

THE MOTIVE FOR CREATION AND INCARNATION

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The Motive for Creation

God created men out of love. God loves men. That is equivalent to saying that God created men *to make them happy*. In more technical terms I think one must say that the happiness of men was the *primary* end of creation. For the «primary» end of an action, one means the end without which the agent would not have done that action.

The affirmation that «God loves men», continuously repeated by Sacred Scripture and Tradition, has nevertheless constituted a number of speculative difficulties for Christian theologians, difficulties which only recently have been overcome. Such difficulties arose from the acceptance of a too simplisistic principle which had been formulated by Aristotle.

According to Aristotle, God could not undergo any influence, any imposition, from realities which were external to him, because such an influence would have constituted an imperfection for God. Therefore God, for Aristotle, did not know and, much less, did not desire and did not love the beings of the world¹.

St. Thomas accepted the Aristotelian principle as evident, but he wanted to affirm also that God desires and loves creatures. He thought that it was possible to resolve the contradiction by saying that God wills realities distinct from Him, «propter se ipsum» or «wanting itself» or «wanting His goodness» (St. Th. I, q. 19, a. 2, ad 2). Nevertheless, in this way, the Aristotelian principle is only verbally saved, since the real meaning of the phrase «God desires men and their happiness by wanting His goodness» is simply that «God desires men and their happiness»; the added «wanting His goodness» is a twisted expression which does not add anything. «Wanting his goodness» coincides with wanting the happiness of men, and that implies an *influence* on the part of creatures in the sense that the desired is a *motive* of divine will. That would be valid even if the happiness of men might be considered as a means for acquiring the perfection «goodness»; but in the case of God, whose goodness is true, not egoistic, totally disinterested, the happiness of men cannot be considered in any way as a means. On the other hand, the fact that the happiness of men is the primary end for which God has created them, does

¹ Keep in mind that for Aristotle the world was not created by God, but existed by Fate.

not even minimally oppose the fact that God desires and rejoices in the exchange of love with his creatures: there is no disordinate egoism in this. In every pure form of love there is in the lover *the joy for the happiness of the loved one and the joy for the exchange of love from the part of the loved one.*

The Fathers of the First Vatican Council found themselves in a situation similar to that of St. Thomas, when they dealt with the motive for creation. Following the steps of St. Thomas, they accepted Aristotle's principle, but on the other hand, clearly thought that God loves men. The second paragraph of chapter I of the dogmatic Constitution «*Dei Filius*»² was influenced by this situation about which one can make considerations parallel to those which were done above with respect to St. Thomas' phrase.

The difficulty was really resolved, in my opinion, when the Aristotelian principle was recently reexamined and the conclusion was reached that what is contrary to the absoluteness of God (that is to the full dominion of himself) is an imposition on the part of creatures which is total, radical, independent from God. Instead, an imposition which «in its roots» is wanted by God himself, and therefore, is dependent on God (inasmuch as he has freely wanted and created creatures) is not absurd; in this case one is dealing with an imposition which has not been undergone radically, but which has been radically desired³. This solution had its beginning in a book by the Protestant Japanese theologian K. Kitamori, and then had some numerous supporters among Ca-

² «This only true God, for his goodness and omnipotence, not for the scope of augmenting his beatitude nor for acquiring it, but for the scope of manifesting his perfection by means of the goods which he gives to creatures, with a very free will in deciding... (produced all the creatures out of nothing)». DS 3002.

Two amendments were proposed by some Fathers of the Council (the 23rd and 24th) in which it was said that God had created in order to *communicate* his perfection to creatures. These amendments, as the Spokesman Archbishop V. Gasser later explained, were not accepted by the Deputy Commission, not because they were not very fair, but because it was judged that the idea of «communication» was already well expressed in the text by the words «by means of the goods which he gives to creatures» (*Collectio Lacensis*, vol. VII, col. 110-111). It seems to me (although I could be erring here) that amendment 23 especially, would have contributed to a net improvement in the text.

Among the canons corresponding to Chapter I, there is one that says: «If someone will deny that the world was created for the glory of God, anathema sit». The Spokesman Gasser explained that there one intended to speak not of the «end of the working person (that is God)», but (of the «end of the work (that is the world)» (*Op. cit.*, col. 116).

