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The Trinity's Loving Act of Creation

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[−] Abstract and Keywords

This chapter discusses the Catholic understanding of God as Creator. It begins with an overview of the biblical proclamation as found in the Old and New Testaments and proceeds by citing the writings of Irenaeus as an example of early patristic thought. It then considers the doctrinal and philosophical understandings of God as one and as a Trinity of persons, with particular emphasis on the thought of Thomas Aquinas. It also examines the act of creation and the type of relationship such an act establishes between God and creation. The chapter highlights creation's eternal purpose: for human beings to become the Father's children after the manner of his own eternal Son, which would be achieved through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

Keywords: God, Old Testament, New Testament, Irenaeus, Trinity, persons, Thomas Aquinas, act of creation, human beings, Holy Spirit

This chapter examines the Catholic understanding of God as Creator. First, it will discuss the biblical proclamation as found within the Old and New Testaments. Second, the writings of Irenaeus are studied briefly as an example of early patristic thought. Third, the doctrinal and philosophical understandings of God as one and as a Trinity of persons, especially in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, are considered. Fourth, having articulated the nature of the one God as a Trinity of persons, it then follows an examination of the act of creation and the type of relationship such an act establishes between God and creation. The purpose of this chapter is to present a biblical, philosophical, and theological understanding of the Triune God as the Creator of all.

The Biblical Proclamation of God as Creator

The Israelites first experienced God as loving and compassionate, the sole Saviour who freed them from the slavery of Egypt. This experience of God as Saviour nurtured their belief that God is likewise the Creator. While God is first Creator before he is Saviour, yet, experientially, it was only as the Israelites encountered God as Saviour that they came to realize that the God who has the power to save also possessed the unique power to create. Within the Hebrew Scriptures, the notion of God as Creator expresses the intimate presence of God and God's radical otherness. Being the Creator ultimately founds God's close relationship to the created order and simultaneously reveals that God is not a member of the created order.

The first creation story illustrates that God is distinct from all else that exists, since God, in an orderly systematic manner, calls into existence the cosmos and all that it contains (Gen. 1). Thus, neither the cosmos nor anything within it is divine. Moreover, unlike the Babylonian gods, the God of Israel does not form the world by doing battle with other cosmic deities. God simply calls forth creation through his mere word (Gen. 1; Pss. 104 [103], 148:8). 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth' (Ps. 33 [32]:6). Both Melchizedek and Abraham profess that God is the most high who created heaven and earth (Gen. 14:19–22). The pagan idols are dead, but Yahweh is the living God who made the earth and all that exists therein (Jer. 10:1–16). What is also evident within the creation stories is that everything God creates is good and that God even creates human beings in God's own image and likeness

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(Gen. 1–2). This, too, is in contrast to the prevailing contemporary creation myths where matter is perceived to be the cause of evil and the deities take on the likeness of human beings, even to the extent of imitating their sinfulness—lust, greed, jealousy, and so forth.

The later Wisdom literature further developed the notion of God as Creator. Wisdom is personified as the first work of God before creation itself (Prov. 8:22 and Sir. 1:9, 24:9). Thus, Wisdom was present when all came into being and was actually cooperating with God as the master artisan (Prov. 8:24–30 and Wis. 8:6). The Spirit of God is also personified as an instrument of creation. 'When you send forth your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground' (Pss. 104 [103]:30, 33 [32]:6). The New Testament and later Christian authors find here a prefigurement of the revelation of the Son as the Word of God and the divine life-giving power as the Holy Spirit.

While the Old Testament clearly portrays God as the Creator of all, yet only once does it allude to the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*—creation out of nothing. 'I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed' (2 Mac. 7:28). The New Testament assumes as its own the Old Testament heritage and so speaks of God as Creator (Mark 13:19; Rom. 11:36; Eph. 3:9; 1 Tim. 6:13; and Rev. 4:11, 10:6, 14:7), and in so doing distinguishes him from all else that is. God as Creator is especially evident in the prayers (4:24) and the speeches within Acts (14:15–17, 17:22–31). These speeches were primarily attempts at evangelizing the Greeks. The speakers wished to confirm that the one God of the Greeks was also the Creator God who has now brought salvation in Jesus.

