



The creation, revelation of God's glory

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Creation, revelation of God

«In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth» (*Gen* 1:1). These first words of the Bible have inspired many reflections and are at the center of the Christian vision of the universe. This marvelous world in which we live is not the product of chaos or chance, but it is the result of a loving plan of God. The creation of the universe, angels and human persons is «the foundation of all God's saving plans, the beginning of the history of salvation that culminates in Christ»¹. The creation of all things is at the center of Christian faith. Without the act of creation, the world, and all that exists within it, would be without sense, and man's life wouldn't have deep meaning.

Our faith in Christ is closely related to the faith in creation and we affirm it when we pray: «We believe in God the Father Almighty, *Creator* of heavens and earth, of all things visible and invisible». That's why St. Ignatius of Loyola presents, at the beginning of his *Spiritual Exercises*, as a *principle and foundation* that «man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. And the other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in prosecuting the end for which he is created»². The fact that we are created, that we have received everything that we are and have from God, and the universe has an anchor in God's will, gives us an essential direction to our lives as humans and Christians.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms that the catechesis on creation is of major importance. It concerns the very foundations

¹ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, n. 280.

² ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, *Spiritual Exercises*, n. 13.

of human and Christian life: for it makes explicit the response of the Christian faith to the basic question that men of all times have asked themselves: «Where do we come from? Where are we going?», «What is our origin? What is our end? Where does everything that exists come from and where is it going?», the two questions, the first about the origin and the second about the end, are inseparable. They are decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions³.

Creation has been considered in the Bible and in the Tradition of the Church as one of the two books in which God reveals himself. He reveals Himself and His will through the Holy Scripture and the book of creation (*liber revelationis, liber creationis*). As a matter of fact, in the book of Wisdom we read: «For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator» (*Wis* 13,5). The Creator «gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities (*Rom* 1:19-20)»⁴, but «planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, He went further [...]»⁵, and «through divine revelation, God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of men. That is to say, He chose to share with them those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind»⁶.

The end of creation

Creation is a great mystery. We can't understand completely the deep reasons of creation that come from the inner mystery of the holy Trinity. We can't grasp with our poor reason the ultimate motivations that explain to our limited intelligence, why God created everything that exists. But what we know with certitude is that the purpose of God creating the world is the manifestation of his glory.

Let us try to present concisely this clear and sure doctrine of the Catholic Church, that has been particularly explained in the Constitution *Dei Filius* of the I Vatican Council (1870). In the first Chapter of this document is presented the doctrine of God, Creator of all things.

³ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, n. 282.

⁴ II VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic constitution *Dei verbum* (18 novembre 1965), n. 3.

⁵ II VATICAN COUNCIL, *Dei verbum*, n. 3.

⁶ II VATICAN COUNCIL, *Dei verbum*, n. 6.

Here it is said that God creates «by His goodness and omnipotent power, and He doesn't do it to increase His own beatitude, and not to add to, but to manifest His perfection by the blessings which He bestows on creatures»⁷. God creates not because He needs to increase his glory or beatitude, but «for the sake of His goodness» (*bonitate sua*). Some Catholic theologians at the time (A. Günter, G. Hermes), influenced by a Kantian vision, maintained that the end of God's creative will (*finis operantis*) must be man and his ultimate perfection. According to them, the ultimate and sole *finis operis* of creation is man's complete happiness. But the doctrine of the Church considers the end of creation, God's glory that is not separated from man's plenitude.

St. Thomas Aquinas had already established that God's goodness is not increased by the act of creation but is communicated by it⁸. What the Council affirms is legitimately interpreted by theologians who say that «the *finis operantis* of creation is the intrinsic glory of God»⁹. The philosophical reason is very simple: «being infinite cannot be motivated by any except by an infinite good»¹⁰.

