# "THROUGH HIM ALL THINGS WERE MADE": CREATION IN CHRIST

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"The theological concept of creation is incomprehensible unless Christ, and therefore the Holy Trinity, plays a decisive role in its shaping."

*"Creation in the Word of God and in his Spirit is, from the very beginning, including when the Trinity is still hidden, the indispensable foundation for his revelation, which, however much it constitutes a novelty in the Incarnation of the Word, is nevertheless its plenitude and impossible without such a foundation."*[1]

God the Father is the Creator; the Son, the Redeemer; and the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier. This is the classic attribution of functions to the distinct persons of the Holy Trinity, which is well-known to us from the Catechism. The suitability of the formula to revealed data and its pedagogical clarity are unquestionable. It is not the Father who died upon the Cross for us. It is not the Son who with his powerful word called into being that which did not exist. Neither is the Holy Spirit, for his part, the agent of these divine works, but rather the one who brings them to their completion in us.

Nevertheless, a more complete and nuanced vision of the reality of the triune God and his relation to the world allows us not only to adopt the viewpoint of the so-called personal

[1]H.U. von Balthasar, "Creation and Trinity," *RCI Communio* 10 (1988): 188.

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"appropriations" mentioned above, but, beyond that, to take into consideration the intimate unity in which the divine persons live and work *ad extra*. Or, to put it more precisely, it is necessary to understand well exactly what is meant when it is said that the Creation is "appropriated" to the Father, the Redemption to the Son, and Sanctification to the Holy Spirit. Does this mean that only the Father is Creator, only the Son Redeemer and only the Spirit Sanctifier? Or that each one of them exercises these actions in a somewhat solitary way, as though on the fringes of the intimate and indispensable relation he has with the other persons? "Appropriation" excludes these suppositions, which nevertheless are perhaps not always far from a certain elementary catechetical imagination. The Creation is specially attributed to the Father, but neither is this his only action nor does it exclude the other two persons from taking an active role in it. The Redemption is specially attributed to the Son, but, again, neither is this his only action nor does he undertake it by himself. The same thing can be said of the sanctification attributed to the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of these pages is not to treat the doctrine of Trinitarian attributions as such, but rather to highlight one of its implications: Jesus Christ is not only the Redeemer of the human race, but also the one "through whom all things were made." We will attempt to delve more deeply into this affirmation, which, to be sure, comes before the confession of faith in the Incarnation of the Son for our salvation in the ordering of the creed.

We will begin with a brief historical consideration of the treatment of the matter in theology, in order then to dwell at somewhat greater length on the data of revelation and on certain theological implications of creation in Christ for the very idea of creation and of God the creator.

## *I. The Theological Novelty of an Old Motif of Faith*

The intervention of the Son in the work of creation is an object of the Church's faith incorporated into the ancient creeds. The testimony of Scripture, to which we shall later refer, is thus perfectly integrated into the Church's profession of faith.

Nevertheless, one has only to cast a glance at the manuals of the first half of the twentieth century in order to realize that, generally speaking, the theology in use before the Council did not

grant a significant place to the figure of the Son in the tractate on Creation. If not totally absent in this context, it is relegated to small corollaries,[2] or marginal notes in the construction of the doctrinal argument.[3] In any event, there is no express discussion of the Trinity per se, as the subject of the Creation.

We would have to look for the remote cause of this state of affairs in the decisive influence of St. Augustine and St. Thomas on Western theology. In particular, the axiom attributed to St. Augustine, according to which "the works of the Trinity *ad extra* are undivided," was increasingly interpreted as a license to disregard the specific actions of each of the divine persons within the creative action of God. The creation is in fact attributed by St. Thomas to the divine essence itself, common to the three persons, even though he does not fail to speak of a certain causality "appropriate" to each one of them.[4]

A cause closer in time to the above-mentioned theological situation would be the modern development of the so-called "natural system of sciences"[5] which favors the establishment of a natural theology quite distinct from the medieval, to the extent that it is characterized by its explicit distancing from Christian revelation and by its recourse to a reasoning supposedly pure of all historical and "supernatural" conditioning. It is evident that this is not so in the theology manuals of the last century. But it is not so clear that this

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[2]Cf. J. M. Dalmau and J.F.Sagues, *Sacra Theologiae Summa, II. De Deo uno et trino. De deo creante et elevante. De peccatis*. Madrid: BAC, 1968. Corollarium 3: Ideae omnium rerum existunt in Verbo Dei [The ideas of all things exist in the Word of God].