³ Aristotle could not have thought in terms of a imposition wanted «in radice» by God himself, since he did not know that God created the world. The idea of creation from nothing is a Christian idea.

tholic theologians, including J. Galot ⁴.

1) It is opportune to add that the Aristotelian principle has had an influence on Philosophy and on speculative Thomistic and Catholic Theology in various other questions, beyond that of the motive for creation. The principal ones derived from that principle are the following.

2) God knows the creatures *in Himself*, not *in themselves*.

3) Free acts of intelligent creatures are *only conditions* of the divine cognition (of those acts), *not causes*.

4) Creation is a divine operation «formally immanent, *only virtually transient*».

5) *God does not experience joy or pain* for the good or bad acts of creatures. The expressions in Holy Scripture which speak in this sense are to be understood as anthropomorphisms.

6) In the incarnated Word the cognitions, volitions, joys and human sufferings *have not reached the divine Person, but are terminated within human nature*.

7) The Father and the Holy Spirit *have not suffered* in the passion of Christ, *nor have they rejoiced* for his resurrection.

In my opinion all these affirmations are mistaken: the opposite is true ⁵.

A final consideration can be given regarding this argument. The Order to which I belong, the Society of Jesus, has as its motto «Ad maiorem Dei gloriam». It is a magnificent motto, suited also for every institution or person who proposes to fully do the will of God. He who fully does the will of God, realizes the greatest glory of God (realizable by him). But there is also *much more*: he who fully does the will of God, provokes the greatest *joy* of God. Therefore, a motto which would go further in depth than the «Ad maiorem Dei gloriam», would be this: «Ad maius Dei gaudium».

The reason why, in this motto and in other expressions of the same type, the theologians preferred to speak of «glory» instead of the «joy» of God, is to be sought in the acceptance of the Aristotelian-Thomistic principle mentioned above. The «glory» (defined by St. Thomas as: «clara cum laude notitia») is something which is more extrinsic to God, something which touches him and yet does not touch him; instead, «joy» is a much more intimate reality. And those theologians thought that we cannot thus influence the intimacy of God. On the contrary *we can* do it; we have the splendid power of making God *smile*, to *delight* Him

⁴ Nonetheless, even today there are many Catholic theologians, more linked to St. Thomas, who do not accept this solution.

⁵ I have amply dealt with these questions in the following articles: *Immutabilità e mutabilità di Dio*, in *Asprenas*, 1981, 1, 57-75 and *Questioni sull'Unità e Trinità di Dio*, in *Teresianum-Ephemerides Carmeliticae*, 1986, 1, pp. 191-204, above all in pp. 203-204.

who first *has loved us, who fell in love with us*, and created us to make us happy and went to his death on the cross in order to redeem us.

The Motive for Incarnation

On the motive for the Incarnation there are various theological opinions, two of which are the most typical: 1) the opinion of St. Thomas, according to whom the primary end⁶ of the Incarnation was the redemption of sinful men; 2) the opinion of Duns Scotus according to whom the Word would have been incarnated even if Adam had not sinned (today we can say: even if men had not sinned).

The opinion of St. Thomas is founded on the explicit and repeated affirmation of Sacred Scripture that the Son was incarnated to save the world, in order to expiate the sins of men. A second motive, which is not opposed to the preceding one, is mentioned in the Letter to the Hebrews: he was made man in order to be able to have pity on us in our weaknesses, having felt them by direct experience (Heb. 4:15).

The opinion of Duns Scotus is founded on some affirmations of Sacred Scripture which speak of Christ as the man most loved by God and who was exalted by God as the most sublime of all creatures, to whom all the other creatures were submitted⁷. From these exaltations of Christ as the most beautiful of all created beings, the idea is derived that he would have been realized by himself, even if he had not to expiate the sins of men. From this, the idea is also derived that the beauty of Christ was the primary end not only of the incarnation, but also of creation itself.

It seems to me, after various uncertainties, that the opinion of St. Thomas is valid and I will try to demonstrate this gradually. What is necessary to keep in mind in each step is that the «man» Christ is not a subject, a human person; he has only a human *nature* which has the function of a *menas* in order that the *divine person of the Word* can also live a human life, that is, in order that he can understand, will, feel as we understand, will and feel.

