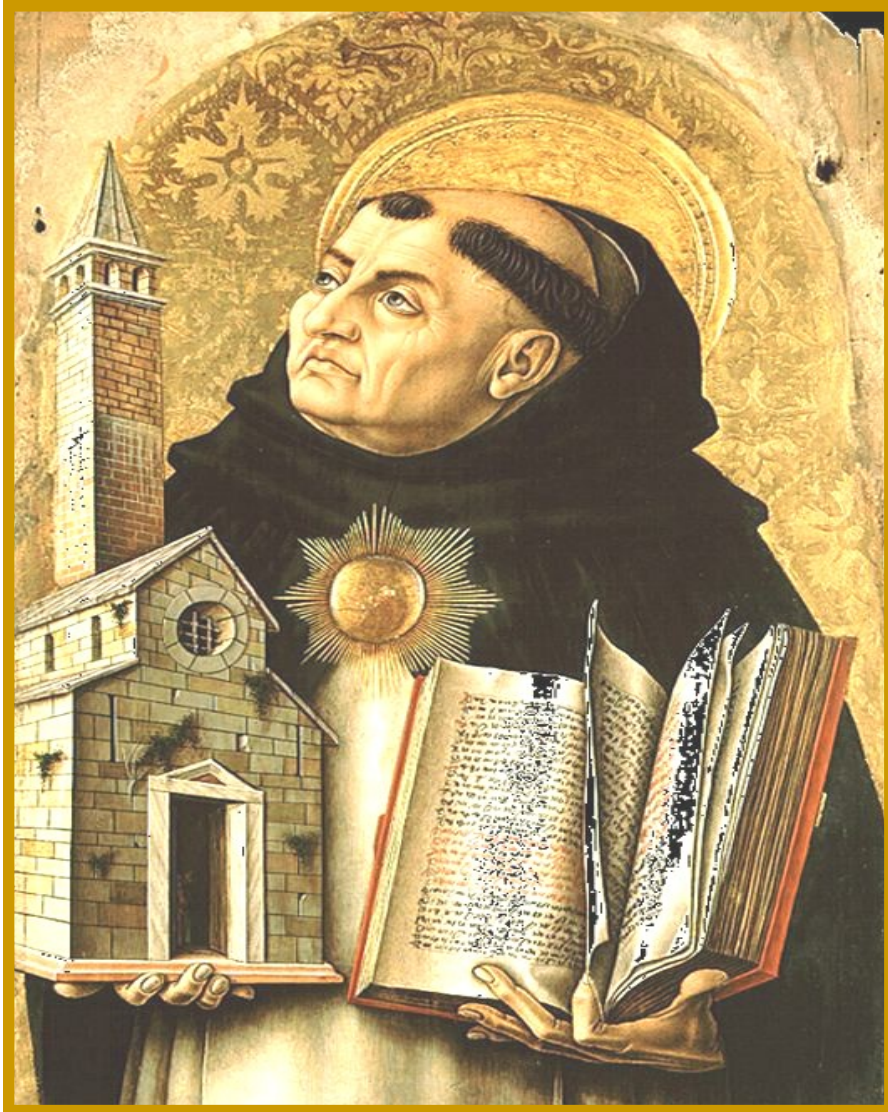


Catholic Philosophy - Part 9 - God is Simple



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Catholic Teaching:

God is not composed or divisible by any physical or metaphysical means. Simplicity of God refers to the fact that he has no parts. The simplicity teaching extends to the entire nature of God. His substance, nature, and very being is that of utter simplicity. The properties usually attributed to God such as omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence do not contradict the teaching of simplicity because each property is a different way of looking at the infinite active being of God from a limited perspective. One consequence of this teaching is the fact that since God is simple, he must be a pure spirit.

Definition of the Dogma:

The dogma of simplicity follows from the teachings of the 4th Lateran Council and the first Vatican Council which stated that God is an absolutely simple substance or nature. The basis of this De Fide dogma can be found within the gospel of John, "God is a spirit" (John 4:24).

Heresies which reject or confuse this teaching:

Anthropomorphism (the heresy of believing God has a body) violates the dogma of simplicity. Anthropomorphism, latent in Mormonism, paganism and polytheism fails to consider the fact that God exists in complete and total actuality. Since God has not unrealized potentiality in the metaphysical sense, he cannot possibly have parts or a body.

Additionally, pantheism, New Age religions and some of the more naïveté Christian sects tend to view God as a diffuse metaphysical being that permeates nature and gives nature a certain metaphysical share in divinity. Such a doctrinal stance violates the teaching of God's simplicity by assuming that nature has a metaphysical share in God's nature. The creations of God can play no part in his metaphysical being without violating his simplicity.

Philosophical Proof from St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica

Primary Argument:

P1. Every composite must have potentiality and actuality

P2. God is entirely actual.

C1. God is not composite and therefore simple.

Objections:

Whatever is from God must imitate him. The world and its beings are not simple and therefore neither is God.

Reply: It is of the essence of a thing to be composite. A parallel cannot be drawn in this fashion between the creator and the created because God's essence is existence. A created thing's existence is different from the created thing's essence. Hence simplicity cannot be attributed to a created thing as it can to God whose nature is that of utter existence.

Any thing that is composite is better than something that is simple (as a hand is to man). Since God is of the highest order he must be composite rather than simple.

Reply: The statement that composites are better than simplicity is true only for created beings because they cannot be altogether simple. Therefore we must look for perfection in many things. However, perfection of a divine goodness is found in one simple thing (God).