

A METAPHYSICS OF THE *LOGOS* IN ST. THOMAS AQUINAS: CREATION AND KNOWLEDGE

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RESUMEN

En este artículo intento mostrar cómo en el pensamiento de Santo Tomás de Aquino la creación expresa o manifiesta a la divinidad, posibilitando así nuestro conocimiento de Dios sin recurrir a la fe. El Aquinate insiste en que la creación de todas las cosas es por el Verbo o el *Logos*, cuyo ser luminoso hace que todo sea inteligible y participe en la luz del Verbo. Esta luz divina es además la fuente de la luz del conocimiento natural –luz en la que participan todos los hombres–. Dada esta participación en el hombre, la razón natural no sólo es *capax entis*, sino también *capax Dei*.

Palabras clave: Creación, expresión, Verbo o Logos, inteligibilidad, participación, conocimiento natural.

ABSTRACT

In this article I seek to show how in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas creation expresses or manifests the divine, making possible our knowledge of God without recourse to faith. Aquinas insists that the creation of all things is through the Word or *Logos*, whose luminous being makes everything intelligible and renders all a participant in the light of the Word. This divine light is also the source of the light of natural knowledge participated in by all men. Given this participation in man, natural reason is not only *capax entis* but also *capax Dei*.

Keywords: Creation, expression, Word or Logos, intelligibility, participation, natural knowledge.

I. INTRODUCTION

St. Thomas's *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* represents the mature thought of a master theologian, written from 1269 to 1272, prior to his composing the third part of the *Summa Theologiae*¹. While the style of the *quaestio* is characteristic of St. Thomas's mature theological works, in this biblical commentary the literary form of the *expositio* is used, that is, St. Thomas follows the order of the subject matters presented in the biblical text². The use of this literary genre makes the text somewhat easier to read than the *Summa* but no less rigorous due to the lofty subject matter of the Gospel, for St. John's principal intention was to show the divinity of the Incarnate Word, an intention which will also constitute the object of St. Thomas's *Commentary*³. This work not only reveals a mind at its intellectual peak but also attests to a saintly man of faith; what St. Thomas says regarding the fullness of John's contemplation which was able to consider "all the effects of a cause in the cause itself"⁴, knowing both the essence and the power of the cause as it extends to many things, may also be applied to St. Thomas himself. Like the apostle John who was especially loved by the Incarnate Word and to whom the Word confided his secrets, St. Thomas, too, was loved by the Word for having spoken well of Him. St. Thomas explains why John is symbolized by an eagle, a description which is also applicable to the saint who is the commentator of the beloved apostle: "John flies like an eagle above the cloud of human weakness and looks upon the light of unchanging truth with the most lofty and firm eyes of the heart [...] 'His eyes look far away,' because the Word of God is seen in the bosom of the Father by the eye of the mind"⁵. The secrets of the Word are revealed, accor-

1 See J. L. TORRELL, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, R. Royal (trans.), Washington D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1996, 339, 333. See also the introduction by J. A. WEISHEIPL O. P. in THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Part I: Chapters 1-7, J. A. WEISHEIPL (trans.), Albany, Magi Books, s. d., where Weisheipl reminds us that this commentary is a *reportatio* by Reginald of Piperno, St. Thomas's "constant companion" for the last fifteen years of his life. A *reportatio* is similar to a student's notes of what was said, which in this case was corrected by St. Thomas himself. According to one of the early biographers of the saint, Thomas fully wrote out the commentary on the first five chapters of John.

2 See P. VALKENBERG, "Aquinas and Christ's Resurrection: The Influence of the *Lectura super Ioannem 20-21* on the *Summa Theologiae*," in M. DAUPHINAIS and M. LEVERING (eds.) *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2005, 281. See also B. SMALLEY, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983³, 301, cited by Valkenberg.

3 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 1, n. 23. See also P. J. BOYLE, "Authorial Intention and the *Divisio Textus*," in *Reading John with St. Thomas Thomas Aquinas*, 1-8.

4 THOMAS AQUINAS, "Prologue" to the *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, n. 7.

5 *Ibid.*, n. 11.

ding to what we read in the prologue, to the humble and to friends⁶, and both St. Thomas and John were that. In commenting on a relevant text from Aristotle, St. Thomas says, “Though the eyes of the bat do not avail to behold the sun, it is seen by the eye of the eagle”⁷.