1) If men had not been created, it seems to me that an incarnation of the Son would not have made sense. In fact, it does not seem to me that God has an interest in assuming any created

⁶ Remember that for the «primary» end of an action, one intends the end without which the agent would not have done that action.

⁷ It is enough to remember the Christological hymns of Col. 1 and Phil. 2.

nature (human or non-human) to love himself even with a created love, given that he already loves himself with a divine love which is infinitely superior to every possible created love, under *all* aspects. And neither does it seem to me that the Father has an interest in his Son assuming a created nature to love him (the Father), also with a created love, given that the Son already loves the Father with a divine love which is superior to every possible created love, under *all* aspects.

2) If God had created men, but had not submitted them to a test and, instead, he had made them happy immediately, even in this case it seems to me that an incarnation of God would have had an interest neither for God, nor for the Father, nor for men, since all these subjects would have already been loved by God with a divine love which was superior to the created love of the incarnated person, under *all* aspects. Neither can one think that God would have been incarnated in order to share, through a direct experience, the joys of men, since God already has a direct experience of joy which is perfect under *all* aspects⁸.

3) If, instead, human creatures are subjected to a serious test, such as to provoke frequent sins⁹, and if to repair this situation¹⁰, in the best way, a proportionate expiation (that is «de condigno») which is, at the same time, *human and of infinite value* is necessary, then the incarnation of the Son fully makes sense, has a function, a scope.

Note that the man exalted by Scripture as the man who loved God the most, who was most loved by God, who constitutes the most beautiful and harmonious of all created beings, is not simply *Christ*, but is always Christ as the *redeemer*. Equally note that Christ did not have any need for a human nature in order to have the direct experience of joy (because he already had a perfect experience of this as God), but he had need of a human nature in order to have the direct experience of our illnesses.

What I have said can be thus synthesized: the primary end¹¹ of creation is the happiness of men. Even the primary end of the redeeming incarnation is the happiness of men.

The redeeming incarnation (or Christ the redeemer) is a means to reach the primary end of Creation; that is incarnation

⁸ In the hypotheses 1 and 2, even if the human nature assumed by the Son were in itself particularly perfect (as that of Christ), this would have the radical defect of being *useless*, of being a means without any end.

⁹ Moreover such a test that human creatures *by themselves*, without a special aid from God, would all sin with practical certainty.

¹⁰ That is, in order to obtain the pardon of sins or the previous graces for avoiding them.

¹¹ Instead of «primary end» one can speak of «necessary end», or of «initial end» (in the mind of God).

is a near, proximate end, added for reaching the ultimate end (which is the primary one).

With that, however, all the aspects of the problem posed by the redeeming incarnation have not been solved. What is lacking is the consideration of another aspect, which is fixed in the mind of Duns Scotus. Such an aspect of the problem is this: the means (that is, Christ the redeemer), realized to obtain the primary end (that is, the happiness of men), is in itself a beauty superior to the primary end. Therefore, this means cannot but have exercised an attraction on God when he decided to realize the complex, creative, actual plan. Perhaps the situation can be well expressed and resolved by affirming that the happiness of men has always remained for God the *primary* end of creation, never subordinated as a means to the redeeming incarnation (that is, to Christ the redeemer), but the means added (Christ the redeemer) became the *principal* end of creation, that is *the end which more than all the others*, has attracted the will of God in realizing the actual plan of creation. Note well: not simply *Christ*, but *Christ the redeemer* became the *principal* end of creation.

There is still to add that, given that God wanted to subject men to a serious test and that he demanded a proportionate expiation in order to give the pardon, Christ the redeemer was a *necessary means* (or «condicio sine qua non») for reaching the primary end of creation and thus also for creating. God, who is love, would not have created a humanity destined entirely or almost entirely¹² for condemnation. If God has created actual humanity, this could only happen because he had already decided, beforehand, to concede the pardon of sins by means of Christ the redeemer.

Therefore, it seems I can conclude that *we have received all gifts* (not only those which are supernatural, but also those which are natural, beginning with creation), *through our dependence on Christ the redeemer, by means of the Cross of Christ*. We have been created in the prevision of Christ the redeemer.

¹² I say «almost entirely» because I think that, even without the passion of Christ, God would have given to men, albeit in a very minor measure, the necessary aids in order to have the real practical possibility of saving oneself.