

GOD & MAN IN HIS IMAGE & LIKENESS

The proper object of the human intellect is the quiddity of things, *what* they are, in which the rational animal is distinguished from the brute. Consistent with this, when the child Thomas of Aquino was hardly at a formative age he would ask, "What is God?" As his intellect, with its accompanying prodigious memory, developed he was able to answer the question and to marry the answer with what God had revealed of Himself to the Jews and, with His coming in human nature, in Jesus Christ to all the world.

Australian philosopher and theologian, Dr Austin Woodbury¹, used relate to his students the behaviour of one of his lecturers at the *Angelicum* University in Rome in the 1920s. This priest would wander the corridors repeating but one phrase. The students would tax him. Why do you say "God alone is His Be"? His response was simple: "Once you understand that you understand everything".

Every material creature on earth and throughout the universe is a compound of *what it is* and *that it is* - of essence and existence - *entis et essentiae*. It is dependent and contingent: it relies on some other influence to supply it with its needs, to give it existence and to keep it in existence. Every creature *has* be (existence). In contrast, God *is* be. God is his own act of existence.

When Moses encountered the burning bush as reported in *Exodus*, the voice that spoke from it said to him: "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob". He directed Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses asked reasonably: "I shall go to the children of Israel and say to them: The God of your fathers hath sent me to you. If they should say to me: What is his name? What shall I say?" He replied:

"I am who am - (*Ego sum qui sum*). Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel : *He who is* hath sent me to you... This is my name forever... my memorial unto all generations. (Ch. 3: 14-15)

The Jews condemned Christ when he told them: "Before Abraham ever was I am" because He was claiming to be God. When on the Mount of Olives, the Jews had gathered to arrest him, Christ asked them: "Whom do you seek?" They replied "Jesus of Nazareth". He did not answer, as the translations have it, "I am he". The text runs - *ut ergo dixit eis ego sum abierunt retrorsum et ceciderunt in terram* - "When he said 'I am' they recoiled and fell to the ground." He had answered them with the name of God. Only this, the late Fr Gregory Hesse insisted, could explain their extraordinary reaction.

Throughout the history of the Jews, and that of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as of Christianity and of Christ's Church in the two thousand years that followed, this claim is maintained.²

¹ Fr Austin Woodbury S.M., Ph.D., S.T.D.

² So, in the fourteenth century in her *Dialogue*, St Catherine of Siena reports God the Father speaking to her in this fashion: "I am He Who is: you are she who is not".

Aristotle, the greatest original mind who has ever lived, realised that God is not merely an understander – one who *has* a faculty of intellect. God is Understand its very self: He *is Intellect*.³ God does not *have* perfections: He *is* His perfections.

The only distinction in God is, as He has revealed, one of relation – Father to Son: Son to Father: Father and Son to the Holy Spirit: Holy Spirit to Father and Son. The first is a relation of generation: the second of being generated. The third is a relation of active spiration from Father and Son to the Holy Spirit, and the fourth of passive spiration of the Holy Spirit by Father and Son. What, then, is *relation*?

Relation

Aristotle taught that relation is one of the ten modes of being. Commenting on this in the 12th century, the Muslim philosopher Averroes considered relation to be the least of all reality, an opinion with which Aquinas was to agree. St Thomas remarked that relation has the singular character that it does not derive from the same influence that it be relation and that it be real. (*Questiones de potentia*, q. 7, a. 9, ad 7)

“Relation is something according to its be, which it has in a subject; but according to its own formal reason it has not that it be something but that it be-referred to another.” (*In I Sent.* D. 20, q. 1, a. 1 and D. 8, 1. 4, a. 3, ad 4.)

Its reality is confined to a *be-towards-other* or a *be-in-respect-of-other*.⁴

St Thomas exposes two types of relation, *predicamental* relation and *transcendental* relation. But, since relation has not from the same that it be relation and that it be real, it is possible for it to be *mental* only. Accordingly, relation may be divided as follows:

	[Real:	[Transcendental: which is
	[and then it is	[together absolute being; or
Relation	[either:	[
is either	[[Predicamental: which is pure, i.e., not
	[[also some absolute being.
	[
	[or	
	[Mental: whose whole being is be-knownn	

It is convenient to consider the three categories in reverse order.