[3]Cf. ibid., 534, Scholion 3: De Christo fine proximo totius creationis [On Christ as the proximate end of the whole of creation].

[4]Cf. *STH* I q45 a6: "Creare convenit Deo secundum suum esse: quod est enim essentia, quae est communis tribus personis. Unde creare non es proprium alicui personae, sed commune toti Trinitati. Sed tamen divinae personae secundum rationem suae processionis habent causalitatem respectu creationis rerum. [Creating befits God according to his act of existence. But his act of existence is his essence, which is common to the three persons. It follows that creating is not proper to any one person, but common to the whole Trinity. Nevertheless, the divine persons have causality with respect to the creation of things in accord with their place in the order of the processions]."

[5]Cf. W. Dilthey, "El sistema natural de las ciencias del espiritú en el siglo XVII," in *Hombre y mundo en los siglos XVI y XVII* (1914), (Mexico and Buenos Aires: n.p., 1947), 101.

type of rationalistic natural theology has not exercised a certain influence on the manuals' theology of Creation, which is articulated around the premise that the Creator is simply the one God and that natural reason is competent for a sufficient recognition of the world as creation.

The novelty of more recent theology in this area consists precisely in the recovery of the trinitarian treatment of the doctrine of Creation, a fundamental part of which is understood by the renewed importance given to the doctrine of Creation in Christ. Some examples:

In the Catholic camp, one can consult the recent synthesis of L. F. Ladaria, who begins his "theological-dogmatic development of faith in Creation" precisely with the consideration of the relation that exists between "The Trinity and the Creation," by which he means "to integrate everything said in the previous chapter about the mediation of Christ in the creation and to establish at the same time the connection between the Creation and grace."[6] Ladaria naturally refers to the similar and fundamental work of authors such as K. Rahner, H.U. von Balthasar or J. L. Ruiz de la Peña.

W. Pannenberg's theology of Creation stands out in the Protestant camp. Taking as his starting point "the trinitarian origin of the act of creation," he then develops in an original and ample manner "the diversity and unity of the creation" as work of the Son, the dynamic of the natural course of events as rooted in the Spirit, and finally, "the joint action of the Son and the Spirit in the work of Creation."[7]

These and other authors agree, each one with his own emphasis, in underscoring that the theological concept of creation is incomprehensible unless Christ, and therefore the Holy Trinity, plays a decisive role in its shaping. To put it another way, in the words of Balthasar, only in Christ is the enigma of Creation that baffled Israel finally deciphered, to wit: "why does the 'One and Only' (Dt 6:4) need any one else?"[8] For his part, Pannenberg thinks that the trinitarian idea of God offers a "clarification of principle" to the

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[6]L. F. Ladaria, *Antropología Teológica*, (n.p.: Casale Monferato, 1995), 64.

[7]Pannenberg, W., *Teologiá sistemática,* vol II. (Madrid: Publicaciones UPCO, 1996).

[8]H. U. von Bathasar, "Creación y Trinidad," in *RCI Communio* 10 (1988), 188.

philosophical problem posed by the relation of the Infinite to a finite world.[9]

### *II. The Head on the Cross: Creation and the New Covenant*

1. Nowadays it is a commonplace in the treatment of the theology of Creation to observe right at the outset the intimate link between God's creative work and with his initiative in choosing the people of the Covenant. The exegetes have highlighted how both the first and the second creation accounts are written "in a covenantal key."[10] This is not a matter of a mere record of the primordial event which recounts in a purely "metaphysical" or "scientific" manner how God gives origin everything that exists.