The New Testament also emphasized two unique aspects of God as the Creator. The first, following the Old Testament allusions, is that the Father created through his eternal Word/Son (John 1:2–3, 1 Cor. 8:6, Col. 1:15–20, Heb. 1:1–3), and that the Father manifests his life-giving power in the raising of Jesus from the dead by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:23, 32, 36; 3:13–17; 4:10; 5:30–31; 7:52; 10:39–40; 13:27–30; 17:31; 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:15; 2 Cor. 4:14; Gal. 1:1; Rom. 4:24, 10:9; 1 Pet. 1:21). Thus the Father will also raise to glory all who believe in his Son (Rom. 6:5, 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14, 15:20ff.; 2 Cor. 4:14, 13:4; Eph. 2:6; Col. 1:18; 2:12ff.; 1 Thess. 4:14; 2 Tim. 2:11). Christians, then, participate in a new birth (1 Pet. 1:3), a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), a new life (Rom. 6:4, Col. 2:12–13, Eph. 2:1), and so become 'in [Christ] one new Man' (Eph. 2:15). This all finds its completion when the Father creates a new heaven and a new earth with the return of Jesus in glory (Rev. 21:1–22:5). We see here that God as Creator and God as Saviour are intimately intertwined in the New Testament, and that this unity finds its source in the unique person of Jesus who sends forth the Holy Spirit as the first gift of redemption.

Irenaeus: God the Good Creator

Building on the biblical and early theology of the Apologists, Irenaeus of Lyons (AD c.130–200) refuted the Gnostic understanding of God and creation and in so doing advanced an authentic Catholic understanding of God as Creator.

The Gnostics of the first and second centuries AD held that everything that exists, including God, formed one continuous whole. There was one contiguous chain of being which included the immutably perfect God at the apex and the passably corrupt matter at the bottom. Between God and matter were placed a whole myriad (depending on the various schools) of lesser beings or Aeons. While God was transcendent for the Gnostics, in that God was remote from the finite realm (which God himself did not create but some lesser being, since for him to do so would have jeopardized his perfect transcendence) and could have no direct contact with it, God was, nonetheless, only relatively transcendent since God, too, was part of the whole. Moreover, the Gnostics were ontological dualists in that God, as spirit, is good while matter, simply as matter, is the source of evil and corruptibility, and so is unintelligible. By conceiving reality in this dualistic fashion, the Gnostics could maintain both the unchangeable perfect transcendence of God and address the reason for why there is evil in the world.

In contradistinction to the Gnostic view of God and the pleroma of various Aeons, Irenaeus enunciated his Christian notion of God. While he was acquainted with the philosophy of his day, Irenaeus was far more the biblical theologian than the philosopher. It was with a mind steeped in the Bible that Irenaeus forged his refutation of Gnosticism and equally his positive contribution to the Christian tradition. Thus, if we are to understand Irenaeus properly, we must grasp that the act of creation was for him the pivotal event, which allowed him both to counter the Gnostic teaching on God and to assert his own conception. For Irenaeus the act of creation became the fundamental hermeneutical principle that governed his conception of God and of God's relation to the created order.

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In Book Two of his *Adversus Haereses (Against the Heresies)*, Irenaeus writes:

It is necessary, then, that we begin with the first and greatest principle, with the Creator God who made heaven and earth, and all things in them, whom these individuals blasphemously call the fruit of degeneracy. [It is necessary] further that we show there is nothing either above him or after him, and that he was influenced by no one but, rather, made all things by his own counsel and free will, since he alone is God, and he alone is Lord, and he alone is Creator, and he alone is Father, and he alone contains all things, and himself gives existence to all things

(*Adv. Haer.* 2. 1.1; Irenaeus 2012: 17).

Placing the notion of creation at the centre of his theology allows Irenaeus to establish three essential truths. Firstly, as in the Hebrew Scriptures, it establishes the absolute otherness of God in a manner that is far more radical than that of the Gnostics. God is not part of a contiguous whole, but absolutely (ontologically) distinct from all else that exists. As Creator, God is then 'distinct' from all else: 'For He Himself is uncreated, without beginning and without end, in need of no one, self-sufficient, bestowing existence on all the rest' (*Adv. Haer.* 3, 8, 3; Irenaeus 2012a: 44). Secondly and simultaneously, it establishes, as also found in the Bible, God's immediate relationship to the created order. Thirdly, since the good God, unlike the Gnostic God, is the Creator of the material world, matter itself is good, which is also in keeping with Genesis 1.

