

THE PERCEPTION OF *LOGOS UT RATIO* AND *LOGOS UT VERBUM* IN CREATION

A Reflection in the Context of the 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea

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ABSTRACT: We examine the Biblical roots of the doctrine of divine creation through the Word, then the respective positions of Greek philosophers and Christian authors (in particular Plato, Philo of Alexandria, Plotinus and Arius), and finally the consolidation of the Church's definitive position on the matter at the Council of Nicaea (with Athanasius, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, among others). We argue that the fundamental structure of a divine Logos (*logos ut verbum*) and a created world with its own intelligibility (*logos ut ratio*) is already present in Greek philosophical thought. However the teaching of Nicaea is critical in our understanding of the relationship between the creating Logos and the created logos. We finally draw some conclusions on the nature of the relationship between *logos ut ratio* and *logos ut verbum*.

KEYWORDS: *Logos*, Science, Creation, Theology, Council of Nicaea, Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti.

RIASSUNTO: Esaminiamo in primo luogo le radici bibliche della dottrina della creazione divina attraverso il Verbo, poi le rispettive posizioni dei filosofi greci e degli autori cristiani (in particolare Platone, Filone di Alessandria, Plotino e Ario), e infine il consolidamento della posizione definitiva della Chiesa in materia al Concilio di Nicea (con Atanasio, Agostino e Tommaso d'Aquino, tra gli altri). Riteniamo che la struttura fondamentale di un Logos divino (*logos ut verbum*) e di un mondo creato con una sua intelligibilità (*logos ut ratio*) è già presente nel pensiero filosofico greco. Tuttavia, l'insegnamento di Nicea è fondamentale per la comprensione del rapporto tra il Logos creatore e il logos creato. Traiamo infine alcune conclusioni sulla natura del rapporto tra *logos ut ratio* e *logos ut verbum*.

PAROLE CHIAVE: *Logos*, Scienza, Creazione, Teologia, Concilio di Nicea, Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti.

SUMMARY: I. *The Biblical Roots of the Doctrine of Creation Through and for the Word*. 1. Creation Through the Word in John's Gospel. 2. Creation Through and for Christ in Paul. II. *The Logic of Creation and the Divine Logos in Greek Philosophy and Christian Theologians: the Theological History of Nicaea*. 1. Plato. 2. Philo of Alexandria. 3. Plotinus. 4. Arius of Alexandria. 5. Nicaea and Athanasius. 6. Augustine, Aquinas and Other Theologians. III. *Christ and Creation: the Contrast Between Greek and Christian Mind-Forms*. IV. *Creation, the Logos, Science and Revelation*.

The world around is marked by many features and elements we ask about: its unity, truth, goodness, intelligibility, order, diversity and harmony. We observe its laws, its balance and justice, its nature and essence. We speak of its beauty, purpose, fulness, life, dynamic permanence, fixity and flexibility, solidity, capacity to self-regulate. We recognize the solidarity of all beings, their consistency and connectedness, the hierarchy and dependence between them. And so on. In general terms, this is what we would call the *logos* of the created world, its proper meaning, its logic, its intelligibility, its rationality. More specifically it may be designated as the *logos ut ratio*.

Yet the question arises: where does this reality and rationality derive from in the first place? Where do all these properties and characteristics have their origin? Perhaps they do not have any origin, springing forth from the universe itself. Perhaps the intelligibility and logic, the *logos ut ratio* of the universe, are the unforeseen result of blind evolution from chaos to order.

Or would it be more correct to say that the *logos* of the physical universe comes from outside itself, as a personal word, as a *logos ut verbum*, which confers intelligibility and rationality on the universe?¹ And

¹ The distinction between *logos ut ratio* and *logos ut verbum* may be found in many works of G. Tanzella-Nitti, especially G. TANZELLA-NITTI, *Jesus Christ, Incarnation and Doctrine of Logos*, in *Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Religion and Science* (2008): <https://inters.org/jesus-christ-logos>; IDEM, *La dimensione personalista della verità e il sapere scientifico*, in V. POSSENTI (ed.), *Ragione e Verità*, Armando, Roma 2005, 101-121; IDEM, *Filosofia e Rivelazione. Attese della ragione, sorprese dell'annuncio cristiano*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2008, 83-93; IDEM, *Teologia fondamentale in contesto scientifico*, Città Nuova, Roma 2015-2018, vol. 1: *La Teologia fondamentale e la sua dimensione di Apologia*, 100-103; vol. 2: *La credibilità del cristianesimo*, 619-23; and especially vol. 3: *Religione e Rivelazione*, 153-62. See also O. JUURIKALA, *Discovering Creation as Personal Presence: From Logos ut Ratio to Logos ut Verbum*, in *From Logos to Person: 5th Interdisciplinary Conference at The Polis Institute, Jerusalem*, October, 2021.