Mental relation

I can distinguish in Peter that he is an animal and that he is a man. No reality corresponds with the distinction: I am simply considering Peter under two aspects. I can distinguish

³ *Metaphysics* IX, 1095, 6; cf., St Thomas Aquinas, *In IX Meta.* XII, lesson 11.

⁴ The nominal definition derives from *referre*, the Latin verb to carry back or to bring back.

Peter's numeric identity with himself. This is the relation of identity. Or I can compare Peter with his portrait or his picture; this is a relation of measure (mensuration). Each involves a 'be-towards' which exists nowhere but in my mind.

Predicamental relation

In his *Categories* Aristotle identifies ten modes of being: *substance*, and nine accidents, *quantity*, *quality*, *relation*, *when*, *where*, *action*, *passion*, *habitus*, *situs*. A substance is that which exists in its own right - *be-in-self*, e.g., a dog, a man, a child, a tree. An accident is that which exists only in some thing - *be-in-other*, as brown-ness in the dog, tall-ness in the man, healthiness in the tree, son-ship in the child towards the man (*relation*), here and now (*where* and *when*) in the child, biting (*action*) in the dog, being bitten (*passion*) in the man, clothed in leaves in the tree (*habitus*), upside-down in the child hanging from one of its branches (*situs*). Of these *relation* is an accident superadded to its subject not formally through itself but formally through something really distinct from itself as fatherhood (in the man), son-ship (in the child), equality, similarity, proximity and so on.

The mark of predicamental relation is that it does not add anything to, or take anything from, its possessor. Thus I am not tainted by the fact that I am standing beside a murderer (proximity). My father may have been a saint but it does not follow that his son will be one (son-ship). I may have the same physique and height as Stirling Moss (similarity). That does not mean that I will, like him, be a great racing driver. Predicamental relation is relation *simpliciter*. It is to be contrasted with transcendental relation.

Transcendental relation

Transcendental relation is at once something else, some other form of being. It *transcends* the character of relation.

For instance, a *quality* such as sight (the property i.e., proper accident of an animal) is also a *relation*. It is referred to (relates to) the power of vision as it does to colour, the object of vision. It is the very entity of some absolute being whose whole essence is *ordered towards another*, or proportioned or adapted or adjusted to another. So there is a proportion between—

natures powers acts ends.

An animal of mosquito nature has the powers of a mosquito, does acts of a mosquito to attain the end of a mosquito. A being with human nature (a man) has the powers of a man, does human acts to attain the end proper to a man. Each of nature, power, act and end is, accordingly, not only some absolute being (an accident) but also involves a relation, a be-towards. In the same way as a power is ordered towards its act, matter (prime matter) is ordered towards form, and some essence is ordered towards its proper be, or existence.

Relation in God

Mysteries, as the late Catholic apologist Frank Sheed used to say, are not something that we know nothing about. They are realities about which we know something, but not everything. The above considerations show that we can know *something* about relation in God.

He has revealed to us that relation in God is not something merely mental. The three Persons are really distinct from each other. St Thomas has this to say:

“[W]hatever in created things has accidental be, has substantial be when it is transferred to God: for nothing is in God as an accident in a subject, but what is in God is His essence...” (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 28, a 2)

Dr Woodbury comments:

“[I]t is clear... that relation according to its proper character is so indifferent with regard to be that alone among the supreme genera it can be real, or mental and is indifferent to be-in-a-subject or be-subsistent... [accordingly] it is clearly not... repugnant to the nature of relation that there be relations which are real by the very reality of God and whose be is the very Divine Be itself.” (*Ontology*, n. 1210 D)⁵

In one of his recorded tapes, the late Fr Gregory Hesse S.T.D., S.J.D. (n. 8) uses the following vivid illustration of relation in God.⁶ God the Father says “I” : God the Son says “I” : God the Holy Spirit says “I”. Each says “AM” - the same AM.