With God, there are simultaneously exhibited power, wisdom, and goodness. His power and goodness [appear] in this, that of his own will he called into being and fashioned things which had no previous existence; his wisdom [is shown] in his having made created things parts of one harmonious and consistent whole; and those things which, through his super-eminent kindness, receive growth and a long period of existence, do reflect the glory of the uncreated One, of that God who bestows what is good ungrudgingly

(*Adv. Haer.* 4, 38, 2; Irenaeus 1989: 521).

Irenaeus is, thus, very clear that God creates 'out of nothing' (*creatio ex nihilo*) and that it is this act of creation, of bringing something into existence, that simultaneously establishes his complete transcendent otherness as God and God's immediate relationship to creation as its Creator.

The Philosophical Foundation of Creation: God as *Pure Being*

The Christian biblical and patristic tradition holds that God is almighty, all-powerful, all-perfect, all-good, etc, and it is because of these attributes that God possesses the ability to create. Nonetheless, what is it about the very nature of God that demands that God possess these and similar attributes? Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225–74) provides a philosophical answer that is not only in accord with the Bible, but also one that illuminates the depth of the biblical revelation. Aquinas argues that God's nature is '*to be*', that God is *ipsum esse* (to-be itself) and thus, *actus purus* (pure act).

Within finite beings, Aquinas perceives a distinction between what something is, its essence or quiddity, and that something is. 'I can know, for instance, what a man or a phoenix is and still be ignorant whether it has being or reality. From this it is clear that being is other than essence or quiddity, unless perhaps there is a reality whose quiddity is its being' (*De Ente et Essentia* 4. 6; Maurer 1968: 55). Thus, for Aquinas, *esse* is that act by which something actually does exist. *Esse* (to be) is a verb and as such does not possess any quiddity, but purely specifies the act by which something exists and so is the foundation of all subsequent actions performed by the existing being. While *esse* (to be) and *essentia* (quiddity) are distinct in that *esse* possesses no quiddity and *essentia* possesses no *esse*, yet they are not realities in themselves. Rather, only beings actually exist and so *esse* and *essentia* are related to one another, for Aquinas, in an act/potency relationship. *Esse* makes *to be* what potentially is and potentially *what is only is* because of *esse*.

Because *esse* and *essentia* are distinct within finite reality, no finite being, whether it be a man, dog, or star, is of such a nature that its nature demands that it be. Therefore, Aquinas argues that the *esse* of finite creatures must come from an extrinsic cause. 'There must be a reality that is the cause of being for all things, because it is pure being (*esse tantum*). If this were not so, one would go on to infinity in causes, for everything that is not pure being has a cause of its being.' This being who is pure *esse* is 'the first cause or God' (*De Ente et Essentia* 4. 7; Maurer 1968: 57).

Aquinas's understanding of God as pure *esse* is founded on what *esse* is in creatures. God must be pure *esse*, for this is what finite beings lack, and what they must be given if they are to be. If God were not pure *esse*, God would be in the

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same situation as creatures and so be in need of *esse* himself. While finite beings are composite beings in which their essence (*essentia*) and existence (*esse*) are in an act/potency relationship, God, whose very nature is to be, *ipsum esse*, is not composite, and 'therefore his essence is his existence'; that is, God's very nature or quiddity is 'to-be' and nothing more (*ST I* q.3, a.4).

As *ipsum esse*, being itself, God's very nature is not, then, designated or signified by a noun, but by a verb. Being pure act (pure verb) as *ipsum esse* does not mean that God is *something* fully in act, such as a creature might actualize its full potential, but rather that God is act pure and simple. Because God is *ipsum esse*, God has no self-constituting potency that needs to be actualized in order for him to be more fully who God is, not because God is *something* fully in act, but again, because God is act pure and simple. God is *actus purus*. It is this philosophical understanding of God that is requisite for understanding what it means for God to be Creator. God can bring other beings into existence only because God himself is pure being for it is precisely 'being' that other beings require if they are to exist.