In this paper I will be particularly interested in pointing out, even if briefly, the expressive or manifestative character of creation—how creation expresses or manifests the divine, much as words express conceptions in our mind—such expression making possible our knowledge of God without recourse to faith. In order to show this, insistence will be placed on the creation of all things through the Word or *Logos*, through whose luminous being everything is intelligible and participates in the light of the Word. This divine light also enlightens men who come into the world since it is the source of the light of natural knowledge which is participated in by men⁸. It would seem then that given this participation in man, natural reason is not only *capax entis* but also *capax dei*. We will see, however, why natural reason does not always attain to knowledge of God and what remedy is supplied for this lack of knowledge. The remedy, so to speak, presented will lead us to think of the Word not only as the beginning of all things but also as their end. By presenting the Word as the beginning of all things, it will be clear that things were made not by a necessity of God’s nature, but rather by his intellect and will, and that he also governs the things he made by acting in all things from within and constantly sustaining them. Of course, it may be objected that the *Commentary* deals with the divinity of the Incarnate Word, the second person of the Trinity, and thus with a Triune God that far exceeds reason and is only known by faith in what God has revealed to us of himself⁹. Nevertheless, reference to the Word or *Logos* is of special interest to the theologian whose faith seeks understanding and also to the philosopher who seeks to understand the reason of the intelligibility of things and their expressive character¹⁰.

6 *Ibid.*

7 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary in Metaphysicam Aristotelis*, II, I, n. 286, quoted in J. PIEPER, “The Negative Element in the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas”, *The Silence of St. Thomas: three essays*, J. Murray S.J. and D. O’Connor (trans.), Chicago, Henry Regnery Co., 1965, 70-71.

8 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 5, n. 129.

9 See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica* I, q. 32, a. 1, s. c. and resp., where St. Thomas tells us that the “trinity of persons cannot be known by reason.”

10 The importance of insisting on the *Logos* and of developing a metaphysics of the *Logos* is evident in the “Regensburg Lecture” of Pope Benedict XVI delivered on September 12, 2006, where we are told that it is contrary to God’s nature to act unreasonably, that is, to act without *logos*. God’s acting through the Word or the *Logos* is of importance as well to J. PIEPER in his essay, translated into Spanish, entitled: “¿Qué quiere decir ‘Dios habla’? Consideraciones previas a una discusión teológica,” in J. PIEPER, *La fe ante el reto de la cultura contemporánea*, J. J. Gil Cremades (trans.), Madrid, Rialp, 1980, 115-143.

II. *IN PRINCIPIO ERAT VERBUM*, OR, IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD...

In order to understand the opening words of the Gospel of John, St. Thomas will inquire as to the existence and the nature of the Word. In this inquiry St. Thomas seeks first to understand the name Word itself; as he does in writings prior to this *Commentary*¹¹, he will say that the exterior word or the vocal sound is made to express what exists interiorly in the soul, that is, the conception in our mind which is termed the interior word. Now in every being that understands, a word is formed; the word formed in the soul is the interior word, which St. Thomas describes “as that in which [the intellect] understands”¹². It is in the interior word, which is expressed and formed by the operation of the intellect, that the intellect sees the nature of the thing understood¹³. The exterior word, on the other hand, signifies the interior word. According to St. Thomas a word always proceeds from an intellect in act and is always “a notion (*ratio*) and likeness of the thing understood”¹⁴. While the human intellect in understanding something other than itself forms a word which is a notion and likeness of the thing understood, it is also true that the mind understands itself. St. Thomas says, “If the one understanding and the thing understood are the same, then the word is a notion and likeness of the intellect from which it proceeds”¹⁵. Insofar as the human mind understands itself, St. Augustine is cited as seeing in this self-understanding of the mind a likeness of the Trinity in the soul¹⁶.

St. Thomas further distinguishes between the human word and the divine word by referring to the different kinds of intellectual natures: the word of a man, as that of an angel, cannot exist before human and angelic beings do as both their existence and operation are caused, whereas the divine word was not made but rather all things were made by it¹⁷. In addition, St. Thomas gives three ways in which the Word differs from our own word. First, we arrive at the notion of a thing by reasoning and so our word, according to St. Thomas, before being formed is formable and before being in act is in potency; the Word of God, on the contrary, is “always in act”¹⁸. Second, it follows from this

11 See for example THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 1. See also my article “The Divine Ideas and the Intelligibility of Creation: A Way Toward Universal Signification in Aquinas”, *Doctor Communis*, 46/3 (1991), 250-65.

12 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 1, n. 25.

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*, n. 26.

that the divine Word is “most perfect,” but that the human word is imperfect¹⁹. While we can only express all that we know in many words, the Word of God is only one; as St. Thomas puts it: “For since [God] understands both himself and everything else through his essence, by one act, *the single divine Word is expressive of all that is in God, not only of the Persons but also of creatures*”²⁰. Third, since the human soul is not its own operation, it cannot be said that in the human soul to understand is the same as the nature of the soul; therefore, the word formed by our intellect is an accident of the essence of our soul and not of its very essence, whereas to understand and to be are the same in God, and so the Word of the divine intellect cannot be termed an accident, as is the case of the word formed by the human intellect, but is of the very same nature as God and the Word thus “subsists in the divine nature”²¹.