this could be understood in two possible ways. Firstly, as the fruit of human effort: of work and human activity, as Marx might say, or from the active and unifying synthesis of sense data by means of immanent intellectual categories, as Kant would hold. Put another way: perhaps the *logos ut verbum* of the universe, its logic, expressivity, intelligibility, the light it contains, belongs to humans, who to their best knowledge are the only creatures capable of conferring intelligibility on things.² Secondly, however, given the metaphysical contingency of the created world, perhaps it would be more correct to say that the *logos ut verbum* refers to some kind of personal presence *outside* the universe. Perhaps a *transcendent, divine Word* that communicates with the universe above and beyond the material and the anthropological? This would account for the *logos ut verbum* “as Someone who is both before nature and before man, and thus as distinct from both. In that way, once we accept that the real physical world is presented with a *givenness* that science does not create but rather receives, the passage from a *logos ut ratio* to a *logos ut verbum* can be clarified in terms of *recognizing the given as gift*.”³ The givenness of the created world that science encounters and recognizes, reflects the divine gift of creation.

In fact, the Christian creed holds unequivocally that all things were created by God through the eternal Word/Son, Jesus Christ.⁴ In the power of the Holy Spirit God’s ‘logic’ was implanted on the created world. This logic therefore reflects the mind of God, the Word of God. And this is what the human mind encounters when it comes into cognitive contact with the universe. Thus we may say that to know the universe is, to some degree, to discover the mind of God, the word of God. As we saw above the one term *logos* may be applied to two connected realities: the divine Word present in God and the created word present in the world. There is a likeness, a parallel between them, a participation

² In other words, are we humans fundamentally *passive* with respect to knowledge, or rather *active*. On different epistemological positions, cfr. my work *Witnessing, Truth and the Dynamics of Christian Evangelization*, Bloomsbury, London 2025, chapter 1.

³ G. TANZELLA-NITTI, *Teologia fondamentale in contesto scientifico*, vol. 3, 160.

⁴ DH 150. On the notion of the world being created by means of the *Logos*, or Word, cfr. P. O’CALLAGHAN, *God’s Gift of the Universe. An Introduction to Creation Theology*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington 2022.

of one in the other. But they are not coincident. In fact the difference between them is great, as is that between Creator and creature.⁵

It is interesting to note, however, that the same fundamental structure of a divine *Logos* (*logos ut verbum*) and a created world with its own intelligibility (*logos ut ratio*) is also present in Greek philosophical thought. In fact, Christian reflection on the divine *Logos* developed to an important degree on the basis of the teachings of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics and the Neo-Platonists. Nonetheless, the difference between the two versions—the Greek and the Christian—is profound, as was confirmed at the fourth-century Council of Nicaea which taught, against Arius, some 1700 years ago, that the *Logos*, made incarnate in Jesus Christ our Savior, is divine in the fullest sense of the word, is ‘consubstantial’ with the Father, and not subordinate to the Godhead, as Greek philosophers held. The teaching of Nicaea, as we shall see, is critical in our understanding of the relationship between the creating *Logos* and the created *logos*.

In the coming pages we shall examine the Biblical roots of the doctrine of divine creation through the Word, then the respective positions of Greek philosophers and Christian authors (in particular Plato, Philo of Alexandria, Plotinus and Arius), and finally the consolidation of the Church’s definitive position on the matter (with Athanasius, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, among others). At the end of this reflection we shall attempt to draw some conclusions on the nature of the relationship between *logos ut ratio* and *logos ut verbum*.

I. THE BIBLICAL ROOTS OF THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION THROUGH AND FOR THE WORD

The doctrine of creation is to be found throughout the whole of Scripture. Genesis is of particular importance, as are the prophetic and wisdom writings.⁶ The New Testament speaks little about creation, and the reason for this is simple: the doctrine is taken for granted by the hagiographers.⁷

⁵ On the relationship between the transcendence of God and his immanence within creation, cfr. O'CALLAGHAN, *God's Gift of the Universe*, 157-62.

⁶ Cfr. *ibidem*, 39-74. Cfr. also M.V. FABBRI, M.Á. TÁBET (eds.), *Creazione e salvezza nella Bibbia*, Edusc, Roma 2009.

⁷ Cfr. O'CALLAGHAN, *God's Gift of the Universe*, 75-95.

