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Catholic Philosophy - Part 7 - God is Incorporeal



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Catholic Teaching:

The doctrine of the incorporeal nature of God states that God is a spirit, and as such has no body (John 4:24). Neither is God a composition of body and spirit. It is true that Jesus was both God and man, but we must remember that Jesus had two natures: that of both the divine and the creature (man). As such, we say that Jesus' Godhead in the divine nature had no composition of body and spirit.

Definition of the Dogma:

John 4:24 quotes: "God is a spirit". Additionally, the 4th Lateran Council and the Vatican Council teach: "God is absolutely simple" (De Fide). Since God is absolutely simple it must follow that he is a spirit.

Heresies which reject or confuse this teaching:

Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism confuses the interpretation of Genesis 1:26 which states, "Let us make man in our image after our likeness." Based on the mistaken interpretation of Genesis 1:26, Anthropomorphists believe that humans are made in the same material form as God. St. Thomas Aquinas proves that this idea is patently false by showing that the cosmological proof reveals God to exist in complete actuality. As a result of this actuality, it follows that God cannot be in potential and therefore must be entirely simple and without parts. If God had parts, a potential for movement would exist and Aquinas has already shown that God has no potential.

Thus Genesis 1:26 is an analogy between the spiritual nature of man and God; the quote is not an analogy between the material form of man and God. Anthropomorphism was part of the Auidian heresy and is part of modern day Mormonism (Church of Latter-day Saints).

Philosophical Proof from St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica

Primary Argument:

P1. No body is in motion unless put in motion

P2. The cosmological argument for the existence of God proves God is the first cause and the unmoved mover. P3. Suppose God has a corporeal body that can move.

C1. Premise 3 must be absurd because it conflicts with Premise 2. Since P2 has been proven, P3 is false.

C2. Therefore, God has no body.

Secondary Argument

P1. God exists in complete actuality and has no potentiality in his being.

P2. Corporeality requires parts, which inherently have the potential to move and change.

C1. Since God has not potentiality it follows that he can not be corporeal.

Objections:

1) Scripture refers to God existing in three-dimensions

Reply: Corporeal qualities are metaphors for spiritual qualities.

2) Scripture refers to body parts of God.

Reply: This is another metaphor. The Psalms also refer to God covering the psalmist with his wings, but that does not imply God has