St. Thomas is quick to state that properly speaking in God the Word is “always understood as a Person,” and that the divine Word is co-eternal, co-essential, and consubstantial with the Father²². Since the Word is begotten from all eternity from the Father in a likeness and identity to the nature of the Father, St. Thomas says that the Word is also called the Son. John does not however begin his Gospel making reference to the Son but rather to the Word. It was certainly more fitting that reference be made to the Word as a procession of an intellectual nature so as not to confuse the generation of the Son with a changeable and material generation²³. Furthermore, since John wanted to consider that knowledge of the Father is made possible through the Son, that is, that the Father is manifested through the Son, the Evangelist chose to use the name Word because as St. Thomas says, “the idea of manifesting is implied better in the name ‘Word’ than in the name ‘Son’”²⁴. It is interesting to note here that it is important to St. Thomas to show why the name Word is preferred by the Evangelist. He refers to St. Augustine who also raised the question as to the Latin translation of the Greek *Logos*, since the Latin language can use both *ratio* (notion) and *verbum* (word) for *Logos*. St. Thomas provides a concise explanation that is especially important by saying that “‘notion’ [*ratio*], properly speaking, names a conception of the mind as precisely in the mind, even if through it nothing exterior comes to be; but ‘word’ signifies a reference to something

19 *Ibid.*, n. 27.

20 *Ibid.* Emphasis is mine. In lect. 1, n. 29 of the *Commentary* St. Thomas will say that “[the Word] is equal to the Father, since it is perfect and *expressive* of the whole being of the Father.” Emphasis is again mine.

21 *Ibid.*, n. 28.

22 *Ibid.*, n. 29.

23 *Ibid.*, n. 31.

24 *Ibid.*, nn. 30-31. That the Word manifest the Father should also remind us that according to St. Thomas the Word expresses all that is in God. See note 18.

exterior”²⁵. It is then particularly fitting from what has been said here that the term “Word” be used, since unlike the term “notion,” “Word” refers not only to a conception of the mind insofar as it is in the mind or to a likeness from which it proceeds, but also refers to something external to the mind, as when we speak of the Word and its relation to external things. According to St. Thomas, “When [the Evangelist] said ‘*Logos*,’ [he] intended to signify not only a reference to the Son’s existence in the Father, but also the operative power of the Son, by which, through him, all things were made”²⁶.

But lest anyone think that creatures are co-eternal with the *Logos*, St. Thomas makes it clear that the Word is separate and elevated above all things, that it is the “one absolute Truth” the essence of which is the divine *esse*, the “one absolute Wisdom” in which all who are wise participate²⁷. St. Thomas further explicates the phrase “in the beginning,” seeking to understand the meaning of *principium*, since the Evangelist wrote “In the beginning was the Word,” or, “*In principio erat verbum*.” By making reference to the Church Fathers²⁸, with whose thought St. Thomas was so well acquainted, he explains the word “*principium*” in such a way as to show the divinity and the eternity of the Word and also the originative principle of all that comes to be, for the Word, that is, the Son who was in the Father from all eternity, having the same essence as the Father, is the beginning and principle of all creatures, determining all

25 *Ibid.*, n. 32.

26 *Ibid.* On this text D. B. BURRELL, C. S. C., says, “By highlighting the phrase subsequently incorporated into the Nicene creed—”by Whom all things are made,” Thomas securely grounds the argument in the tradition of revelation, while his astute remarks regarding a preferable translation of *logos* remind us of the way he carefully anchors the word spoken to create in the Word proceeding within divinity, as its eternal pattern,” in his article “Creation in St. Thomas Aquinas’s *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*”, in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas*, faltan datos editoriales 121.

27 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 1, n. 33. In order to emphasize the participatory and expressive nature of a metaphysics of the *logos*, by which all things may in a sense be called words of the divine Word, I will cite St. Thomas’s text: “Although there are many participated truths, there is just one absolute Truth, which is Truth by its very essence, that is, the divine act of being (*esse*); and by this Truth all words are words. Similarly, there is one absolute Wisdom elevated above all things, that is, the divine Wisdom, by participating in which all wise persons are wise. Further, there is one absolute Word, by participating in which all persons having a word are called speakers. Now this is the divine Word which of itself is the Word elevated above all words. So in order that the Evangelist might signify this supereminence of the divine Word, he pointed out this Word to us absolutely without any addition.”