The first chapter of the Book of Genesis narrates how the powerful Word of God successively called distinct creatures into being, over a period of time divided into six days culminating with the repose of the Creator. There are those who wish to see in this temporal succession, which yields a growing complexity in created beings, a certain reflection of the modern evolutionary conception of the world, with its assumption of an initial all-potential energy —the "light" of the first day (Gn 1:3)—whereupon the diverse creatures progressively enter the scene of creation until reaching their apex in the human being. It cannot be denied that this passage, like any other in Scripture, contains, at least implicitly, a certain manner of conceiving the world in accordance with experience and the study of empirical reality, which even though "prescientific" in the modern meaning of the word "science," is not always as naive as some critics have assumed. Of course, neither empirical nor philosophical science, whether critical or pre-critical, is the primary object of the sacred books, which speak directly of their theme and only indirectly of knowledge about the world. Their theme is the free action of a God who sovereignly chooses a people in order that they might seal with him a covenant of life. The six days of the

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[9]Cf. W. Pannenberg, *Teologiá Sistemática* (Madrid: Publicaciones UPCO, 1992), I: 434ff., 443, 451, 483.

[10]Cf. G. von Rad, *Teologiá del Antiguo Testamento, I. Teología de las tradiciones históricas de Israel* (Salamanca, 1969) or Schoekel, L. Alonso, "Motivos sapienciales y de alianza en Gen 2–3," *Biblica 43* (1962): 295–316.

account that concerns us say this before all else: that the Sabbath rest is the intrinsic end of Creation. The Creator created for the Covenant that the Sabbath recalls and actualizes.

The account of the second chapter of Genesis speaks of the same idea in another key: that of the foundational events of the Exodus. Yahweh "drew" Adam out of the dust of the ground (Gn 2:7), just as he "drew" his people out of Egypt; he "put" him in Paradise (Gn 2:15), just as he "put" the people rescued from slavery into the Promised Land; and he established with the human race an original pact (Gn 2:16) that prefigures the pact made with the people after their liberation. In this manner, Adam's creation is presented as a first act of election and covenant, that is, as charged with a meaning that far surpasses the mere production of a creature distinct from God.

The creation narratives of the Book of Genesis, echoing other passages of the prophetic books and wisdom literature, make two fundamental claims about the creative action of God: that it is free and that it is salvific. The Creator acts out of no necessity that impels him to create, just as Yahweh chooses his people only by His sovereign and unconditioned will. But the incomparable freedom of the act of placing into being that which it is not does not denote a capricious, totally uncontrolled operation; it is rather a freedom directed by a mysterious law of absolute gratuitousness that affirms the existence of the other to the other's own benefit: it is a freedom for salvation. The mystery of this gratuitousness will be fully revealed, without losing its mystery, with the promulgation of the New Covenant.

2. The New Testament, as is well-known, offers no account of Creation similar to those found in Genesis. Neither does it dedicate any specific attention to the question of the origin of everything that exists in the creative will of God. But this is not to say that its contribution to the understanding of creation is insignificant. G. von Rad showed some time ago that the authentic "theological achievement" of Israel was not so much the establishment of a general idea of creation as the specific qualification of creation in light of the history of salvation.[11] Israel took up, adapted and transformed the ideas about creation proper to the religious visions of the surrounding world in the light of the

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[11]Cf. G. von Rad, *op.cit.*, p. 185.

revelation of God concerning election and the covenant. This implies a movement from the simple production of a world (general religious horizon) to the new horizon of Creation in the proper sense, that is, as the free working of the Creator ordered for (and towards) the greater freedom of the salvation of God in favor of his people.[12]

By the same token, the eschatalogical revelation of God in favor of all peoples, which occurred in Jesus Christ, does not require the elaboration and presentation of a doctrine of creation exclusively its own, especially because there was already a theologically worked out idea of creation to draw on, namely, that of Israel. The New Testament assumes the Old Testament concept of creation, and for that reason makes no great developments in the material. Nevertheless, seen in the light of Christ, the mystery of the gratuitousness of the work of creation is revealed. It is also deepened, perhaps no less radically than the general concept of creation was transformed in the light of the revelation of Israel.

In Jesus Christ, in fact, the mystery of God's will is revealed, for which the hymn incorporated into the letter to the Ephesians, particularly the beginning (1: 3–10), blesses God. This is a mystery of election and of grace that is rooted in "the Beloved" (6). This beloved is at the beginning, "before the creation of the world," as the place of God's election of men (4); he is in the eschatological plenitude of history, where he manifests the divine wisdom in his redeeming blood (7); finally he is the place of the recapitulation of "everything in the heavens and upon the earth" (10). In a single verse (1:7) that refers to redemption by his blood, Christ appears as the Alpha and Omega of a great divine plan of which he is the original, final and central cause.