In fact, many New Testament texts dealing with creation are to be found in the context of praise, proclamation of faith in the resurrection, of trust in God the Savior, and so on. Creation is never separate from the other works of God. Rather it is the presupposition of the latter, and even though creation has a relevance all of its own, it is not correct to speak of a solution of continuity between divine action “at the beginning” and the rest of God’s action in benefit of humanity.⁸

The novelty introduced by the New Testament involves principally the presence and action of Christ, God’s own Word made flesh in the Spirit. This may be seen especially in the teachings of John and Paul.

1. Creation Through the Word in John’s Gospel

Firstly we shall examine the doctrine of creation through the Word/Son in John’s Gospel. John’s theology of creation is situated principally in the prologue of his Gospel (1:1-18), and is based on two motifs with deep roots in the Old Testament: the power of the word and the personification of Wisdom.⁹

In effect, Scripture on repeated occasions tells us that God creates *through the word*. The “word” in Scripture is not a simple means by which an abstract idea is communicated; it is the sign and powerful expression of the presence and activity of God (Gn 1:6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29). Isaiah presents the word as *the vehicle of divine power* (Is 55:10). By means of the word God *called* Israel and at the same time *constituted* it as his people. Thus, creation is a product of the divine word. “Let all your creatures serve you, for *you spoke, and they were made*. You sent forth your Spirit, and it formed them; there is none that can resist your voice” (Jud 16:14). “My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand forth together” (Is 48:13). “Let all the earth fear the Lord, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth” (Ps 32:8). The notion of word coming from the “mouth” of God fits well with the revealed doctrine of creation, for God when he creates does not merely give “instructions” to a previously

⁸ L. LADARIA, *Antropologia teologica*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1982, 20.

⁹ Cfr. A. BOTTINO, *Logos, Sapienza, Creazione*, in FABBRI, TÁBET (eds.), *Creazione e salvezza*, 377-86.

existing messenger or worker who goes on to construct the universe out of previously existing matter (which is what the Greek explanation of the Demiurge entails), but rather he carries it out himself, directly, personally, with his own power, without intermediaries of any kind.

Not unrelated to creation through the word is *creation through Wisdom*.¹⁰ We can sum up this teaching as follows. First, creation takes place through wisdom (Ps 8; Prv 8:27, 29-31), which penetrates the whole of reality, complete and entire (Wis 7:22-30). Then, Wisdom is superior to the created world (Bar 3:29-31), yet, though eternal, is distinct from God and at the same time made by him (Sir 1:1, 4, 6-8; 24:8-9). Besides, Scripture speaks of a deep and powerful *mutual* relationship between God and Wisdom (Bar 3:31; Jb 28:23-27). Johann Auer describes the passage between Old and New Testaments in respect of creation as follows: "In the place of the created wisdom of the Old Testament appears the eternal Son of the eternal Father, as principle, center and end of the history of salvation."¹¹

The similarities of Wisdom with the Word through whom all things were made (John's prologue), and with the Christ through whom, for whom, and in whom the world was created (Paul), are quite obvious. Wisdom, though used in the feminine in the Old Testament (*chokhmah* in Hebrew, *sophia* in Greek) and in general usage,¹² becomes fully personified¹³ in the New. Indeed it becomes a Messianic title. Christ identifies himself with Wisdom (Mt 23:34; Lk 11:49-50).¹⁴ Interestingly, Church Fathers hesitated between attributing the term to Christ or to the Holy

¹⁰ On Wisdom in Scripture, cfr. M. SILVA (ed.), *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols., 2 ed., Zondervan, Grand Rapids 2014, (abbrev. NIDNTTE), 4:330-40, s.v. σοφία.

¹¹ J. AUER, *Die Welt - Gottes Schöpfung*, 2nd ed., F. Pustet, Regensburg 1983, 38.

¹² Cfr. E.-B. ALLO, *Sagesse et Pneuma dans la première épître aux Corinthiens*, «Revue Biblique» 43 (1934) 321-46; G. VON RAD, *Weisheit in Israel*, Neukirchen Kreis Moers, Neukirchen 1970; L. BOUYER, *Sophia, ou, le monde en Dieu*, Cerf, Paris 1994; J. TRUBLET (ed.), *La sagesse biblique. De l'Ancien au Nouveau Testament*, Cerf, Paris 1995; M. CIMOSA (ed.), *La sapienza nella Bibbia*, Borla, Roma 2013.

¹³ Cfr. A.M. SINNOTT, *The Personification of Wisdom*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2005.

¹⁴ Cfr. A. FEUILLET, Y. CONGAR, *Le Christ sagesse de Dieu d'après les épîtres pauliniennes*, Librairie V. Lecoffre J. Gabalda & C.ie, Paris 1966; S. KIM, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 3rd ed., J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen 1985, 173-339.