What is also evident, in keeping with the biblical revelation, is that God's manner of existence differs in kind and not merely in degree from that of creatures. Christian philosophy and theology do not then espouse what is sometimes referred to as 'Onto-theology,' that is, that God transcends the created order only in the sense that God is the highest being within a continuum of beings. Rather, as *ipsum esse*, God transcends the created order in the sense that God exists in a manner that is uniquely God's own. It is precisely because God transcends the created order, in that God is not a member of the created order, that God can be so intimately related to the created order as its Creator.

The Doctrinal Foundation of Creation: The Persons of the Trinity

Since the One nature of God is 'to be,' how is such an understanding related to the truth of revelation that the one God is a Trinity of persons? Christian tradition holds, following Gregory of Nazianzus (AD 329–89) in the East and Augustine (AD 354–430) and Aquinas in the West, that the persons of the Trinity are distinguished by their relationships, that is, that they subsist as distinct subjects or are defined as distinct persons only in relationship to one another. This account of God directly informs our understanding of God as Creator.

Human persons are partially defined by their relationships and so cannot be fully understood apart from their relationships. A father is a father only because he begets a child and so is related to his child as father. A woman is a wife only because she has a husband. However, human persons are not entirely constituted by their relationships. Relationships can cease (friends can fall out), and yet the person continues to live. A human person can also make new relationships (one can marry or make a new friend). Human persons then possess relational potential, which can be actualized, and in so doing, they are defined as who they are. While human persons cannot exist without relationships, yet they are always more than the sum total of their relationships.

For human beings not to be completely constituted by their relationships may first appear to be a good thing. Human persons possess an independent integrity apart from their relationships. However, it is precisely this independent integrity that does not allow a human person to give his or herself completely to another, but he or she must do so only through mediating words (words of kindness and love) and actions (hugs, kisses, sexual relations, etc.) which express only a partial giving of oneself even if one's intention is to give the whole of oneself. This is not the case within the Trinity.

The persons of the Trinity are eternally constituted in their own singular identity only in relation to one another, and thus they subsist as who they are only within their mutual relationships. In their relationships to one another each person of the Trinity subsistently defines and is equally subsistently defined by the other persons. Thus, the persons of the Trinity are subsistent relations. These mutually subsistent relationships, which constitute and define the identity of the persons of the Trinity, are founded on origin and action.

The Father subsists eternally as Father only in relation to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, for his very identity as Father is predicated on his being the origin of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and so he is constituted as Father in the one eternal act of begetting the Son and spirating the Holy Spirit. The Father then only subsists as Father in and by giving himself wholly, unlike human beings, as Father in the begetting of his Son. He gives himself wholly in the begetting of the Son through the Holy Spirit. The Father, then, equally and simultaneously gives himself wholly in spirating the Holy Spirit for the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father as the fullness of his fatherly love in and by whom the Father begets the Son.

The Son subsists eternally as Son only in relation to the Father and to the Holy Spirit, for his very identity is predicated on

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his being begotten of the Father from whom he takes his origin and on his being conformed by the Holy Spirit, in whom he is begotten, to be the Son of and for the Father. As the Son, he in turn gives himself completely to the Father as Son in the same Spirit who conformed him to be Son of and for the Father. Thus, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as the act of the Son's total giving himself in love for the Father who begot him in the same Holy Spirit of love. Therefore, the Son is Son only because he is begotten by the Father in the Holy Spirit and in the reciprocal giving of himself completely to the Father in the same Spirit in whom he was begotten.

The Holy Spirit subsists eternally as the Holy Spirit only in relation to the Father and to the Son, for his identity as the Holy Spirit is predicated on his coming forth from the Father as the one in whom the Father begets the Son and as the one in whom the Son, having been begotten in the Spirit, in turn completely gives himself, in the Spirit, to the Father as Son. Thus, while the Spirit comes forth from the Father as the Father's love in whom the Son is begotten and proceeds from the Son as the Son's love of the Father, the Holy Spirit equally only subsists, as the Holy Spirit, in the act of conforming the Father to be Father of and for the Son, and in the simultaneous act of conforming the Son to be Son of and for the Father. The Holy Spirit only subsists as the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father and to the Son.

A number of important conclusions must now be drawn which bear directly on God as a Trinity of persons and their act of creation. Firstly, because the persons of the Trinity only subsist as distinct subjects in relationship to one another, they are fully, completely, and absolutely relational. Each distinct person is defined as who he is singularly, and so subsists as who he is, only in relation to the other two. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit solely and completely are who they are only in relation to one another.

