

Boethius

*Whether Father, Son and Holy Ghost are Predicated of the Trinity
in Reference to Substance*

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Whether Father, Son and Holy Ghost are Predicated of the Trinity in Reference to Substance¹

Boethius

I

5 I am investigating whether ‘Father,’ ‘Son’ and ‘Holy Ghost’ are predicated of the
divinity in reference to substance or in some other way; and I judge that a path of inquiry
should be taken from that place which is agreed to be the clear starting point of all affairs,
that is from the very foundations of the catholic faith. So, if I should ask whether He who
is called Father is a substance, the response would be that He is a substance. But if I
10 should ask whether the Son is a substance, the response would be the same. And no one
would doubt that the Holy Ghost is a substance as well. But when, in turn, I collect Fa-
ther, <183.10> Son and Holy Ghost, it becomes clear that there are not several sub-
stances, but only one. Thus in no way can the one substance of the three be separated or
pulled apart. And this substance has not been pulled together into one, as though from
15 parts, but it is one without qualification. It therefore fitting for anything predicated of the
divine substance to be common to the three. And this will be a sign of things which are
predicated in reference to the substance of the divinity: whatever things are said in this
way will be predicated, one at a time, of the three when the three have been collected into
one. And so if we say, “The Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Ghost <183.20> is
20 God,” then Father, Son and Holy Ghost are one God. Thus if their one deity is one sub-
stance, it is therefore permissible for the name ‘God’ to be predicated of the divinity in
reference to substance.

II

25 Thus the Father is truth, the Son is truth, and the Holy Ghost is truth; moreover,
Father, Son and Holy Ghost are not three truths but one truth. Therefore, if the one sub-
stance among them is one truth, it is necessary for ‘truth’ to be predicated in reference to
substance. Concerning goodness, incommutability, justice, omnipotence and so on, when
we predicate individually, not only of each alone, but also of all, it is clear that we are
speaking <183.30> in reference to substance. Thus it appears that those things which are
30 conventionally said of each individually but cannot be said of all are predicated not in
reference to substance, but in some other way. What this way is, I will investigate later.
For he who is Father does not pass on the name ‘Father’ to the Son or to the Holy Ghost.
Thus this name is not applied in reference substance; for if it did refer to substance, such
as God, truth, justice, and even substance itself, then it would be said of the others also.

¹ Based on the Latin of C. Moreschini’s 2000 edition, *De Consolatione Philosophiae : Opuscula Theologica*. Munich.

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III

Likewise, the Son alone receives the name ‘Son,’ and he does not attach it to the <184.40> others, as is the case with God, truth, and the rest which I mentioned above. Furthermore, the Holy Ghost is not the same as the Father and Son. From these examples we understand that Father, Son and Holy Ghost are not said of the divinity in reference to
 40 substance, but in some other way; for if this predication referred to substance, then it would be said both of each individually and of all in turn. But it is clear that these things are said in reference to a relationship, for the Father is someone’s father, the Son is someone’s son, and the Ghost is someone’s ghost.² Thus, not even ‘Trinity’ is predicated of God in reference to substance. Since <184.50> the Father is not a trinity, for he who is
 45 the Father is not the Son and the Holy Ghost; nor is the Son a trinity, nor is the Holy Ghost a trinity for the same reason, but in fact their trinity consists in a plurality of persons, while their unity consists in a simplicity of substance.

IV

But if persons have been divided, while their substance has not been divided, it is
 50 necessary that a name that takes its origin from persons does not pertain to substance. But diversity of persons produces their trinity; ‘Trinity’ therefore does not pertain to substance. Thus neither Father, Son, <184.60> Holy Ghost nor Trinity is predicated of God in reference to substance, but—as was said—in reference to a relationship. But God, truth, goodness, omnipotence, substance, immutability, virtue, wisdom and anything of
 55 this sort which can be considered: these things are said of the divinity in reference to substance. I ask that you inform me whether these things are correct and in accordance with the faith, or if you happen to differ on some matter, look more closely at what has been said, and—if you are able—bring together faith and reason.

² Neither ‘ghost’ nor ‘spirit’ directly communicates the meaning ‘breath,’ which is clearly the role of *spiritus* here.