Spirit. But with time the former reading prevailed.¹⁵ Christ is the eternal Wisdom of the Father. This doctrine finds its full expression in the prologue of John's gospel.

The most relevant text of John's prologue (Jn 1:1-18) reads as follows:¹⁶

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (Jn 1-5).

Edwin C. Hoskyns makes the following incisive observation on the text: "That Jesus once spoke is more fundamental for the understanding of the *Logos* than is the history of Greek philosophy, or the story of the westward progress of oriental mysticism, more fundamental even than the first chapter of Genesis or the eighth chapter of Proverbs."¹⁷

The teaching of John's prologue may be presented synthetically in the following five stages: (1) God and the Word are one and the same (vv. 1, 12, 14, 18), although (2) a distinction may be posited between the Father and the Son as persons (vv. 1, 18); (3) but the Word is particularly present to creation, for "all things were made through him" (v. 3) and "in him was life and the life was the light of men" (v. 4), the play of words between "life" and "light" offering a key insight into the kind of

¹⁵ Theophilus (*Ad Autolyicum*, II.15) and Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 20:1-3) both apply the term "Wisdom" to the Holy Spirit, whereas Augustine (*De Trinitate* VII, 3:5) and Thomas Aquinas (*STI*, q. 38, a. 8; III, q. 3, a. 8) identify it with the Son.

¹⁶ Cfr. M.-É. BOISMARD, *Le prologue de saint Jean*, Cerf, Paris 1953; A. FEUILLET, *Le prologue du quatrième Évangile: étude de théologie johannique*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1968; G.R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John*, WBC 36, Word Books, Waco 1987, 1-15; E.L. MILLER, *Salvation-History in the Prologue of John: The Significance of John 1:3-4*, Brill, Leiden 1989; M. ENDO, *Creation and Christology: A Study on the Johannine Prologue in the Light of Early Jewish Creation Accounts*, J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen 2002; D.J. MACLEOD, *The Creation of the Universe by the Word*, «Bibliotheca Sacra» 160 (2003) 187-201; R. FABRIS, *Creazione nel Logos e nascita da Dio in Giovanni*, in FABRIS, TABET (eds.), *Creazione e salvezza*, 213-25; P. BORGES, *The Gospel of John: More Light from Philo, Paul and Archaeology: The Scriptures, Tradition, Exposition, Settings, Meaning*, Brill, Leiden 2014; J.G. VAN DER WATT, R.A. CULPEPPER, U. SCHNELLE (eds.), *The Prologue of the Gospel of John: Its Literary, Theological, and Philosophical Contexts*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2016.

¹⁷ E.C. HOSKYNs, *The Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed., Faber and Faber, London 1948, 137.

presence the Word enjoys among creatures; (4) the Word, coming into the world created through him is not recognized by the world (vv. 10-11), and especially by his own people, on account of the darkness and gloom introduced by sin that kills life and quenches light; and (5) for this reason the Word, life and light, became flesh to save the world, reveal Wisdom, and bring creation back to the Father (vv. 1, 4, 9, 14, 17). We can see that creation is totally tied up with salvation.

As regards John's teaching on God's creation in the prologue, the following six observations may be made in respect of the *Logos*, or Word.

First, that creation is an entirely divine work; creatures have no involvement whatsoever in bringing it into existence. The Word is not a mere intermediate instrument, a Demiurge, a first creature, a created creator. Rather he is with God and is God.

Second, God created the world through the Word. The expression applied by Paul to Christ, *dia autou* ("through him") is employed here. Thus the Word is presented as the "mediator" of creation. John uses terminology that is frequent in Greek philosophy, that of Plato and Philo especially. This is of help in understanding the text, although the prologue goes beyond the positions of the philosophers on many fronts. Besides, the prologue evokes Genesis,¹⁸ as well as Proverbs and Wisdom. This helps us to situate and understand the text, which is ultimately meant to present the person and saving work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, eternal Word of God made man.

In the third place, since the Word is *one with God*, as we have just seen, then his mediating role cannot be merely passive or passing; the Word is not a mere created, temporary intermediary. It is not as if the Word offers the Father a series of possible blueprints among which he could then choose and follow in constructing the universe. In effect, the mediation of the Word is not accidental, occasional, or temporary, coming to a close as soon as the work of creation is over. Rather, the Word's mediation is as continuous, profound, and direct as it is divine. Perhaps for this reason the Book of Revelation—closely bound up

¹⁸ Cfr. BORGES, *The Gospel of John*; G. SCHWARZ, *Gen 1,1-2,2a und Joh 1.1a.3a. Ein Vergleich*, «Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentums» 73 (1982) 136-7.

with the Johannine corpus—speaks of Christ as the origin or principle (*archē*) of creation (Rv 3:14),¹⁹ as “the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (Rv 21:6; 22:13). In brief terms, we may say that the creative mediation of the Word is active, dynamic and enduring, not merely passive, static and accomplished once and for all, because creation takes place not only through the Word but also in the Word.