Secondly, because the persons of the Trinity subsist only in relation to one another, they are relations in act and only relations in act. As designating subsistent relations or relations fully in act, the terms 'Father', 'Son', and 'Holy Spirit' are therefore *verbs*, for they refer to, define, and name, solely and exclusively, the *interrelated acts* by which all three persons are who they are. The Father is not 'someone' who possesses fatherhood. The term 'Father' designates that the Father is completely and solely 'fatherhood in act' and nothing more. The Son is sonship itself for he is begotten by the Father in the Spirit and so gives himself in the same Spirit to the Father as Son. The Holy Spirit has no specific name because the Holy Spirit is solely defined as the one who proceeds from the Father and the Son and in so doing is the act that conforms the Father to be Father of and for the Son, and the Son to be Son of and for the Father. Put succinctly and boldly, the persons of the Trinity are not nouns; they are verbs and the names (nouns) which designate them—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—designate the acts by which they are defined.

By stating that the persons of the Trinity are verbs and not nouns does not mean that they are not acting subjects or persons, as if one needs a noun (a subject or person) in order to perform an action. Because the acts (the verbs) that completely define and constitute the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are personal or subjective acts (and not impersonal acts), the very acts themselves constitute the subjectivity or personhood of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Within the Trinity, the action (the verb) constitutes the subject and the subject is a verb—the action by which he is so constituted.

The Trinity as the One God is Utterly Relational and Active

From our doctrinal examination of the persons of the Trinity as subsistent relations and from our philosophical study of God as *ipsum esse*, we have discovered that both converge on the notion of 'pure act'. As subsistent relations, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are fully in act in that they are constituted and defined only in the act of being interrelated to one another. As stated above, because the persons of the Trinity are subsistent relations fully in act, they are verbs (pure acts) and not nouns (substances). Equally, the nature of God, as conceived philosophically, is pure act—*ipsum esse* or *actus purus*—and so is a verb as well. While Aquinas does not bring out this relationship, in that he never addresses the relationship between God being *ipsum esse* and being a Trinity of persons, yet he does state that 'relation really existing in God has the existence of the divine essence in no way distinct therefrom ... Thus it is clear that in God relation and essence do not differ from each other, but are one and the same' (*ST I*, q.28, a.2).

Therefore, it is *ipsum esse* which grounds the Trinity of persons as being subsistent relations fully in act, pure verbs, and likewise, it is the Trinity of persons as subsistent relations fully in act which grounds their being *ipsum esse*, pure verb. There is an inherent ontological reciprocal constitutive relationship, or better, a reciprocal constitutive ontological oneness, between being *ipsum esse* and being subsistent relations (and vice versa) for both express 'being' as *actus purus*. What we see then from the convergence of our doctrinal and philosophical study is that to be fully 'to-be' (*ipsum*

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esse) is 'to be fully relational' (a subsistent relation).

It is precisely because the one God is a Trinity of persons fully in act and so being itself, that he is able to bring other beings into existence and doing so by relating them to himself as he is in himself—as a Trinity of persons.

God and the Act of Creation

Having examined the notion of God both from a philosophical and theological understanding, the following discussion will first examine the philosophical understanding of God as Creator, and then address the Trinitarian issues, which will add theological depth and aesthetic beauty to the God/creature relationship.

First, for Aquinas, 'to create' is to bring something into being and so establishes a relationship between the Creator and the creature. Since the act of creation is the bringing of something into existence that did not previously exist, the act of creation does not imply motion, change, or succession, for motion, change, and succession only take place in previously existing beings. The act of creation is something much more radical and more dynamic than simply a change. The effect of the act of creation in the creature is the existence of the creature itself. 'Creation is not a change, but the very dependence of the created act of being upon the principle from which it is produced' (SCG II, 18, 2). Thus, a unique relationship is established between God and creation, a relationship such that if it ceased to be, the creature would cease to be. The relationship between God and the creature must be, therefore, always in act in that it is only by continuously being related to God that the creature exists.

Second, 'to create', as Aquinas states, signifies action on the part of God. God truly acts, but since God is pure act, the act of creation signifies no other action than the pure act that God is. Human beings cannot comprehend how a being who is pure act acts, but God can act in no other way for that is simply what God is—pure existence or pure act. Moreover, the act of creation itself demands that God act by no other act than the pure act that God is as *ipsum esse* for no other act is capable of such a singular effect, that is, bringing something into existence.

