



# SEVERINUS BOETHIS

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# Learning Objectives

- ▣ Know the major events of Boethius life
  - His employment to King Theoderic's court
  - His imprisonment
- ▣ Know his Philosophical and Theological works and their major themes
  - Trinity I and II
  - *Consolation of Philosophy*
    - ▣ Fortune
    - ▣ The Good
    - ▣ The Being and Nature of God
    - ▣ Freedom of will and God's knowledge

# Importance

- ▣ Venerated as a Christian Martyr
- ▣ Works
  - Translations and commentaries of Aristotle's logical treatises
  - Original logical treatises
  - Text books on arithmetic and geometry
  - Theological treatises (*opuscula sacra*) – Philosophical works
  - *Consolation of Philosophy*

# Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius

c. 475- 524/525

- ▣ Born in Rome
- ▣ Descended from a Roman Christian aristocratic family
- ▣ Orphaned at an early age
- ▣ Educated by Symmachus his future father-in-law
  - Learned Greek
- ▣ Life of learned leisure devoted to his philosophy interests
- ▣ Involved in some of the ecclesiastical disputes

# Accused of Disloyalty

- ▣ King Theoderic's "Master of Offices"
- ▣ Accused of disloyalty
  - Plotting with Emperor Justin against Theoderic (Arian)
  - Plotting to restore "Roman Liberty"
  - Sacrilege – practicing
  - Engaging in Magic
- ▣ Cast into prison, condemned unheard, and executed

# Christian Martyr

- ▣ By the 8<sup>th</sup> Century Boethius honored as a martyr
- ▣ It was believed he died because of his devotion to the Catholic cause
- ▣ Feast 23 October

# Theological Treatises (*opuscula sacra*)

- ▣ Analyze points of Christian doctrine
- ▣ Seem to be occasioned by specific events
- ▣ Two short treatises *Trinity*
- ▣ Other Works
  - *From The Same To The Same How Substances Can Be Good In Virtue Of The Existence Without Being Absolute Good*
  - *Against Eutyches and Nestorius*
  - *On the Catholic Faith*

# *Trinity* Treatises

- ▣ Addressed to John the Deacon (Pope John I)
- ▣ Method of using logical analysis in a theological context
- ▣ Orthodox understanding of God does not fit within the Aristotelian logic and natural science
- ▣ Boethius charts how far these distinctions also apply to the deity and at what point they break down

# Predication

- ▣ Predication – Something that is confirmed or denied concerning an argument
  - Substantial - property that is essential to its nature
  - Accidental – a property of a thing that is not essential to its nature
  - Augustine – Nothing is predicated of God accidentally
- ▣ Uses Aristotle scheme of predication based on:
  - Substance, Quality, Quantity

# *Trinity I*

- ▣ Arguing against the Arians who graduate the Trinity by merit (Father is superior to Son)
- ▣ Demonstrates how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one
- ▣ Shows how logic can fail in analyzing the relationship of the Trinity

# Absence of Different

“The belief of this Religion concerning the unity of the Trinity is as follows: the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. Therefore Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, not three.”

# Number

“If I say one and the same thing ‘one sword, one brand, one blade’ it is easy to see that each of these denotes a sword; I am not numbering unities but simply repeating one thing. . .

. . . So Then if God be predicated thrice of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the threefold predication does not result in a plural number”

# Father and Son Predicates of “Relation”

- ▣ Needs to explain how it can be true that the same god is both his Father and his Son
  - Logically impossible for a created being to be both father and son
  
- ▣ Argues that predication of relation, such as “is the father” does not concern the substance of the related things

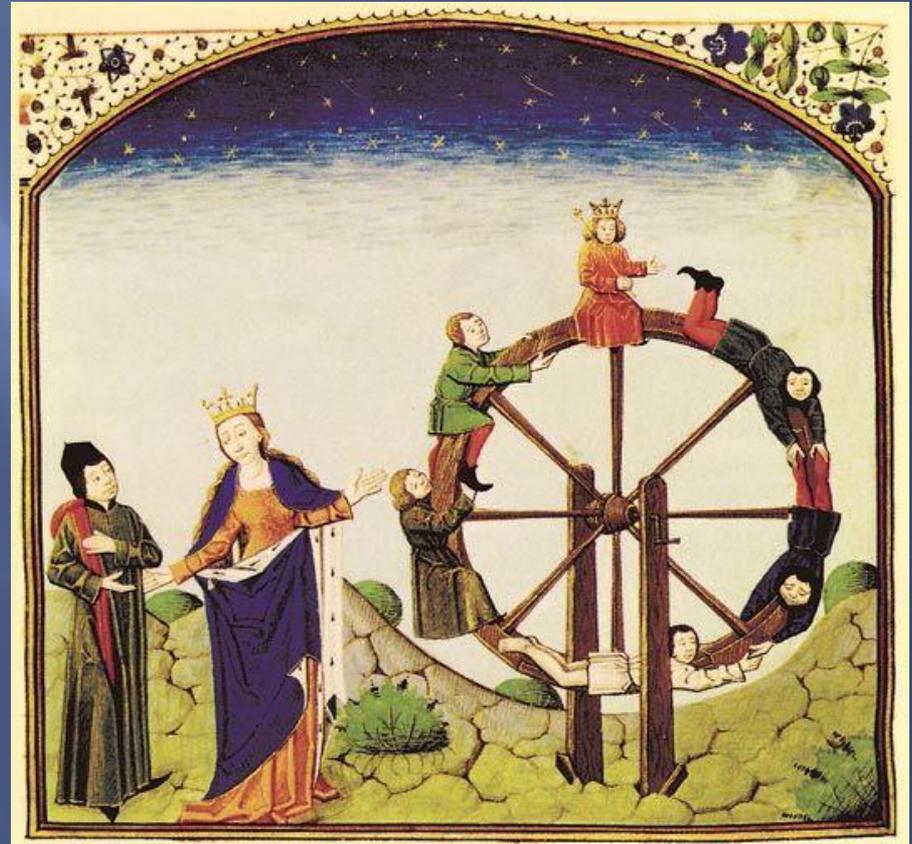
“But since no relation can be affirmed of one subject alone, since a predication referring to one substance is a predication without relation, the manifoldness of the Trinity is secured through the fact that there is no difference of substance, or operation, or generally of any substantial predicate. So then, the category of substance preserves the Unity, that of relation brings about the Trinity”