Fourth, created entities receive existence, permanence in being, intelligibility, and vitality from the inexhaustible existence, permanence, intelligibility, and vitality of the Word, that is, they *receive life* from the one who has received it from the Father. Indeed, the Word’s mediation may be expressed as a kind of continuous vivifying presence within the world. In the text of the prologue there is a possible variant in the translation of verses 3-4: “All things were made through him and without him nothing was made. *All things made in him were life*, and life was the light of men.”²⁰ The variant brings out an important aspect of role the Word plays in creating the world, which is more than that of an architect or a teacher, because it is not external but interior. The Word is *the living source of all life*, a doctrine confirmed later on in John’s gospel (Jn 5:21, 26). The God of the Old Testament of course is the God of life, the one who has life in fulness and communicates it to us with almighty power.²¹ Pagan gods or intermediate beings, on the contrary, are primarily receptive to life and thus incapable of natively imparting it; unable to take care of themselves, they are the work of human hands, standing in need of human support, with no vital power of their own. Yet the life Christ has received from the Father he divinely imparts it to creatures: he is the only Lord.

Fifth, other Johannine texts speak of the world being creation *for the Word*. For example: “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will

¹⁹ Cfr. C.F. BURNEY, *Christ as the APXH of Creation*, «Journal of Theological Studies» 17 (1926) 160-77; C. DOGLIO, *La creazione ‘nuova’ secondo l’Apocalisse*, in FABBRI, TÁBET (eds.), *Creazione e salvezza*, 227-67.

²⁰ On the correct translation of the text, cfr. I. DE LA POTTERIE, *De interpunctione et interpretatione Jo 1,3-4*, «Verbum Caro» 9 (1955) 193-208, and FEUILLET, *Le prologue*, 37-64.

²¹ F. MUSSNER, *Zoē: Die Anschauung vom «Leben» im vierten Evangelium unter Berücksichtigung der Johannesbriefe. Ein Beitrag zur biblischen Theologie*, K. Zink, Munich 1952; F. ASENSIO, *Trayectoria teológica de la vida en el AT y su proyección en el Nuevo*, Csic, Madrid 1968.

they existed and were created” (Rv 4:11). Besides, Christ is described as “the Alpha and *the Omega*, the beginning [*archē*] and the end [*tēlos*]” (Rv 21:6). The hymn of praise that constitutes the high-point of the Book of Revelation presents Christ as Lord and goal of creation. So creation may be said to take place not only through the Word, and in the Word, but also for the Word, the ultimate source of life at every stage of the existence of the universe.²²

The sixth observation is a relevant one. Sin obscures human awareness of the living presence of the Word in creation. “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not” (Jn 1:10-11). This text resonates openly with Wisdom 13:1-9 and Romans 1:18-22, which speak of the “obviousness” of God’s presence in creation and the blindness of humans induced by sin. Through the incarnation God wanted to bring the world back to himself by vivifying our awareness of the Word already present among and within creatures. Thus through the faith involved in conversion, *life*, the life given to the world by the Word, becomes *light*. Life becomes anew the light of men (v. 4), overcoming the darkness of sin (v. 6).

The divine logic of the incarnation (v. 14) is presented in two ways. On the one hand, it shows that God’s self-giving and revelation in Christ has become extraordinarily direct and accessible to humanity. The beauty and light and approachability of Jesus’ words and life are undeniable. On the other hand, the incarnation of Christ the Word is weak on account of the weakness of mortal flesh; this provides perhaps the true key to understanding the reality of divine Wisdom, God’s own Word: the word of God and his wisdom speak with greater power through the death and apparent weakness of Christ, for they do not attempt to impose but rather to convince. The deepest knowledge of the interior reality of the created world, of its total dependence on God, of its “own” nothingness and inner orientation toward a transcendent end, derives from and is revealed in Christ. And this is Christ on the cross, the Word through whom, in whom, and for whom the world was made. Christ, dying on the cross, renounced, in order to do

²² I.A. McFARLAND, *From Nothing: a Theology of Creation*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville Kentucky 2014, 34-42.

the will of his Father, the greatest and most noble created good, human life itself, in that way showing not only the fidelity and intensity of his love for humanity (Jn 15:13), but also the inner reality of the created world.