The Letter to the Colossians (1:15–20) presents the text of the Christological hymn that is the basis for the one found in Ephesians.[13] The references to creation are more abundant and more

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[12]The assumption and transformation of the general idea of the production of the world by the divinity to a specifically theological idea of creation, a process moved and directed by the self-revelation of the God of Israel as the God who freely acts in history in favor of his people, could perhaps be clarified with the help of the fundamental idea of Gadamer's hermeneutic: the fusion of horizons. We suspect that von Rad himself took his inspiration from his colleague at Heidelberg.

[13] Cf. J. Sanchez Bosch, *Escritos paulinos* (Estella: n.p., 1998), 42–425.

explicit. Jesus Christ is presented as "the first-born of all creation" in a conceptual and literary parallelism to his function as "first-born from among the dead." Each function illumines the other. If "in him all things were created . . . by him and for him," it is because "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things." We could say that the converse is also the case. The hymn is constructed upon this parallelism of functions in which each illumines the other: he who is "before all things," as the beginning of the creation, is "the Head" of the people of the Redeemed, the principle of resurrection.

The Prologue of the Gospel of St. John makes the same point as the pre-pauline hymn of Colossians with respect to the protological-eschatological function of Christ. It simply affirms, as does 1 Cor 8:6, that "all things were made by him" (cf. Jn 1:3); and, in perfect agreement with the hymn, places the affirmation of the creative mediation of Jesus Christ in connection with his mediation of the grace of filiation (cf. Jn 1:13 and 17).

The presence of Christ in the work of creation neither substitutes nor displaces the originating action of the Father, but rather adds to it. The text from the Letter to the Corinthians, to which we have just alluded, is quite clear: "one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor 8:5–6). The particle *ek*, used here and elsewhere in reference to the Father (cf. Rom 11:36), is never used in relation to Christ in this context. It is the Father who pronounces the creative word (cf. 2 Cor 4:6; Rom 4:17; Jn 1:1).

A brief synthesis of the Scriptural data allows us to make the following affirmations in connection with creation in Christ:

a) Sacred Scripture speaks of the origin of all things in God in the light of God's covenant with his people. In this way creation appears as the first act of a history of salvation.

b) Given that the Covenant of God with his people is sealed definitively in Jesus Christ, the New Testament does not understand the creation apart from Christ.

c) The hymns found in Ephesians and Colossians, on the one hand, and in the Gospel of St. John on the other, do not simply speak of the Word of God in its pure pre-existence of the creation, but of Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, dead and resurrected.

d) To God the Father is reserved the function of originating everything that exists, of speaking the creative word.

This manifold implication of the Holy Trinity in the work of creation figures in the Magisterium of the Church. The basic texts are naturally found in the symbols of the faith, particularly the Nicene-Constantinopolitan, which attributes the creation to the Father without failing to confess the Son as him "through whom all things were made" (DH 150). In the sixth century, the Second Council of Constantinople coins a brief trinitarian formula of creation: "In effect, the God and Father from whom all things proceed is one; Jesus Christ, through whom all things were made, is one; and the Holy Spirit, in whom all things exist, is one" (DH 421).

It cannot be said that Magisterial tradition has made special doctrinal developments in this area. The medieval councils referred above all else to the idea that the one God is the singular principle of everything created. The same thing can be said of the First Vatican Council.

On the other hand, the teaching of the last ecumenical Council, without developing a doctrine of creation, very clearly offers elements that are sufficient to direct us towards a trinitarian and christological understanding of it. Some of those elements are as follows:

a) Christ is presented in various places as the Alpha and Omega of the creation, with explicit reference to the Pauline texts. We see this, for example, when *Dei Verbum* 2 speaks of the manifestation of the mystery of God; when the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* 38–39 explains the sense of man's collaboration with God in terms of "a creation that God made for man's benefit;" and, above all, when we read: "The Word of God, by whom all things were made, became man in such a way that as perfect man he would save all people and recapitulate all things. The Lord is the end of human history, the point in which all desires of history and civilization converge, the center of the human race . . . "(GS 48). The christological orientation of the Council's anthropology is unmistakably clear, especially if we recall the end of the introduction to *Gaudium et Spes*: "[The Church] believes that the key, the center and the end of human history is found in its Lord and Master. The Church moreover affirms that in all changes, many things subsist that do not change and have their ultimate grounding in Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Consequently, in the light of

Christ, the first-born of all creatures, the Council attempts to speak to everyone in order to illumine the mystery of man . . . " (GS 10).

b) In this framework, the Council speaks of the *only vocation* of man, which is divine (cf. GS 22; 24 and 29). It is a vocation revealed by Christ to every man: "Christ, the New Adam, in the same revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to man himself and discloses to him the greatness of his vocation" (GS 22), which is to attain to being a son in the Son (id.).