28 See WEISHEIPL’S introduction to the *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, which makes mention of St. Thomas’s extensive knowledge of both the Latin and Greek Fathers of the Church due to his work on the *Catena Aurea*, knowledge which he draws from in order to explicate the difficult or obscure questions in the Gospel of St. John. In order to explain the meaning of *principium*, for example, St. Thomas brings to bear on his own thought the understanding of Origen, Augustine, Chrysostom, Basil, and Hilary.

things²⁹. Everything that is made makes reference to the operative power of God who acts with reason in a way that is similar to how a craftsman acts, that is, with an idea in his mind, in an intentional way, with purpose, rather than by chance. To this effect, St. Thomas says, “*Principium* is understood as the Person of the Son, who is the principle of creatures by reason of his active power acting with wisdom, which is the conception of the things that are brought into existence”³⁰. Because understanding is the highest form of life, St. Thomas also speaks of the *principium* in terms of the very life of God: “The Word himself is the *principium*, principle, in the sense in which life is said to be ‘in’ God, when this life is not something other than God”³¹.

Just as St. Thomas takes pains to point out that the Father and the Son have the same essence, that the Word is consubstantial with the Father, that the Word, as Son and image of the Father, is of the same nature as the Father and is in no way unlike the Father, he also wishes to emphasize that they are co-eternal, by insisting that in the generation of the divine Word, God the Father did not exist prior to the Son, for if this were the case then God’s understanding would not be in act, but rather in potency, and his Word would be formable before being formed, as is the case with the human word³². From all eternity, then, “God the Father, understanding himself, conceives the Word”³³. In order to better understand the co-eternity of the Word with the Father, St. Thomas uses an example to enter into this mystery: brightness is always given wherever there is fire, such that if fire had existed from eternity, its brightness would have been co-eternal with it. And so the Son who is begotten from the Father in an immaterial way, in an intelligible proceeding, is called “the brightness of the Father”³⁴. The Son as this brightness is thus co-eternal with the Father. As St. Thomas teaches us, we need to refer to what is better known to us, that is, to material, sensible things, in order to understand what is less known to us, even though it is more intelligible in itself; by analogy then we can extend our knowledge of God, and so St. Thomas says, “We must attain our knowledge of divine things from many

29 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 1, nn. 35-37.

30 *Ibid.*, n. 35.

31 *Ibid.* We will return to this question of life when we consider that what was made in and through the Word was life.

32 *Ibid.*, n. 41. See also n. 26.

33 *Ibid.* In establishing the co-eternity of the Word with the Father, that is, in emphasizing that God did not exist first and subsequently generated the Word, he is doing so for philosophical reasons which will be pointed out later in the paper, but also for theological reasons so as to refute the Arians. Against the Arian heresy, St. Thomas clearly points out, “We cannot say that the Father pre-established a beginning of duration for his Son by his own will, because God the Father does not generate the Son by his will, as the Arians held, but naturally: for God the Father, understanding himself, conceives the Word; and so God the Father did not exist prior to the Son.”

34 *Ibid.*

likenesses in material things, for one likeness is not enough”³⁵. We might say here that just as the brightness of the fire, though only a limited example, helps us to enter somewhat into the co-eternity of the Word with the Father, seeing in the Son the Father’s brightness, or “the brightness of his glory,” as we are told in Heb. 1:3, this brightness through whom all things were made accounts ultimately for the brightness of creatures, for their light or luminosity, for their truth and intelligibility³⁶.

After having shown the eternity of the Word, that the Word was before all things, St. Thomas then comments on the phrase of the Evangelist: “and the Word was with God.” He does this not only to underline again the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, but also to stress the personal distinction. Although “the Word was God,” as John says in the beginning of his Gospel, thus indicating the divine nature of the Word, there is also a distinction of persons since the Son is distinguished from the Father though “by origin alone”³⁷. That “the Word was with God” thus refers to the Son being with the Father “as one person with another”³⁸. As St. Thomas says, there is an intrinsic union that exists between the Son and the Father which refers to consubstantiality such that it is said that “the Son is *in* the Father”³⁹. However, when it is said that the Son is *with* the Father, here the “with” signifies the personal distinction, although St. Thomas adds that the preposition “with” also signifies “a consubstantiality inasmuch as it signifies a certain extrinsic, so to speak, union”⁴⁰. That “the Word was with God” thus indicates that the Word has the same divine nature as the Father, that the Word subsists for “in the beginning was the Word,” not as an accident, but rather the Word was with God as his author and yet with no beginning of duration. Therefore, St. Thomas insists again on the divinity of the Word when he says, “The Word is not separated from the Father by a diversity of nature, because the Word itself is God”⁴¹.

Having thus established the existence and nature of the Word and stressed that the Word is God by his own essence and not by participation as are creatures, such that the Word is not inferior to God but is God, and that in the beginning, before all things, the Word was in the Father from eternity, St. Thomas concludes the first lecture with a number of references to philosophical errors

35 *Ibid.*

36 Insofar as creatures participate in the Word, who is also termed light, they also participate in this light or luminosity. Only as such can they be *expressive* of their creator. This light which is their intelligibility and their truth enables us to reason from them to knowledge of their creator.

37 *Ibid.*, n. 45.