I

AM

I

I

There is but one BEING: One who IS. There are Three Who say “I am”. Fr Hesse quotes G K Chesterton’s poem *Ultimate* to illustrate the contrast between man’s limited being and the infinite being of God:

The vision of a haloed host
That weep around an empty throne;
And, aureoles dark and angels dead,
Man with his own life stands alone.

‘I am’, he says, his bankrupt creed,
‘I am’, and is again a clod:
The sparrow starts, the grasses stir,
For he has said the name of God.

⁵ Cf. austinwoodbury.com/works *Ostensive Metaphysics part 4*, at p. 947. The enquirer will need to register to enter the site.

⁶ Cf. [https://archive.org/details/FatherHesse/Fr.+Hesse+-+Man+in+the+Image+of+God+\(Remastered\).mp3](https://archive.org/details/FatherHesse/Fr.+Hesse+-+Man+in+the+Image+of+God+(Remastered).mp3)

Man – God's image and likeness

God created man in His own image and likeness (*Gen.* 1: 26). There are two words here signifying two different realities. St Thomas says that it is according to his intelligence and reason that man is [made in] the *image* of God. (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 1, ad 2) Further on (I, q. 4, art. 3), he considers *likeness* and says this can be taken in a number of different ways, *inter alia* the likeness an agent produces in his effects. In the case of God, Who is above every genus, creatures participate in likeness according to analogy, as—

- all things are like to God in that they exist—for God exists;
- some things are like Him in that they live—for God lives;
- some things are like Him in that they know singular things—for God knows singular things; and
- some things are like Him in that they know universal natures—for God knows universal natures. (I, q. 93, a.2)

Yet it was to something higher than these that the passage in *Genesis* refers.

We have adverted elsewhere to the insight provided by the late Fr Bernard Basset S.J. who remarked that psychologically every man comports himself as though he was not one being, but two, for at every moment of every day he is engaged in an internal colloquy with himself deciding what he shall, or shall not, do.⁷ Shakespeare's plays are replete with examples of these internal discussions as, for instance, this splendid, if cynical, one in Hamlet—

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death...

The standard which motivates a man in this colloquy is his own welfare, his good.

Every creature, St Thomas says, 'loves' itself. It desires the continuance of its essence and its existence. This is as true for man as for any other creature. Quoting from Aristotle's *Ethics* he identifies five characteristics of friendship:

"[I]n the first place, every friend wishes his friend to be and to live; secondly, he desires good things for him; thirdly, he does good things for him; fourthly, he takes pleasure in his company; fifthly, he is of one mind with him, rejoicing and being saddened in almost the same things." (II-II, q. 25, a. 7)

He then says this:

"This is the way the good love themselves as to the interior man because they wish the preservation of its integrity; they desire good things for him, namely spiritual goods; indeed they do their best to obtain them; and they take pleasure in entering into their own hearts because they find there good thoughts in the present, the memory of past good, and the hope of future good, all of which are sources of pleasure. Likewise they experience no clashing of wills, since their whole soul tends to one thing." (Ibid.)

⁷ https://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/trinity-reflected-in-man.pdf

Thus, the standard which motivates a man as he orders his life moment by moment is the love he bears himself.

This tri-fold-ness, the ordered-ness of a man to himself driven by the love he bears himself, it seems to this commentator, is the 'likeness' to God referred to by the author of *Genesis*. We need not concern ourselves too much over whether this opposition is real or mental. What matters is that it reflects in some fashion the substantial opposition of relation that is found in the Trinity of Persons in Almighty God.⁸

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⁸ I am not different from the one with whom (myself!) I conduct this dialogue; so *that* part of the reflection seems to involve mental relation only. The love I bear for myself, however, is a real inclination and therefore involves transcendental relation.