### *III. Jesus Christ, the Mystery who Elucidates the Enigma of Creation*

These broad vistas open for theology a whole range of perspectives and themes. The correct exposition of matters such as the relation of Christianity to other cultures and religions or the grounding of morality, to mention only two areas of special current importance, must take these perspectives into account. Here we confine ourselves to some elementary reflections on a few implications of creation in Christ for the idea of creation itself.

The enigma of the gratuitousness of creation which proceeds from the simple free will of the "One," is elucidated in the light of its mediation by Christ. This elucidation has at least two facets: with respect to the world as such and with respect to God, the creative power of love.

1. The ontology of creation affirms, in effect, that the world is the world and that God is God; that is, that the world's being has its own consistency before God and is in no wise a part of the divine being or a debilitated manner of being God. God, for his part, being God, that is, truly unique and one, has no necessary relation with whatever is plural and multiple, if his unicity is not to be negated. This is the problem posed by Scholasticism, in terms of the "real relation" between God and the world that, in its view, was impossible. Old Testament revelation already resolves these problems by simply affirming the liberty of God and of his creative act with respect to the world that he creates—a freedom analogous to the freedom of his historic election of the people. That is why Israel had successfully overcome every dualist or monist vision of the world. The entire creation depends absolutely upon the Creator (there is no second, quasi-divine power, not even the power of evil), and it is no necessary part of the sole divinity (there is no confusion between the world and God).

The revelation of Christ as mediator of the creation sheds a new light on the relation between the Creator and the creature. God creates in the Son and for this reason without any obligation towards the creature. The Son is the principle of alterity in God Himself. This alterity is not based upon the appearance of a world before God; rather, the converse is the case. The world exists before God precisely because God Himself contains the basis and fountain of alterity: the procession of the Son from the Father.[14]

This same idea appears with diverse nuances in other contemporary theologians. K. Rahner approaches it in order to work out a "non-mythical" understanding of the Incarnation of the Logos that is not conceived in a grossly anthropomorphic manner as an "apparition" of God in human form upon the stage of creation, conceived as absolutely closed and heterogenous with respect to what is then the extrinsic intervention of the divinity. In search of a more "transcendental" account of the Incarnation, Rahner sees creation "gravitating from the outset towards the point at which God simultaneously reaches supreme closeness to and distance from what is distinct from him—the creature—by objectivizing himself most radically in his image . . . . In that case God would not be the ahistorical founder of a history alien to himself, but rather the being whose very history is being addressed."[15] And from his Christological perspective Rahner goes on to affirm: "Christology as a whole would then be the most radical realization of this primordial relation (of creation) that God maintains with that which is distinct from himself. The rest of creation would be only a deficient *modus* of the Incarnation, the vague outline of the clearest realization of this

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[14]Cf. Pannenberg, *op.cit,* 28ff. The idea that the origin of alterity is found in the Son is of Hegelian provenance and could give rise precisely to a pantheistic understanding of a divine necessity of the other. Here is Pannenberg's criticism of this kind of Hegelianism: "If one considers the other in the figure of the Son as a product of the absolute subject's exit from unity with itself, then it seems plausible that this self-alienation would have to prolong itself in the emergence of the finite, since only then can the principle of alterity be taken 'seriously.' But if one considers the life of the Trinity starting from the reciprocity of the relations of the Trinitarian persons, then such a consequence does not arise. Because for each one of the Trinitarian persons, his self-distinction from the two is the condition of his communion in unity. Thus the divine life is a complete circle that requires nothing outside of itself" (29).