This world has been created by God absolutely independent of any exterior influence and without any internal necessity to create the universe. God created because He wants to manifest *ad extra* his love, because He wants to communicate externally his goodness: «There is not any other cause that moved God to create but to communicate His goodness to the things He created»¹¹. And the glory of God is the manifestation of this Love. If the end of the creative act is divine goodness, this goodness is also the end of the created world. The world has in God his ultimate end, as it exists to manifest His goodness. And the manifestation of his love is His Glory. We can better understand this idea by thoroughly studying the concept of God's glory in the Holy Scripture.

⁷ I VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* (24 April 1870), n. 1 (DH, n. 3001).

⁸ ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *In II Sent.*, d. 1, q. 2, a. 1: «Bonitas Dei movet quodammodo ipsum ad operandum, non quidem ut ipse bonitatem acquirat, sed ut bonitatem sua aliis communicet».

⁹ PH. LONELLY, S.J., «The Doctrine of The Vatican Council on The End of Creation», *Theological Studies* 4 (1943), 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Catechismus romanus ad parochos*, p. 1, art. 1.

The Glory of God

The world *glory* in Greek is δόξα, that has two main meanings: the *opinion* that I have *about others*, and *the opinion*, consideration that *others have of me*¹². But in the Old Testament the world glory (*kabod*), has a wider range of meanings. It appears to derive from the word liver (*kabed*), a dense and heavy organ, hence the derivative meaning of “heavy”, that leads to the concept of importance, respect, glory, something that impresses the viewer¹³. God reveals his glory in the Mount Sinai (*Exod* 19:20), in the Tabernacle (*Exod* 40:34) and in the Solomon’s Temple (*1Kgs* 8:10-11).

In the *Old Testament* the Hebrew uses *kabod* for glory. The primary meaning is honor, something important, full of prestige. In the Psalms the glory of God appears as the manifestation of His power over the natural phenomena, like in the storm (*Ps* 97:1; *Ps* 29). The glory of God is great (*Ps* 138:5), and it means the «eternal acknowledgement, honor that is possible to tribute or refuse to God», and «to give *kabod* to God is to recognize, with all the consequences, the importance of His divinity»¹⁴. God comes down from heavens to show his glory in the tent of the encounter (*Exod* 24:15), or in the winged char, pictured in the theophany of Ezequiel (*Ez* 10:18).

One important text, very often quoted, we find in the *Psalms* 19:1 «The heavens declare the Glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hand». God is revealed here through the created universe which is a work of his hands¹⁵. This psalm continues with the praise of the Law as a special revelation of God to Israel, and it suggests a continuity between the revelation of God in the creation and in the Law, which is the most perfect and complete of all laws («The Law of the Lord is perfect»: *Ps* 19:7).

¹² G. KITTEL, δόξα, in *Gran Lessico del Nuovo Testamento*, ed. G. KITTEL – G. FRIEDICH, edizione italiana a cura di F. MONTAGNINI – G. SCARPAT – O. SOFFRITTI, II, Paideia, Brescia 1966, 1349.

¹³ J. HOFFMEIER, «The Heavens Declare the Glory of God: The Limits of the General Revelation», *Trinity Journal* 21 (2000), 17.

¹⁴ G. VON RAD, δόξα, in *Gran Lessico del Nuovo Testamento*, 1369.

¹⁵ J. HOFFMEIER, «The Heavens Declare the Glory of God: The Limits of the General Revelation», *Trinity Journal* 21 (2000), 20-21.

In the *New Testament* the glory (δόξα) of God is used in continuity with the main meaning of the Old Testament (divine honor, divine magnificence, visible divine splendor), as we can see in the episodes of the Nativity (*Lk* 2:9), the Transfiguration (*Lk* 9:31; *2Pet* 1:17), the conversion of Paul (*Act* 22:11), the revelation of God's glory in the new Jerusalem (*Rev* 15:8; 21:23). But the real novelty is the application of the idea of glory to Jesus. In Him God reveals his glory. He is the Lord of glory (*1Cor* 2:8; *Jam* 2:1). He is risen in glory (*1Tim* 3:16). For Saint John, the glory of Jesus is already manifest during his earthly life and is recognized by the believer through the faith. The cross is the glorification of Jesus and God is glorified in him (*Jn* 13:31). This glory is participated to the disciples in the measure they believed in him and are united with him. Those who believe in him will be transformed «from glory to glory» (*2Cor* 3:18), but they are able to see already here on earth the glory of Jesus (*Jn* 17:24).