2. *Creation Through and for Christ in Paul*

We shall now examine the doctrine of creation in, through, and for Christ in the Pauline corpus. On the one hand, there is a clear continuity between Old Testament teaching on creation and that of Paul in the New: God has created all things, without exception, and is therefore the Lord of the universe.²³ On the other hand Paul develops a theology of creation in terms of the relationship between Christ and creation expressed by a series of functional creational prepositions which describe the way in which God's creative action relates respectively to the Father and to Christ. They are as follows: *ek* (from), *dia* (through), *eis* (for), although another two are also to be found: *epi* (above) and *en* (in).

Three Pauline texts are of particular interest here. First, Rom 11:36, which serves as a climax to a section of the letter to the Romans dealing with salvation and the Jews. Paul encourages believers to show appreciation for the gifts and hidden counsels of God and concludes: "For from [*ek*] him and through [*dia*] him and to/for [*eis*] him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom 11:36). The subject of creation is God. This means that the created world comes entirely from him and is always directed to his glory. God is "the source, medium and goal of everything, the beginning, middle, and end of all that is."²⁴

Second, in Eph 4:4-6 we read: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is

²³ Cfr. G. BAUMBACH, *Die Schöpfung in der Theologie des Paulus*, «Kairos» 21 (1979) 196-205; J.D.G. DUNN, *Romans 1-8*, Word Books, Waco 1988 («Word Biblical Commentary», 38A); U. MELL, *Neue Schöpfung: eine traditionsgeschichtliche und exegetische Studie zu einem soteriologischen Grundsatz paulinischer Theologie*, W. de Gruyter, Berlin 1989; U. VANNI, *La creazione in Paolo. Una prospettiva di teologia biblica*, «Recensioni di Teologia» 36 (1995) 285-325; R. PENNA, *L'idea di creazione in Paolo e nel paolinismo: il ruolo di Cristo per un nuovo concetto di cosmo, di uomo e di chiesa*, in FABBRI, TÁBET (eds.), *Creazione e salvezza*, 191-212.

²⁴ DUNN, *Romans*, 704.

above [*epi*] all and through [*dia*] all and in [*en*] all.” Again God, the one and only God, is seen to be the all-encompassing, transcendent creator, present in all things.²⁵

This doctrine is confirmed in a third text, 1 Tim 6:13-15, in which we read that “God [...] gives life to all things [...] the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.” The text also mentions Christ, not in the context of creation, but as God’s witness before Pontius Pilate (6:13). In these texts it may be said that the creational prepositions, “from him,” “through him,” and “for him” are applied consistently to God the eternal Father. Things change clearly in two more substantial texts in the Pauline corpus, 1 Cor 8:5-6 and Col 1:15-20.

First, the letter to the Corinthians. Speaking of the uniqueness of God,²⁶ Paul observes: “For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom [*ek hou*] are all things and for whom [*eis autou*] we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom [*di’ hou*] are all things and through whom [*di’ autou*] we are” (1 Cor 8:5-6).²⁷ The doctrine of Romans, Ephesians, and 1 Timothy is maintained: the world comes into being by and from God and is directed to him. But the *mediation* of creation and salvation (*di’ hou*) is now attributed to Christ. This is a novelty not present elsewhere. 1 Tim speaks of Christ’s mediation in relation to salvation (especially 1 Tm 2:5), but not to creation. Yet in 1 Cor creation is included in Christ’s work. By implication Christ, in sharing the creational prepositions with God, is placed on the same plane as the Father, precisely because the “gods” in the strict sense simply do not exist, for there are no intermediate beings, but only one,

²⁵ Some authors understand “all” in the masculine and therefore apply the expression to the Church (all humans), but the context here as well as other Pauline texts (1 Cor 8:6 and 15:28; Rom 11:36) indicate that “all” should be taken in the neutral sense, referred therefore to the created world (all beings). Cfr. A.T. LINCOLN, *Ephesians*, Word Books, Waco 1990, («Word Biblical Commentary», 42), 240.

²⁶ Conzelmann puts it as follows: “The gods become gods by being believed in, and faith in the one God and the one Lord creates freedom no longer to recognize these powers,” (H. CONZELMANN, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1975, 145).

²⁷ J.A. FITZMYER, *First Corinthians*, *Anchor Yale Bible*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2008, 341-44.

single, supreme divinity. And here Christ is presented as “the preexistent mediator of salvation.”²⁸ The Johannine term *Logos* is not used, but the idea is the same. This position of course finds its roots in the Old Testament continuity between creation and salvation: the one who saves is the one who created us; God’s work of creation finds its ongoing complement in salvation, one and the other taking place through Christ.