[15]K. Rahner, *Problemas actuales de cristologia* (published 1954) in *Escritos de Teologia* (Sp. transl Madrid: n.p., 2000), I: 156–205, 172.

primordial relation, which is nothing other than the self–alienation that God realizes at the same time that he remains radically in himself, and thus unchanged."[16]

God remains in himself as he relates to the world. The Incarnation is the sole and supreme mode of this relation. Without this "mediation," without this "through Christ," the creation in its fully biblical sense of gratuitousness and alterity would be inconceivable. J. L. Ruiz de la Peña has expressed this with great clarity, going so far as to say that "the doctrine of the Trinity is the inescapable premise of the doctrine of creation." De la Peña explains this remark as follows: "A solitary God is a God without love (love requires alterity) or a God who produces something outside of himself in order to have a place to put his love; in that case, the creation would be necessary and love would not be love, strictly speaking, because it would lack its basic component, which is freedom . . . but thanks to the faith in the Triune God, all necessity of communication is vanquished in the vital circulation of life within the Trinity, such that outside of his essence, nothing is necessary."[17]

When Balthasar enquires into the place of the world as such and in its difference from God, he responds that it is found in the Trinity, "between God and God": The infinite distance between the world and God is founded upon another distance, the archetypical distance between God and God."[18] L. Ladaria writes, in the same vein, that "God does not begin to be Father because he creates the world, but rather he creates it in virtue of his eternal paternity."[19]

The world is the world because God *is* love. This is the light shed by the Christological account of creation. Let us now train this light further on the Creator as creative love.

2. What God is it who "dares" to create a world before him? For God, to create is to put something outside of himself; and if this

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[16]*Loc. cit.* 182, note 2. Observe how Rahner also responds, before Pannenberg does, to the possible accusation of Hegelianism. It seems impossible to him not to be exposed to it, since "what is developed in the distant part of this abyss of *asynchutos* is, in all rigor, the history of God *Himself*" (Ibid., note 29).

[17]J.L. Ruiz de la Peña, *op.cit.,* p. 137.

[18]H.U. von Balthasar, *Teodramatica II. Las personas del drama: el hombre en Dios,* (Madrid: Encuentro, 1992), 244.

[19]L. Ladaria, *op.cit.,* p. 68.

"outside of himself" is capable of reacting freely to the Creator, how does God "respond" to the possible outrages of his creatures?

The well-known English writer C.S. Lewis, in view of the tragedy and suffering present in the good creation of the good God, wonders whether God is, in addition to being a "tragic Redeemer," a "tragic Creator"; even more, "whether it is possible that God believes the play to be worthwhile."[20]

This type of question has become for many in the modern age the "bulwark of atheism." The Enlightenment mentality, constructor of gods within the limits of pure reason, is unable to find a convincing explanation for the presence of suffering in a world supposed to have been freely desired by a good and omnipotent God. Certainly there is no purely rational explanation for evil and suffering, since they themselves are not rational. Nevertheless, neither does the atheist elimination of God for the sake of a supposedly logical coherence seem rational, inasmuch as it leads, paradoxically, to the apotheosis of evil and suffering. If God were not responsible for this world traversed by suffering, it seems that this suffering would have the last word. If, as it seems, the God of theism is incapable of assuming this responsibility, neither is it strange that the so-called problem of theodicy ultimately proves to be the strongest argument for atheism. Those who construct God according to the measure of their reason are to blame for this paradoxical transmutation.

The Creator who creates in Christ, on the other hand, does take responsibility for his creation. The God who dares to create a world before Him is a God who is capable not only of loving the other as other in virtue of the eternal difference that takes place in God himself; he is, moreover, the God capable of assuming as his own history the history of the other. The Incarnation is the supreme act of God with respect to his creation, in a double sense: as salvation, and as redemption.

The Incarnation of the Son in Jesus of Nazareth is the new and unsurpassable manifestation of the salvific meaning of creation itself. God does not create simply to produce something distinct from himself. He creates for communion, for the union of the creature with the creator. The salvific meaning of God's creative action had

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[20]C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm, chiefly on Prayer,* (London: n.p., 1974), Letter 17, cited by Balthasar, *op.cit.,* 250.

already been manifested to Israel, the most intimate reason for which is nothing else than the establishment of the covenant with the people. The Church receives the revelation of the ultimate depths of the covenant initiated in creation: God himself shares in his Son the lot of his creature. In the history of Jesus of Nazareth the covenant of the creator with the creature is a personal reality of God himself. The creation thus reaches its ultimate end of union of life with God, but not without the commitment of God to his creature. To say that everything has been created through Jesus Christ can mean only one thing, it seems: there would have been no creation if God were not Immanuel, God-with-us.