# *Trinity II*

- ▣ The God is Greatness and Goodness itself
- ▣ When we say “God is good” or God is great”, we are not affirming any attribute of him beyond what he is as a substance.
- ▣ There are no accidental predicates for God

# Consolation of Philosophy

- ❑ Written during his imprisonment
- ❑ Caused modern scholars to question Boethius' Christianity
- ❑ *Prosimetrum* (Prose with verse interludes)
- ❑ Dialogue with Personified Philosophy
- ❑ Very popular in Medieval Times



# *Consolidation of Philosophy*

- ▣ Boethius is confused and dejected by his sudden change of fortune, thinks the “wicked” prosper and the “good” are oppressed
- ▣ Philosophy
  - Boethius has no good reason to complain
  - True happiness not damaged by any change in fortune
  - Will demonstrate that the “wicked” do not prosper and the “good” are not oppressed

# Philosophy Personified

- ▣ Complex view of the highest good
  - Ornamental goods of fortune (no value) : riches, status, power, and sensual pleasure
  - True goods – virtues and sufficiency
  - Non ornamental goods – friends and family
- ▣ Simple view of highest good
  - The perfect good and perfect happiness are God
  - Perfect happiness is therefore completely untouched by changes in earthly fortune

# Philosophy's Main Argument

- ▣ The transitoriness and unreality of all earthly greatness
- ▣ Superior desirability of the things of the mind

# *Consolation of Philosophy*

- ▣ Does not reflect Christian influences
- ▣ The work takes up many problems of metaphysics as well as ethics
  - The “Being” and nature of God
  - Providence and fate
  - Origin of the universe
  - Freedom of will

# God Rules Universe

- ▣ This world could never have been compacted of so many divers and contrary parts, unless there were One that doth unite these so different things; and this disagreeing diversity of natures being united would separate and divide this concord, unless there were One that holdeth together that which He united. Neither would the course of nature continue so certain, nor would the different parts hold so well-ordered motions in due places, times, causality, spaces and qualities, unless there were One who, Himself remaining quiet, disposeth and ordereth this variety of motions. This, whatsoever it be, by which things created continue and are moved, I call God, a name which all men use." (Boethius Book III, 12)

# God Know Future/Free Will

"It seemeth," quoth I, "to be altogether impossible and repugnant that God foreseeth all things, and that there should be any free-will. For if God beholdeth all things and cannot be deceived, that must of necessity follow which His providence foreseeth to be to come. Wherefore, if from eternity he doth not only foreknow the deeds of men, but also their counsels and wills, there can be no free-will; for there is not any other deed or will, but those which the divine providence, that cannot be deceived, hath foreseen. (Boethius Book V, III)

# Eternity – God “Present”

For even though they be foreseen because they shall be, yet they do not come to pass because they are foreseen, notwithstanding it is necessary that either things to come be foreseen by God, or that things foreseen do fall out, which alone is sufficient to overthrow free-will. But see how preposterous it is that the event of temporal things should be said to be the cause of the everlasting foreknowledge! (Boethius Book V, III)

# God's Knowledge

His knowledge also surpassing all motions of time, remaineth in the simplicity of His presence, and comprehending the infinite spaces of that which is past and to come, considereth all things in His simple knowledge as though they were now in doing. (Boethius Book V, VI)

But God beholdeth those future things, which proceed from free-will, present. (Boethius Book V, VI)

# *Possible Interpretations*

- ▣ Take it at face value – Philosophy is recognized as an authority figure whose teachings should not be doubted
- ▣ Clues to a more complex meaning
  - Hints that there is a double meaning to some of the text
  - Choice of *prosimetrum* or *Menippean* satire genre
    - ▣ Associated with works which ridicule the pretension of authoritative claims to wisdom
    - ▣ Philosophy

# Summary

- ▣ Venerated as a Christian Martyr
- ▣ Works
  - Trinity I – Demonstrates how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one
  - *Trinity II* – Argues that God is greatness and goodness in itself
  - *Consolation of Philosophy*
    - ▣ Fate
    - ▣ Nature of Goodness
    - ▣ The “Being” and nature of God
    - ▣ Freedom of will and God’s knowledge