Second, the most extensive Pauline text on Christ and creation is to be found in the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians (1:15-20). It reads as follows:

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him [*en autō*] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers—all things were created through him [*di’ autou*] and for him [*eis auton*]. He is before all things, and in him [*en autō*] all things hold together [*sumestēken*]. He is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him [*en autō*] all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him [*di’ autou*] to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Some observations on these impressive liturgical text are in order.²⁹ It is clear that the subject of the text is Christ.³⁰ Perhaps the most important theological novelty in Colossians lies in the fact that a double role is attributed to Christ that in earlier texts was attributed to the Father, “all things were created *through him and for him*” (v. 16). Besides, this is confirmed in verse 17: “in him all things hold together” which connects

²⁸ A. LINDEMANN, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2000, 193; also G. DE VIRGILIO, “Πᾶν κτίσμα θεοῦ καλόν” (1Tm 4,4). *La positività della creazione e la sua dimensione salvifica nelle Lettere Pastorali*, in FABBRI, TÁBET (eds.), *Creazione e salvezza*, 361-76.

²⁹ FEUILLET-CONGAR, *Le Christ sagesse de Dieu*; P. BENOIT, *L’hymne christologie de Col 1, 15-20. Jugement critique sur l’état des recherches*, in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, edited by J. Neusner, Brill, Leiden 1975, 226-63; J.-N. ALETTI, *Colossiens 1, 15-20: genre et exégèse du texte: fonction de la thématique sapientielle*, Biblical Institute Press, Rome 1981; L.R. HELYER, *Arius Revisited: the Firstborn over all Creation (Col 1:15)*, «Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society» 31/1 (1988) 59-67; C. BASEVI, *Col 1, 15-20. Las posibles fuentes del ‘himno’ cristológico y su importancia para la interpretación*, «Scripta Theologica» 30 (1998) 779-802; S.M. McDONOUGH, *Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, 172-191.

³⁰ LADARIA, *Antropologia teologica*, 23; A. GRILLMEIER, *Christ in the Christian Tradition, vol. 1: from the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon*, John Knox Press, Atlanta 1975, 144.

directly with Hebrews 1:3: “He [Christ] reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding [*pherōn*] the universe by his word of power.” As a result, in the words of O’Brien, “from the highest to the lowest, all creatures alike are subject to Christ.”³¹ André Feuillet sums up Col 1:15-20 by saying that Christ “as divine Wisdom, is the mirror in which God has contemplated the plan of the cosmos.”³²

The text also justifies the “transfer” of the creational prepositions from the Father to Christ. For Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15),³³ a way of speaking that finds deep roots in wisdom literature, especially in Prov (8:22, 30)³⁴ and in Wis (7:25). In fact, being the “first-born of all creation” does not make Christ a mere creature, but rather the eternal Son in whom and through whom and for whom creation takes place, because in him God’s image is perfect. Christ “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp [*charaktēr*] of his nature” (Heb 1:3). Thus he is the creator, along with the Father, of all things, heavenly and earthly, including the angels: “all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers—all things were created through him and for him” (v. 16).

In comparison with the prologue of the Gospel of John, which expresses the presence and mediating role of Christ in creation in the past tense, as a former event, Paul insists besides on the present action of Christ: “in him all things hold together.” This suggests that Christ constantly conserves all things in their very existence, cohesion, and harmony (the term used is *sunestēken*, “to bring together”).³⁵ Christ may not

³¹ P.T. O'BRIEN, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Books, Waco 1982, («Word Biblical Commentary», 44), 47.

³² FEUILLET-CONGAR, *Le Christ Sagesse*, 365.

³³ On the interpretation of “image of the invisible God” in Col 1:15, cfr. J.R. STRAWBRIDGE, *The Image and Unity of God: the Role of Colossians 1 in Theological Controversy*, in *The Bible and Early Trinitarian Theology*, edited by C.A. Beeley, M. Weedman, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington 2018, 172-90.

³⁴ Cfr. R.B.Y. SCOTT, *Wisdom in Creation: the Ἄμὼν of Proverbs viii.30*, «Vetus Testamentum» 10 (1960), 213-223.

³⁵ W. BAUER, F.W. DANKER, W.F. ARNDT, F.W. GINGRICH (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London 2000, (abbrev. BDAG), 972, s.v. συνιστήμι.

simply be considered as a static exemplar of what the world always was and always will be.