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.*, n. 56.

for which a metaphysics of the *Logos* seems to be the remedy and which shows how St. Thomas's thought completes and corrects both Plato and Aristotle. The conclusion of the first lecture also shows the importance of this biblical commentary for philosophy. St. Thomas first notes that some of the ancient, natural philosophers thought that the world came about by chance; if the Word, who is the principle or beginning of creatures, acts with wisdom, which is a conception of those things to be brought into existence⁴², then creatures can in no way be the result of chance. At the beginning of things, philosophers such as Democritus and others held to a material principle as the cause of whatever came into existence⁴³. With the Word, however, we have in the beginning an intellectual principle and thus chance plays no role.

Second, St. Thomas makes mention of Plato who held that material things participated in subsistent Ideas that existed separately in their own natures; a particular existing man for example participated in the separated Idea of man. Unlike the Platonic Ideas that are separated from God, "the Word [or the Idea] was with God," as the Evangelist says⁴⁴. St. Thomas further notes that some Platonists thought that God the Father was "most eminent and first" and that under him, or inferior to him, there was a mind containing the ideas and likenesses of things; but as St. Thomas has fully shown in explaining the text of the Evangelist, the Word was in no way no less than the Father, or under him, since "the Word was God"⁴⁵. Now besides speaking of the errors of Plato and some Platonists, St. Thomas thirdly mentions Aristotle. Unlike Plato who separates the Ideas from God, St. Thomas interprets Aristotle by saying that for the Philosopher "the ideas of all things are in God, and that in God, the intellect, the one understanding, and what is understood, are the same"⁴⁶. While God is for Aristotle an intellectual principle, the world according to him is coeternal with God. This however cannot be for both the biblical text and St. Thomas's commentary maintain that only the Word was "in the beginning with God," such that this does not exclude another person but as St. Thomas says, "only another coeternal nature"⁴⁷. From these corrections of philosophical errors we can thus see how faith completes reason and why the first lecture of the *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* will be indispensable for a proper understanding of creation.

42 *Ibid.*, n. 35.

43 *Ibid.*, n. 65.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*

III. “ALL THINGS WERE MADE THROUGH HIM...”

In the second lecture St. Thomas will be more properly concerned with the power of the Word that brings all things into existence, although he will reiterate that the Word is equal, coeternal, and consubstantial with the Father such that he is neither a creature nor is he made; rather all things were made through the Word⁴⁸. Now lest we misunderstand the use of the word “through” here, St. Thomas goes to great lengths to avoid both theological and philosophical errors in this regard. We are not to understand the Word as an exterior cause such that the Word uttered to the Father would have been the cause for his creation of the world, or that the Father would have acted on the suggestion, as it were, of the Word. God did not create from an exterior cause but rather made all things for himself⁴⁹. St. Thomas also wants to maintain the coequality of the Word to the Father, for some might think that if the Father created through the Word then the Word is somehow inferior to the Father, or is an instrument of the Father⁵⁰. According to St. Thomas if the word “through” denotes a kind of causality, then this must be understood in terms of formal causality; to this effect St. Thomas says, “If the ‘through’ denotes a formal cause, as when the Father operates through his wisdom, which is his essence, he operates through his wisdom as he operates through his essence. And because the wisdom and power of the Father are attributed to the Son [...], then by appropriation we say that the Father does all things through the Son, i.e., through his wisdom”⁵¹. The power through which the Son works is the same power which the Father has and which he has given to the Son such that when it is said that the Father works through the Son, the Son is neither inferior to the Father nor is he the instrument of the Father⁵².

In order to better understand how all things were made through the Son, St. Thomas will once again emphasize that God acts intelligently, that is, through his wisdom, just as an artisan will have an idea for the thing he is going to make. Creation does not emanate from God by natural necessity but rather by intellect and will, in a way similar to the artisan who will freely bring into

48 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 2, nn. 69-72.

49 *Ibid.*, n. 73. In refuting the error of Valentine, St. Thomas says, “He understood *All things were made through him* to mean that the Word proffered to the Creator the cause of his creating the world; so that all things were made through the Word as if the Father’s creating the world came from the Word. This leads to the position of those who said that God created the world because of some exterior cause; and this is contrary to *Prov.* 16, 4, ‘The Lord made all things for himself.’”

50 *Ibid.*, n. 75.

51 *Ibid.*, n. 76. St. Thomas wants to correct the error of Valentine whereby “through” denotes an efficient or movent cause such that the Word then causes the Father to act, in other words, the Word would then be the cause of the Father’s making all things.