We can conclude with M. Flick and Z. Alszeghy that in the Bible “glory of God” means very often God himself, his power, his goodness, and magnificent beauty, that produces ecstasy and great sweetness, because in the revelation of glory can be contemplated the real being of God, within the limitations of humans¹⁶. Glory is goodness of God, spread in the universe and especially present in man, at the point that we could say that the glory of God consists in his goodness that expands and communicates to men and produces a similarity with Him. In this sense creature can be called the image of God's glory (*1Cor* 11:7).

When the Church affirms that the end of the universe is God's glory¹⁷, she doesn't say that He needs the universe to have more glory or more being but that He created all things «not to increase his glory, but to show it forth and to communicate it»¹⁸. So «the glory of God consists in the realization of this manifestation and communication of his goodness, for which the world was created»¹⁹. The «ultimate purpose of creation is that God who is the Creator of all things may at last become all in all (*1Cor* 15:28), thus simultaneously assuring his own glory and our beatitude»²⁰.

¹⁶ M. FLICK – Z. ALSZEGHY, «Gloria Dei», *Gregorianum* 36 (1955), 361-390.

¹⁷ I VATICAN COUNCIL, *Dei Filius*, can. 1, n. 5 (*DH*, n. 3025).

¹⁸ ST. BONAVENTURE, *In II Sent.* I, 2, 2, 1.

¹⁹ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, n. 294.

²⁰ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, n. 294; II VATICAN COUNCIL, *Ad Gentes*, n. 2.

The concept of glory of God in the Bible is the manifestation of His supreme being in the created things, especially when he is near the people as on the Mount Sinai, or when he accompanied the people in the Tent in the desert, or in the Ark of the Covenant or, finally, in the Temple of Jerusalem. In the New Testament this glory is specially revealed in Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, and it is the manifestation of God's love to mankind in the mysteries of his Incarnation and Redemption. The Glory of God, his ontological "weight" (*kabod*) is his Love, as revealed in history through his incarnated Son and the Holy Spirit. All the operations of the Trinity *ad extra* are a manifestation of this glory, this supreme Love, either in the Creation or in the Redemption. It is in this sense that the Church affirms, following the teaching of the Old Testament (*Ps 19:1*), that the end of the whole creation is the glory of God, and that means the manifestation of his Love to the creatures, in a special way, to mankind.

Glory of God, reason and finality

We have finally one more issue. If the universe manifests the glory of God and the end of creation is the manifestation of this glory, the question can arise, until which point the human reason is able to see this finality in the universe? This question is especially important today, when a secular culture and some scientists want to present the world as not having any end or purpose. The presentation of the scientific theory of evolution as the alternative to the Christian doctrine of creation has played an important role here. Many people accepting without discrimination the popular presentation of this theory think that the world exists just by chance, without any end or purpose at all.

The theology has no problem seeing a design in the creation, this design is the manifestation of the salvific God's glory. The question that the modern science asks is: Is it possible to find design in the universe only with the light of science?

Before we consider this issue, it is important to present the same question in the field of philosophy. Can design be seen in the natural world, from the point of view of philosophy, specifically philosophy of nature? The answer to this question is not so complicated. We can say that most philosophers accepted what we call the "final cause" in the

universe. St. Thomas Aquinas accepted without problem the final cause in nature, when he proposed the fifth way to prove the existence of God:

The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that *not fortuitously*, but *designedly*, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence, as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore, some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God²¹.

For Philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas it was evident and plain that it is not chance but a design that works in the natural world. And this design required a Designer, some intelligent Being that directs the natural things to their ends. This argument was also used by authors like Paley who presented it by using the well-known example of the watchmaker:

Supposed I had found a watch upon the ground [...] when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive that its several parts are framed and put together *for a purpose*, e.g., that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion is regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that, if different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, of a different size from what they are, or placed after any other manner, or in any other order, than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it [...]. The inference, we think, is inevitable that the watch must have had a maker, that there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehend its construction and designed its use²².

Philosophy of the physical world, accepting the final cause, has seen without problems a *design in nature*, thanks to the use of reason, the profound *logos* existing in the universe. As Cardinal Ratzinger puts

²¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, I, 2, a. 3.

²² W. PALEY, *Natural Theology*, London, 1802, chapter 1.

it: «The Christian vision of the world presents a world born from a very complex evolutionary process, that in deep *comes from the Logos*. It brings in it the Reason»²³. The Reason postulates a cause, not only an efficient cause, but also a final cause, a finality, a design, a purpose in nature. *Omne agens agit propter finem*. The application of this principle to the universe has been accepted until the advent of the theory of evolution. As matter of fact, Darwin presented his theory as contradicting the final cause in nature:

The old argument of design in nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to be so conclusive, fails now that the law of natural selection had been discovered. We can no longer argue that, for instance, the beautiful hinge of a bivalve shell, must be made by an intelligent being, like the hinge of a door by man²⁴.

In this way the theory of evolution, as it is adopted in science, presents itself like a new philosophy, indeed a new metaphysics in a horizon in which, according to positivism, the knowledge given by science is the only one capable to grasp reality, letting behind as not valid the knowledge provided by philosophy and theology.

The critics of the final cause, with the advent of a new pattern of science, had been requested by Francis Bacon, who said in a peremptory way that «the inquiry of final causes is a barren thing, or as a virgin consecrated to God»²⁵. Bacon saw a danger into using the final causes in physics without a solid scientific method and into the consequences that this use could create:

For the handling of final causes, mixed with the rest in physical inquiries, hath intercepted the severe and diligent inquiry of all real and physical causes, and given men the occasion to stay upon these satisfactory and specious causes, to the great arrest and prejudice of further discovery²⁶.

²³ P. SEEWALD – J. RATZINGER, *Gott und die Welt*, Freiburg-in-Brisgau 2000, 119.

²⁴ CH. DARWIN, *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin: Including an Autobiographical Chapter*, vol. I, Frances Darwin, New York - Appleton 1888, 278-279.

²⁵ F. BACON, *On the dignity and advancement of learning*, Book III, ch. V (ed. J. DEVEY, New York 1901, 168).

²⁶ F. BACON, *Of the proficience and advancement of learning divine and human*, Book II, c. 7, 7.

Philosophy, with theology, goes beyond the proper domain of natural sciences.

It is not only a question of knowing when and how the universe arose physically, or when man appeared, but rather of discovering the meaning of such an origin: is the universe governed by chance, blind fate, anonymous necessity, or by a transcendent, intelligent and good Being called God?²⁷

Must science totally disregard the final cause that allegedly comes from a magical or superstitious mentality? Can science ignore not only the principles that reason sees in nature but also the very human experience? It is obvious that science has its own field of inquiry, but the realm of science is not independent from the whole reality of man and nature. It is a method of knowledge, valid within the limits that every method has in its proper field.

An integration of the different forms of knowledge that humans have is necessary to contemplate the universe and see in it the glory of God. The theology of creation is not opposed to science, definitely not to genuine science. The Church admits the due and legitimate autonomy of the sciences, required by modernity that remains in harmony with the will of the Creator²⁸. In fact, «if methodic investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith, for earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God»²⁹.