Thirdly, there is a further point that manifests that God and creatures are related to one another in the most intimate manner, far different and unlike a mediated relationship found among creatures. Because God creates by no other act than the pure act that God is, the creature is related to God as God actually exists as *ipsum esse* for it is only by being related to God as pure being that creatures themselves come to be and continue in existence—acquire their own act of existence from God. It is precisely because God is wholly other than creatures that allows him to be related to them in such an intimate manner. This view of Creator/creature relationship is very biblical. St Paul, when preaching in Athens at the Areopagus, told the men of Athens that the unknown God that they worshipped 'made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth', and so God 'does not live in shrines made by men'. Nonetheless, this utterly transcendent Creator God is very close to them. 'Yet he is not far from each one of us' for 'In him we live and move and have our being; as even some of your poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring"' (Acts 17:22-28). Thus, the act of creation establishes a relationship that is utterly intimate and thoroughly dynamic for it is only by being related immediately to God as God is that the creature comes to be and is. Aquinas writes:

God is in all things; not, indeed, as part of their essence, nor as an accident; but as an agent is present to that upon which it works ... Now since God is very being by his own essence, created being must be his proper effect ... Now God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being ... Therefore as long as a thing has being, God must be present to it; according to its mode of being. But being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally inherent in all things since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing. Hence it follows that God must be in all things, and most intimately so

(ST, I, 8, 1).

The kind of relationship that creatures and human beings have with God as Creator is grasped more fully when compared to the kind of relations they have with one another. Relationships between, for example, human beings are radically different from the Creator/creature relationship for they are always established through or by some mediating act (a hug or a kiss). The relation is established, by what can be called, 'act' to 'act', that is, both persons are engaged in the *act* of kissing and so are related, but, because the relationship is established through some mediating act (a kiss) the two people are never related to one another as each fully is. However, this is not the case in the Creator/creature relationship. While the relationship between God and creatures is equally 'act' to 'act', it is not mediated nor is it a partial

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expression of their being, but rather the complete and utter expression of their being. The 'act' (the *esse*) by which the creature is a creature only is in 'act' because it is unceasingly related to the 'pure act' that God is as *ipsum esse*—being itself. The Creator/creature relation is an unmediated relationship between the pure act of God as *ipsum esse* and the act, the *esse*, by which the creature is. The creature is totally defined as a creature in this relation for it establishes the creature as created. Moreover, unlike relations between human beings, the Creator/creature relation is perpetual and uninterrupted. Thus, this relation is absolutely immediate (no mediating action), supremely dynamic (pure act to created act), utterly intimate (a relation between God as God is in himself and the creature as it is in itself), and unbreakably enduring (it can never be severed).

Lastly, the above understanding of the act of creation is important in the light of the contemporary discussion concerning evolution. The act of creation and biological evolution are two distinct but interrelated notions—the first philosophical and theological and the second scientific. The act of creation, as seen above, concerns the very existence of beings; that they come to be and continue in existence. Evolution concerns itself with the biological changes that take place in the course of time according to the laws of science of beings that already exist. The notion of creation concerns itself with the philosophical and theological question of why there is something rather than nothing and discerns that the answer to this enquiry is that there is a being (God) capable of bringing into existence other beings. Evolution concerns itself with what happens, in accordance with the scientific laws of nature, to those beings once they exist—what evolutionary changes they may undergo in the course of time. Thus, there is no inherent conflict between religion and science. Such conflict only arises when philosophy or theology attempts to answer purely scientific issues, such as does the sun revolve around the earth, or when science attempts to address questions that are of a philosophical or theological nature—such as whether or not God exists.