52 *Ibid.*

existence a cabinet according to one preconceived idea rather than another. Of course, the artisan is not responsible for the totality of the effect as is God; the artisan simply informs the matter which is already given to him in the substance of wood, for example, and thus the artisan does not really create, whereas God's causality extends both to the matter and the form making the substance *be* because as St. Thomas will say, "the effect most proper to the first cause of all is *esse* (existing) itself"⁵³. And elsewhere he says, "to create is to give existence (*esse*) to the thing created"⁵⁴. So while the analogy of the artisan is often found in St. Thomas to understand creation, dissimilarities obviously abound among the similarities⁵⁵. But it is useful in stressing that God, like the artist, acts intelligently, for as St. Thomas puts it, "For whoever makes something must preconceive it in his wisdom, which is the form and pattern of the thing made: as the form preconceived in the mind of an artisan is the pattern of the cabinet to be made. So, God makes nothing except through the conception of his intellect, which is an eternally conceived wisdom, that is, the Word of God, and the Son of God"⁵⁶. St. Thomas thus concludes that God makes all things through the Son, and refers to St. Augustine who in *The Trinity* describes the Word as "the art full of the living patterns of all things"⁵⁷. Reference is also made to scriptural authority: "I was with him forming all things" (*Prov.* 8, 30), so as to stress that the Father made all things with the Son, or that the Son worked with the Father making all things⁵⁸.

Not only are things made through the Word, they are also conserved and sustained through the Word. The things that are brought into existence by the Word are unlike things made by artisans; a cabinet needs the artisan to come into existence, but once made it continues to exist without being acted upon by the artisan. This is not however the case with things made by the Word, who not only causes things to exist but also causes them to continue in existence, for in explicating the Evangelist's words "and without him nothing was made," St. Thomas says, "Nothing was made outside of him, because he encompasses all things, preserving them"⁵⁹. From the beginning of creation, then, as St. Thomas will further explain in lecture 5, the Word was in the world not only causing but

53 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica* I, q. 45, a. 5, quoted in D. B. BURRELL, "Creation in *Super Evangelium S. Joannis Lectura*", 125.

54 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 5, n. 133.

55 This analogy though inexact is interesting, for if the artwork can be revelatory of the artisan/artist, so can creation be revelatory or expressive of the Creator.

56 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 2, n. 77.

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ibid.*, n. 85.

59 *Ibid.*, n. 86.

also preserving all things⁶⁰. If God were to stop thinking of the things he made, or if he withheld his power from those things, they would all cease to be⁶¹. To more clearly explain why and how this is the case, St. Thomas will borrow an example from Origen which refers us once again to the importance of the interior word: “As a human vocal sound is to a human word conceived in the mind, so is the creature to the divine Word; for as our vocal sound is the effect of the word conceived in our mind, so the creature is the effect of the Word conceived in the divine mind. ‘For he spoke, and they were created’ (*Ps.* 148, 5)”⁶². Just as the external word will cease when the interior word is no longer, so also things would cease to be if, as St. Thomas says, “the power of the divine Word were withdrawn from things”⁶³. God thus causes and sustains all things “by his powerful word”⁶⁴.

The God who creates is therefore very different from other agents who act, for these act from without, moving and altering a thing with respect to its exterior, such as the sculptor who in working on marble gives the marble a new appearance by educating a new form (an accidental form) in and from the marble he acts on; the sculptor acts “as existing externally”⁶⁵. God however acts in things “from within,” because only God acts by creating, which means that only God gives being to things. And because being (*esse*) is what is innermost to a thing, when God acts giving being to each thing he acts from within. St. Thomas will therefore say that “God was in the world as one giving *esse* to the world.” In creating God thus gives what is most intimate to himself, that is, *esse* or being. St. Thomas then goes on to tell us, as he has done in the *Summa Theologiae*, that God is in all things by his power, presence, and essence⁶⁶. God is not only everywhere by his power but all things are subject to him and to his power. By his essence God is also present everywhere, since as St. Thomas puts it, God’s essence “is innermost in all things”⁶⁷, for without him the *esse* of each

60 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 5, n. 135.

61 *Ibid.*

62 *Ibid.*

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*, n. 133.

66 See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica* I, q. 8, a. 3, resp.: “God is said to be in a thing in two ways: in one way after the manner of an efficient cause, and thus He is in all things created by Him; in another way He is in things as the object of operation is in the operator, and this is proper to the operations of the soul, according as the thing known is in the one who knows, and the thing desired in the one desiring. In this second way God is especially in the rational creature who knows and loves Him actually or habitually [...] God is in all things by His power, since all things are subject to His power; He is by His presence in all things, since all things are bare and open to His eyes; He is in all things by His essence, because He is present to all as the cause of their being, as we have said (a. 2).”

67 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 5, n. 134.

thing would not be made nor preserved. St. Thomas will then conclude that “since the *esse* of a thing is innermost in that thing, it is plain that God, by his essence, through which he creates all things, is in all things”⁶⁸.