To see the glory of God in creation, in this magnificent and beautiful universe we need an integral vision of reality. This includes, – besides the findings and research in natural sciences – the contribution of philosophy and theology. All three contribute to an integral knowledge. We need to widen the horizons of rationality, as Pope Benedict said, and go beyond the restricted use of mere reason. This is kind of «the requisite for a *new opening* onto the reality that the human person in his uni-totality is»³⁰.

²⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 284.

²⁸ II VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, n. 36.

²⁹ II VATICAN COUNCIL, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 36.

³⁰ BENEDICT XVI, Address to Participants at the Sixth European Symposium for University Professors (7 June 2008).

Although some scientists think that after Darwin there is no room for a Creator nor final cause in sciences, a balanced philosophy of knowledge and sciences accepts three degrees of knowledge. John Paul II described them when he spoke about the relation between creation and evolution:

Consideration of the method used in diverse orders of knowledge allows for the concordance of two points of view which seem irreconcilable. The *sciences of observation* describe and measure with ever greater precision the multiple manifestations of life and place them on a timeline. The moment of passing over to the spiritual is not the object of an observation of this type, which can nevertheless reveal, on an experimental level, a series of very useful signs about the specificity of the human being. But the *experience of metaphysical knowledge*, of the awareness of self and of its reflexive nature, that of the moral conscience, that of liberty, or still yet the aesthetic and religious experience, are *within the competence of philosophical analysis and reflection*, while theology extracts from it the final meaning according to the Creator's designs.³¹

«The heavens declare the glory of God; The skies proclaim the work of his hand» (*Ps* 19:1). In creation there is one creature that in a special way reflects the glory of God, because he has been created after His image: the human person (*Gen* 1:26-27). St. Paul expresses this when he says that «he is the image and glory of God» (εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ)³², and the same did St. Irenaeus, «gloria Dei vivens homo»³³, glory of God, the living man. We are invited to see without prejudice the glory of God in the universe. The Creator created for the sake of his glory and we glorify God when we see his goodness in the universe. It should be recognized especially in Christ, his beloved Son, image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation; in whom all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible (*Col* 1:15, 16).

³¹ JOHN PAUL II, Address to Pontifical Academy of Sciences Plenary Session (23 October 1996).

³² Cf. A. FEUILLET, «L'homme, gloire de Dieu et la femme, gloire de l'homme (*ICor* 11,7)», *Revue biblique* 81 (1974), 161-182.

³³ ST. IRENEUS, *Adv. haer.* IV, 20, 7: «Gloria Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei».

Summary: The ecclesiastical doctrine on the end of creation as God's glory revelation requires an understanding of the biblical concept of "glory of God". Based on this biblical ground, the author presents the glory of God as a manifestation of his Love in the created works and in a special way in the human person. Related to this theological issue, the second part analyses the possibility of finding, with the human reason, a finality in the creation. Accepting the existence of the final cause from a theological and philosophical perspective, the empirical sciences, that put aside in their methodology the uses of this kind of cause, will find difficult, if not impossible, to use this particular cause in their studies. The need of opening the epistemological horizons of knowledge to different ways of approaching the real and to put in dialogue their original contributions, is a task that the contemporary culture should have as a pressing task.

Key words: Creation, glory of God, final cause, finality, knowledges integration

Sommario: L'articolo presenta la dottrina ecclesiastica sul fine della creazione come rivelazione della gloria di Dio. Si analizza il concetto di "gloria di Dio" e si cerca di capire come tale concetto stia in relazione con l'amore di Dio che si manifesta nelle opere divine, in special modo nella creazione della persona umana. La seconda parte dell'articolo presenta il tema della possibilità di trovare con la ragione umana una finalit  nella creazione, anche se le scienze empiriche, che operano con metodi che lasciano fuori la causa finale, senza negare l'esistenza di una tale causa, non potranno per  usarla come prova scientifica e dovranno ricorrere alla filosofia e alla teologia per ampliare i propri orizzonti epistemologici.

Parole chiave: Creazione, gloria di Dio, Causa finale, finalit , integrazione dei saperi,