

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS
The Simplicity and Immutability of God

SEVENTH ARTICLE. WHETHER GOD
IS ALTOGETHER SIMPLE?

We proceed thus to the Seventh Article:—

Objection 1. It seems that God is not altogether simple. For whatever is from God imitates Him. Thus from the first being are all beings, and from the first good are all goods. But in the things which God has made, nothing is altogether simple. Therefore neither is God altogether simple.

Obj. 2. Further, whatever is better must be attributed to God. But with us that which is composite is better than that which is simple: thus, chemical compounds are better than elements, and elements than the parts that compose them. Therefore it cannot be said that God is altogether simple.

On the contrary, Augustine says, *God is truly and absolutely simple.*¹

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¹ *De Trin.*, VI, 6 (Pl. 42, 928).

I answer that, The absolute simplicity of God may be shown in many ways. First, from the previous articles of this question. For there is neither composition of quantitative parts in God, since He is not a body; nor composition of form and matter; nor does His nature differ from His *suppositum*; nor His essence from His being; neither is there in Him composition of genus and difference, nor of subject and accident. Therefore, it is clear that God is in no way composite, but is altogether simple. Secondly, because every composite is posterior to its component parts, and is dependent on them; but God is the first being, as has been shown above.² Thirdly, because every composite has a cause, for things in themselves diverse cannot unite unless something causes them to unite. But God is uncaused, as has been shown above,³ since He is the first efficient cause. Fourthly, because in every composite there must be potentiality and actuality (this does not apply to God) for either one of the parts actualizes another, or at least all the parts are as it were in potency with respect to the whole. Fifthly, because nothing composite can be predicated of any one of its parts. And this is evident in a whole made up of dissimilar parts; for no part of a man is a man, nor any of the parts of the foot, a foot. But in wholes made up of similar parts, although something which is predicated of the whole may be predicated of a part (as a part of the air is air, and a part of water, water), nevertheless certain things are predicable of the whole which cannot be predicated of any of the parts; for instance, if the whole volume of water is two cubits, no part of it can be two cubits. Thus in every composite there is something which is not it itself. But, even if this could be said of whatever has a form, viz., that it has something which is not it itself, as in a white object there is something which does not belong to the essence of white, nevertheless, in the form itself there is nothing besides itself. And so, since God is absolute form, or rather absolute being, He can be in no way composite. Hilary touches upon this argument when he says: *God, Who is strength, is not made up of things that are weak; nor is He, Who is light, composed of things that are dark.*⁴

Reply Obj. 1. Whatever is from God imitates Him, as caused things imitate the first cause. But it is of the essence of a thing caused to be in some way composite; because at least its being differs from its essence, as will be shown hereafter.⁵

Reply Obj. 2. With us composite things are better than simple things, because the perfection of created goodness is not found in one simple thing, but in many things. But the perfection of divine goodness is found in one simple thing, as will be shown hereafter. . . .⁶

² Q. 2, a. 3 [in *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, pp. 117–19].

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *De Trin.*, VII (PL 10, 223).

⁵ Q. 50, a. 2.

⁶ Q. 4, a. 1; Q. 6, a. 3.