This presence of God in all things is not to be taken in a pantheistic sense; St. Thomas maintains the distinctions necessary to hold that God does not enter into his creatures as a material or formal constituent; he is not a part of their essence nor is he in things as an accident is in a substance⁶⁹. He is present in all things as an agent is present to that upon which it acts immediately, for every agent insofar as it is acting is joined to its effect such that the thing moved and the mover must be together⁷⁰. Since God alone is being itself by his own essence, then created being is the proper effect of God; he causes them to be and also preserves them in being, as we have said above. According to St. Thomas, “As long as a thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being. But being is innermost in all things since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing [...] Hence it must be that God is in all things, and most intimately”⁷¹.

IV. KNOWLEDGE OF GOD’S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD AND LACK OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

Given what has already been said with respect to God’s presence in the world and also regarding the Word as the art full of living archetypes or forms⁷², through whom all things were made, it is not surprising that St. Thomas should compare the world to a work of art which manifests its maker: “As a work of art manifests the art of the artisan, so the whole world is nothing else than a

68 *Ibid.*

69 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 8, a. 1.

70 See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 5, n. 134, and *Summa Theologica* I, q. 8, a. 1, resp.

71 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 8, a. 1, resp. See also I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3: “Being itself is the most perfect of all things, for it is compared to all things as act; for nothing has actuality except so far as it exists. Hence being itself is the actuality of all things, even of forms themselves. Therefore it is not compared to other things as the receiver is to the received, but rather as the received to the receiver. When therefore I speak of the being of man, or horse, or anything else, being itself is considered formal, and as something received, and not as that to which being belongs.” See also *Summa Theologica* I, q. 8, a. 1, ad 2 where St. Thomas speaks of God as containing things: “Although corporeal things are said to be in another as in that which contains them, nevertheless spiritual things contain those things in which they are as, the soul contains the body. Hence also God is in things as containing them; nevertheless by a certain likeness to corporeal things, it is said that all things are in God, since they are contained by Him.”

72 See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 2, n. 91 and lect. 4, n. 118.

certain *representation* of the divine wisdom conceived within the mind of the Father”⁷³. The wisdom of God, the Word, is also light in himself, but also light “as making known all things,” such that “all that appears is light” (*Eph. 5, 13*)⁷⁴. Thus we have here the insistence on the luminosity and the intelligibility of being. If the world then expresses or manifests its creator, since God is, as has been explained, in all things, it seems that we should be able to read into this presence of God in the world such that we would be able to acquire knowledge of his existence and nature. It is evident however that many people do not know God as manifested in and through the world, even though as St. Thomas insists, in commenting on the text of the Evangelist, everything participates in the light of the Word since God himself is light.

Moreover, the Evangelist stresses that the Word “enlightens every man who comes into this world”⁷⁵. The enlightenment of every man coming into this world created by God refers, according to St. Thomas, to “the light of natural reason [...], [f]or all men coming into this visible world are enlightened by the light of natural knowledge through participating in this true light, which is the source of all the light of natural knowledge participated in by men”⁷⁶. It is of particular interest to note here how every man who comes into the world is enlightened by God, that is, as St. Thomas explains, “with respect to the intellect, which is something external [to the world]”⁷⁷. It will be worthwhile to quote here what St. Thomas says in this regard, as it will enable us to see more clearly why there is in the world a lack of divine knowledge despite the intellect’s participation in the true light⁷⁸:

For man is constituted of a twofold nature, bodily and intellectual. According to his bodily or sensible nature, man is enlightened by a bodily or sensible light; but according to his soul and intellectual nature, he is enlightened by an intellectual and spiritual light. Now man does not come into this world according to his bodily nature, but under this aspect, he is from the world. His intellectual nature is derived from a source external to the world, as has been said, from God through creation; as in “Until all flesh returns to its origin, and the spirit is directed to God, who made it” (*Eccl. 12, 7*). For these reasons, when

73 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 5, n. 136. The emphasis is mine. St. Thomas ends this section by referring to *Sirach 1, 10*: “He poured her [wisdom] out upon all his works.”

74 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 4, n. 118.

75 *John 1, 9*.

76 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 5, n. 129.

77 *Ibid.*

78 *Ibid.*, n. 125. With reference to the Word, St. Thomas says, “The Word of God was not a false light, nor a symbolic light, nor a participated light, but the true light, i.e., light by his essence.”

the Evangelist speaks of *every man coming into the world*, he is showing that this enlightenment refers to what is from without, that is, the intellect⁷⁹.

Insofar as man has a rational nature, then, he is intimately related to God, whereas his bodily nature is from the world, as St. Thomas says. Is it possible then that there could be a conflict between man's intellectual nature, whose immediate source is God as transcending the world, and man's bodily nature which arises so to speak from the world? St. Thomas tells us that no man is completely devoid of divine light since if we know any truth it is due to our participation in the light. However, at times God hides his light because our minds become dull, foolish; we become "savage" which, according to St. Thomas, is comparable to being proud; and so our minds are no longer intimately related to their source⁸⁰. As a result, we may find ourselves in darkness with respect to the truth and more specifically with respect to knowledge of God despite the light which permeates all created things.

