. *Cons.* v. pr. 4 and 5, especially in pr. 5 the passage "quare in illius summae intellegentiae acumen si possumus erigamur."