We cannot enter here into the old argument about the motives of the Incarnation. The data of revelation about the mediation of the incarnate Logos in the work of creation are sufficiently clear. Certainly we confess that the incarnation is "for us men and for our salvation." Many texts of Sacred Scripture speak directly of salvation as redemption. Nevertheless, if we wish to capture all of the full wealth of the Bible and the Magisterium to which we have made reference, it seems necessary to keep in mind, as L. Ladaria says, that "salvation is a much broader concept than that of redemption or the conquering of sin . . . . Salvation is the gift that God makes of Himself in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, which allows us to participate in his trinitarian life. The salvation of man consists in conformity with Christ, in reproducing his image, in realizing at last the human ideal that finds its paradigm in the risen Christ."[21]

This distinction between salvation and redemption allows us an exact understanding of Jesus Christ as the first-born of creation, inasmuch as he is the head in whom the entire creative work of God is recapitulated and acquires meaning. But we must always bear in mind that in fact Sacred Scripture itself knows of no humanity that was not in need of being redeemed, freed from sin. This could be the reason why salvation frequently appears as a synonym of redemption.

In God's single plan, Jesus Christ is thus simultaneously the head and the redeemer of mankind. It could be said that because he is the head, he is the redeemer, and vice versa, because the divine plan of God is unitary and integral from the very beginning. The Letter to the Ephesians clearly adopts this perspective. The Epistle

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[21]L.F. Ladaria, *op.cit.,* 47.

focuses on the cross, in the framework of a plan that is prior to the creation of the world (cf. Eph 1:4–7). Similarly, First Peter speaks of the Lamb predestined before the foundation of the world ( I Ptr 1:18–21).

Redemption should not be seen as God's reaction after the fact to some unforeseen lapse of creaturely freedom. This view of things reduces Christ to the role of a mere restorer of an initial plan gone awry, unforeseeably twisted, it seems, by creatures. Redemption is rather the concrete manner in which the creator assumes responsibility for his creation from the very beginning. In the head of creation, the first-born of all creation, God has already walked all the roads on which creatures wander far from him. When Christ died the death of the sinner, he took upon himself the drama of the creature's going astray and made possible for this creature the attainment of its end in communion with God.

"Oh happy fault!" sings the Church at the Easter Vigil. That the world has been created in Christ, Head of Creation and sacrificial Lamb of the New Covenant, should not cause us to think that the deviation of freedom was somehow part of the divine plan for creation. It does, however, offer us the possibility of knowing the mystery of a God disposed from the beginning to assume responsibility for his creation, a God disposed to give himself to his creatures for no other reason than his own goodness. The "surrender" of the Son shows the unconditional seriousness of that disposition. Sin thus becomes the unexpected way of the final and surprising revelation of the love of God, or, better, the love that God is in eternal communion of the three divine persons. The God who creates in Christ is capable not only of loving the other who stands before him, but also of involving himself in his creation in order to carry it to himself from the farthest point where the fountain of life has placed himself: the death of the sinner. "He is truly a God with us who amazes us by his love on the cross even more than by the his magnificent creation."[22]

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[22]Seventieth Plenary Session of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, *Dios es Amor. Instruccion Pastoral en los umbrales del Tercer Milenio,* Madrid, 27 November 1998. The bishops call to mind in this context a prayer from the Easter Vigil: ". . . that your redeemed ones may understand how the creation of the world, at the beginning of time, was not a work of greater grandeur than the Paschal Sacrifice of Christ in the fullness of time."

I end these succinct reflections by returning to the quotation from Balthasar that begins them. The Incarnation of the Word is certainly a novelty with respect to the Creation. But the Creation, made possible by the same Word Incarnate, draws its life from this novelty. It would be illegitimate and constructing to reduce the grace that gushes forth from the side of Christ simply to the most elevated level of the gratuity shown in the act of creation. But it is equally impossiblee to consider God's creation as a mere "nature" alien to the communion that the creator offers his creatures in Christ. If the Incarnation is the plenitude of creation, then the creation tends on its own towards the Incarnation. All creatures, which exist in virtue of the Word, tend toward the Incarnation before its appearance in the flesh, and come from in in eschatological time. —*Translated by David Carradini.* □

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