This lack of divine knowledge is obviously not due to the Word, through whom all things were made, since he is light and has made all things participants in his light; as such, God is knowable through the world he made⁸¹. St. Thomas insists that the lack of divine knowledge is not due to the Word, who is light and is God, but rather to man's nature or to his guilt⁸². If there were some men who were able to read off, as it were, the presence of God in the world and thus arrive at knowledge of God, it was because they were able in a sense to transcend the world and their bodily existence, for as St. Thomas puts it, "If [men] mentally perceived anything eternal, that was insofar as they were not of this world"⁸³. St. Thomas also attributes the lack of divine knowledge among men to love of the world, that is, when men love the world in an inordinate way, then that same world created by God cannot serve as a means for knowing the maker⁸⁴. St. Thomas quotes St. Augustine in this regard: "For love of the world is what chiefly withdraws us from the knowledge of God," because as St. Thomas goes on to say in quoting from Scripture, "Love of the world makes one an

79 *Ibid.*, n. 129.

80 *Ibid.*, lect. 4, n. 103.

81 *Ibid.*, lect. 5, n. 136.

82 *Ibid.*, n. 138.

83 *Ibid.*

84 To love anything in an inordinate way leads man away from God who should be loved above all else and converts things into false gods or idols, thus separating us from the One True Good. See for example chap. 13 of the *Book of Wisdom*, which begins in this way: "For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works."

enemy to God” (*Jas.* 4, 4); “The sensual man does not perceive the things that pertain to the Spirit of God” (*I Cor.* 2, 14)⁸⁵.

It is therefore a disordered love of the world which does not permit us to see traces of God’s presence in the world. While the world created by God was good, when sin enters into the world through man’s freedom the world then shares in the perversity and defect of the misuse of human freedom. As St. Thomas explains, the spiritual world of the first man, who was created by God in the state of original justice, gave way after the original sin of the first couple to a world “which is darkened by perversity and defects and is full of ignorance”⁸⁶. Both man and the world taken from the point of view of defect and ignorance need therefore to be perfected and enlightened.

Due to the lack of divine knowledge in the world, it was necessary then that the Word of God, who is called by the Evangelist, “true light,” that is, light by his very essence, come into the world “to testify to the truth,” and so to enlighten every man⁸⁷. The reconciliation of man and the world was made possible through the Word’s becoming incarnate and so coming into the world. Only thus could man as a rational creature be restored to that life of the Word which is the light of men. And only thus could man attain to true life by being able to return to “the living fountain” from which all being and perfection proceed⁸⁸. We see here that the Platonic *exitus-reditus* theme finds its true interpretation in St. Thomas: without the Word or the *Logos* becoming man, without the Incarnation, what has emanated from “the living fountain” could not return to its source, since it is incapable of its nature alone. The Word thus takes on human nature so as to unite all men to his life and thus bring about the perfection of the universe by returning all things to their first principle. We will conclude this essay with a beautiful passage from the *Sentences* which shows the appropriateness of the Incarnation for the return of all things to God:

It is the mystery of the Incarnation that is signified by this return of rivers to their source [...]. These rivers are the natural goods with which God has

85 THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, lect. 5, n. 138.

86 *Ibid.*, n. 130.

87 It is important to note that St. Thomas says that the Evangelist “shows why it was necessary for the Word to come,” and goes on to say, “The necessity for the Word’s coming is seen to be the lack of divine knowledge in the world,” in *Ibid.*, n. 124. It is evident then that the necessity of the Incarnation is due to this lack of divine knowledge. Only this knowledge provides true light and true life for men and thus their true fulfillment and perfection. The Word then is not only the beginning of creatures and more specifically of men, but also their end.

88 *Ibid.*, lect. 2, n. 94. In explaining a phrase of the Evangelist, St. Thomas says, “*In him was life*, by which he could not only produce all things, but which has an unfailling flow and a causality for producing things continually without undergoing any change, being a living fountain which is not diminished in spite of its continuous outflow.”

filled his creatures—being, life, intelligence [...] and the source from which they come is God [...]. Although they are in a state of dispersal throughout the creation, these goods are brought together in man, for he is like the horizon; the limit where the corporeal nature and the spiritual nature are rejoined. Standing in the middle, he participates in both spiritual and temporal goods [...]. That is why when human nature was reunited with God by the mystery of the Incarnation, all the rivers of natural goods returned to their source⁸⁹.

89 THOMAS AQUINAS, *In III Sententiarum*, “Prologue” quoted in J. P. TORRELL, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, R. Royal (trans.), Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2003, 73-74.