

Objection 1. It seems that names are predicated primarily of creatures rather than of God. For we name anything accordingly as we know it, since “names”, as the Philosopher says, “are signs of ideas.” But we know creatures before we know God. Therefore the names imposed by us are predicated primarily of creatures rather than of God.

Objection 2. Further, Dionysius says (Div. Nom. i): “We name God from creatures.” But names transferred from creatures to God, are said primarily of creatures rather than of God, as “lion,” “stone,” and the like. Therefore all names applied to God and creatures are applied primarily to creatures rather than to God.

Objection 3. Further, all names equally applied to God and creatures, are applied to God as the cause of all creatures, as Dionysius says (De Mystica Theol.). But what is applied to anything through its cause, is applied to it secondarily, for “healthy” is primarily predicated of animal rather than of medicine, which is the cause of health. Therefore these names are said primarily of creatures rather than of God.

On the contrary, It is written, “I bow my knees to the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, of Whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named” (Eph. 3:14,15); and the same applies to the other names applied to God and creatures. Therefore these names are applied primarily to God rather than to creatures.

I answer that, In names predicated of many in an analogical sense, all are predicated because they have reference to some one thing; and this one thing must be placed in the definition of them all. And since that expressed by the name is the definition, as the Philosopher says (Metaph. iv), such a name must be applied primarily to that which is put in the definition of such other things, and secondarily to these others according as they approach more or less to that first. Thus, for instance, “healthy” applied to animals comes into the definition of “healthy” applied to medicine, which is called healthy as being the cause of health in the animal; and also into the

definition of “healthy” which is applied to urine, which is called healthy in so far as it is the sign of the animal’s health. Thus all names applied metaphorically to God, are applied to creatures primarily rather than to God, because when said of God they mean only similitudes to such creatures. For as “smiling” applied to a field means only that the field in the beauty of its flowering is like the beauty of the human smile by proportionate likeness, so the name of “lion” applied to God means only that God manifests strength in His works, as a lion in his. Thus it is clear that applied to God the signification of names can be defined only from what is said of creatures. But to other names not applied to God in a metaphorical sense, the same rule would apply if they were spoken of God as the cause only, as some have supposed. For when it is said, “God is good,” it would then only mean “God is the cause of the creature’s goodness”; thus the term good applied to God would included in its meaning the creature’s goodness. Hence “good” would apply primarily to creatures rather than to God. But as was shown above (a. 2), these names are applied to God not as the cause only, but also essentially. For the words, “God is good,” or “wise,” signify not only that He is the cause of wisdom or goodness, but that these exist in Him in a more excellent way. Hence as regards what the name signifies, these names are applied primarily to God rather than to creatures, because these perfections flow from God to creatures; but as regards the imposition of the names, they are primarily applied by us to creatures which we know first. Hence they have a mode of signification which belongs to creatures, as said above (a. 3).

Reply to Objection 1. This objection refers to the imposition of the name.

Reply to Objection 2. The same rule does not apply to metaphorical and to other names, as said above.

Reply to Objection 3. This objection would be valid if these names were applied to God only as cause, and not also essentially, for instance as “healthy” is applied to medicine.