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In order to appreciate the full significance of what we have just philosophically established concerning the Creator/creature relationship, we must now place it within the context of the Trinity. We want to grasp clearly, that in creating and sustaining the created order, God the Father acts through the Son/Word and in the Holy Spirit. While the Trinity does act *ad extra* as one, as the tradition demands, God never acts generically as the one God, for the one God is a Trinity of persons and must act as such. It must be remembered that, for Aquinas, 'Creation signified actively means the divine action, which is God's essence,' and that God's essence is the same as the Trinity of persons (*ST*, I, q.45, a.3, ad.1). Therefore, God never acts as *ipsum esse* or *actus purus* apart from doing so as a Trinity of persons. Moreover, while the Hebrew tradition sees the one God as Creator, in the light of subsequent Christian revelation the act of creation must be conceived as the act of God in so far as the one God is a Trinity of persons. The act of creation is common to all three persons and as such, it is the act of the one God, but this one act must be predicated of them in a manner that is appropriate to each person. Aquinas argues that creation cannot be said properly of any one of the three persons singularly 'since it is common to the whole Trinity'. However, it is not common to the Trinity generically as the one God:

The divine persons, according to the nature of their procession, have a causality respecting the creation of things ... Hence God the Father made the creature through his Word, which is his Son; and through his Love, which is the Holy Spirit. And so the processions of the persons are the type of the production of creatures inasmuch as they include the essential attributes, knowledge and will

(*ST*, I, q.45, a.6).

Further, for Aquinas, while all three persons share in the divine nature, they do so 'in a kind of order'. The Son receives his divinity from the Father and the Holy Spirit receives it from the Father and the Son, and therefore this same order is maintained within the act of creation. The term 'Creator' is attributed to the Father for he receives his power to create from no other, but he creates through the Son, his Word, and through the Holy Spirit, his goodness and love (*ST*, I, q.45, a.6, ad.2).

While Aquinas does not fully articulate the Trinity/creature relationship, we will attempt to do so here. Since the persons of the Trinity share in the pure act of divine being as subsistent relations fully in act, they possess no self-constituting relational potential and so they embrace the singular ability to relate, in the act of creation, the creature to themselves as they are, and are therefore related to the creature as who they are in themselves. Thus, as we saw above in our philosophical enquiry, the Trinity/creature relation is equally absolutely immediate (no mediating action between the persons of the Trinity and the creature), supremely dynamic (the persons of the Trinity fully in act are related to the

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created act by which the creature is), utterly intimate (a relation between the persons of the Trinity as they truly exist in themselves and the creature as it is in itself), and unbreakably enduring (it can never be severed). Moreover, if we now add to this that the creature involved in this relationship is a human person, it means that the Trinity of persons is actually and fully related to the human person as they are in themselves for the human person is related to them as they are. The relation between the Trinity and a human person is absolutely relational and utterly personal for the human person (the human 'I') only exists as a human person (a human 'I') by being related to the persons (the divine 'I's') of the Trinity in a personal manner—the human 'I' to the 'I' of each divine person.

In this regard, one further very significant point must be made more explicit. Each creature, and more importantly, each human person, is related to each person of the Trinity in a singular manner or according to the proper order within the Trinity, that is, the creature or human person is related to the Father as the Father is, to the Son as the Son is, and to the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit is.

This is why Aquinas could state that the name 'Word' signifies a relation to creatures:

Word implies relation to creatures. For God by knowing himself, knows every creature. Now the word conceived in the mind is representative of everything that is actually understood. Hence there are in themselves different words for different things which we understand. But because God by one act understands himself and all things, his one only Word is expressive not only of the Father, but of all creation. And as the knowledge of God is only cognitive as regards God, whereas as regards creatures, it is both cognitive and operative, so the Word of God is only expressive of what is in God the Father, but is both expressive and operative of creatures; and therefore it is said (Ps. 33:9): 'He spoke, and they were made'; because in the Word is implied the operative idea of what God makes

(*ST*, I, q.34, a.3).

God the Father is the author of creation not only because he knows the whole of creation in his Word, but also because he creates what is known in the Word through the Word. Thus, creation is related to the Father not only as known in the Word, but it is also related to the Father through the Word. Moreover, the Word is related to creation not only as the one in whom the Father knows creation, but also as the one through whom creation comes to be. Creation, then, is related to the Word not only as the one in whom it is known by the Father, but also as the one through whom it is created. The Father's knowledge of creation is the most thorough, dynamic, and intimate, for he knows creation in the very act of begetting his Son or speaking his Word. Thus, he knows creation in the very same act by which he knows himself—through the Word (see *ST*, I, q.14, a.8).

Aquinas similarly states concerning the Holy Spirit:

The Father loves not only the Son, but also himself and us, by the Holy Spirit ... Hence, as the Father speaks himself and every creature by his begotten Word, inasmuch as the Word *begotten* adequately represents the Father and every creature; so he loves himself and every creature by the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as the Holy Spirit proceeds as the love of the primal goodness whereby the Father loves himself and every creature

(*ST*, I, q.37, a.2, ad.3).

As the Father knows the whole of creation in the Word and so creates through the Word, so the Father loves not only his Son but also the whole of creation in the Holy Spirit, and it is because of this love (in this Spirit) that he creates it through his Word. As the Father lovingly begets his Son in the Spirit so the Father lovingly creates, in the same Spirit, through his Word. Thus, creatures participate in the same intimate, passionate, divine love of the Spirit in which the Father and Son love one another, and so are related to the Father and to the Son in the same passionate love of the Spirit.

We clearly perceive now the awesome truth that because creatures, especially human persons, are, in the act of creation, related to the persons of the Trinity as they are in their own subsistent relations, and so are related to each person of the Trinity in a specific and proper manner, they are assumed into the very mystery of the Trinity itself. Thus, the act of creation mirrors, though imperfectly, the processions within the Trinity. 'It is evident that relation to the creature is implied both in the Word and in the proceeding Love, as it were in a secondary way, inasmuch as the divine truth and goodness are a principle of understanding and loving all creatures' (*ST*, I, q.37, a.2, ad.3). If the act of creation establishes such an intimate and dynamic relationship between the persons of the Trinity and human beings, how much more intimate and dynamic must be the relationship established by grace!

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To confirm the absolute love of God for creation one further point must be made concerning the Trinity. Aquinas states that there are two reasons why knowledge of the divine persons is necessary:

[Firstly,] it was necessary for the right idea of creation. The fact of saying that God made all things by his Word excludes the error of those who say that God produced things by necessity. When we say that in him there is a procession of love, we show that God produced creatures not because he needed them, nor because of any other extrinsic reason, but on account of the love of his own goodness

(*ST*, I, q.32, a.1, ad.3).

That we needed a knowledge of the Trinity in order to have a proper understanding of creation seems, at first sight, a rather strange argument, yet it is one of Aquinas's great insights. The lack of such knowledge and its consequences were readily exemplified in the various pagan traditions and Greek philosophies. The pagan gods needed creatures for their own happiness, and even within Platonic emanationism and Stoic pantheism the world was a necessary correlative to God. Even the Jewish people, despite their belief in the One Creator God, were not immune from pagan influences, as their history manifests. However, the revelation that God is a Trinity establishes the ontological independent transcendence of God in that God, as a Trinity of persons, is already self-fulfilled both by way of knowledge and of love. The Father knows himself perfectly in his Word and loves himself perfectly in the Holy Spirit. This does not imply a selfish, self-centred, and self-contained deity, but the exact opposite. The transcendent independence of the Trinity, as wholly other, allows the act of creation to be a sheer act of the Trinity's loving goodness and freedom. Because the persons have no need of self-fulfilment, they are motivated solely by their beneficent and altruistic love to bring others into existence and so bestow on them their goodness. Commenting on Dionysius, Aquinas states:

Divine love did 'not' allow 'him to remain in himself without fruit', that is, without the production of creatures, but love 'moved him to operate according' to a most excellent mode of operation according as he produced all things in being (*esse*). For from love of his goodness it proceeded that he willed to pour out and to communicate his goodness to others, insofar as it is possible, namely by way of similitude, and that his goodness did not remain in him, but flowed out into others

(*De Divinis Nominibus*, IV, lect. 9 [§409]).

Conclusion: Creation Possesses an Eternal End

This essay has focused on the Christian understanding of the one God as a Trinity of persons and the act of creation. Nonetheless, in bringing beings into existence the Trinity had a purpose—and end in view—especially for human beings. The Father desired that human beings would become his children after the manner of his own eternal Son and that this would be achieved through the transformative power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Creation has an eternal purpose. There is to be a new heaven and a new earth, and human beings are to be new creations in Christ. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

Since God could create everything out of nothing, he can also, through the Holy Spirit, give spiritual life to sinners by creating a pure heart in them and bodily life to the dead through the Resurrection. God 'gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist' (Rom. 4:17). And since God was able to make light shine in darkness by his Word, he can also give the light of faith to those who do not yet know him

(CCC 298).

Suggested Reading

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