Another important novelty of the Colossians text lies in the affirmation that the world was created *for* Christ: 1 Cor 8:6 spoke of *God* “for whom we exist.” And O’Brien observes: “The teaching that Christ is the ultimate goal of all creation [in Colossians] has no parallel in the Jewish Wisdom literature or indeed any other Jewish source. The very one who was crucified as a common criminal, that is Jesus Christ, is the very person to whom the whole of creation, and therefore history as well, moves.”³⁶ To this may be added the observation of McDonough who points out that “a messianic reading of the passage fits well with frequent Jewish assertions that the world was created ‘for the sake of’ Moses or whomever.”³⁷ The notion of finality is very much present in the Scriptural account of creation. All in all, we may say that Christ is, to use the technical term, the *final cause* of the entire created universe (cfr. also Eph 1:9).

But what does this involve theologically? It means that just as creation has a beginning, it will also have an end, a fulfillment, an ultimate purpose, and on the same terms. Just as the Son, the perfect image, the Word, was present, actively present, at the beginning, and present throughout history, he will also be so at the end, when God through him will be “all in all things” (1 Cor 15:28). In Christ, God’s Word/Wisdom has taken on the dominion, the control, the reins, and the meaning of the entire universe, of the whole of history, in all its height and depth, in its intricate dynamism and dramatic realism. Christ, the beginning of all things, the eschatological judge of history in its final fulfillment, was present at the beginning of creation, is now and ever shall be present. Present *actively*, as creator, not as a mere spectator. Christ is never lost, or relativized, or emptied, or surpassed “on the way” as it were, whether by history, by reason, by progress, by technology, by humans. He is,

³⁶ P.T. O’BRIEN, *Colossians*, in *New Bible Commentary*, edited by D. Guthrie, D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Moteyer, G.J. Wenham, 4th ed., InterVarsity, Leicester 1994, 1259-75, 1265.

³⁷ Cfr. McDONOUGH, *Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine*, 186. This author refers to *b. Sanh.* 98b, where the world is variously said to be created for David, for Moses, for the Messiah.

always was, and always will be the Lord of history and judge of the universe. Everything that exists tends toward him, whether it is aware or not of the fact.

Giacomo Biffi says of the Christ: "Everything derives its nature from him, the exemplar principle; everything derives its very existence from him, the efficient cause. Everything is a fragment of immeasurable value gathered together in him; every single thing receives from him alone its proper meaning. We are all fruit of his act of love, which mysteriously humanizes the ineffable act of divine love that is at the source of the existence of every creature."³⁸

II. THE LOGIC OF CREATION AND THE DIVINE LOGOS IN GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIANS: THE THEOLOGICAL HISTORY OF NICAEA

In the order, unity, goodness, beauty, and harmony of nature, in its "logic" as it were, Christian authors have always detected traces of God's action in and through the eternal Word, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were made. *Semen omnium Christus*, said Ambrose: "Christ is the seed of all things."³⁹ Biblical and patristic understandings of the "logic" of the universe developed principally in an intentional dialogue between Jewish and Christian believers on the one hand and Greek philosophers on the other. Content-wise, the Christian end-product differed clearly from Platonism, Stoicism, and Aristotelianism, as the Council of Nicaea taught in 325 A.D. Yet the language and philosophical concepts of Greek and Christian thought had a great deal in common, especially in respect of their respective understanding of the divine *Logos*. Besides, the concern of philosophers was not substantially different from that of Christian theologians: to understand what God did in creating the world, why he did it, and the kind of mediations he employed in doing so.

In the following pages we shall consider the position of four philosophers who dealt with the issue of the creation of the world through the mediation of an intermediary being (*Logos* or Demiurge): (1) Plato, (2) Philo of Alexandria, (3) Plotinus, and (4) Arius. Others could certainly

³⁸ G. BIFFI, *Approccio al cristocentrismo: note storiche per un tema eterno*, Jaca Book, Milano 1994, 80.

³⁹ AMBROSE, *In Ps.* 43, 39.

have been chosen, for example, Origen or Clement of Alexandria, but the four are sufficiently representative of the variety of positions present in the debate. Then we shall refer to (5) the teaching of Athanasius and the Council of Nicaea, as well as that of (6) Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

1. *Plato*

Plato considers as true and real what is divine. And to be divine means above all to be immortal, that is, permanent, eternal, perfect and immaterial. And yet divinities are to be found everywhere throughout the whole world. “The world is full of gods,” he says.⁴⁰ The supreme divinity, which maintains all the rest in unity and provides the center point in the hierarchy of beings, is designated as the Good. In itself, however, the Good is unreachable and virtually unknown to all the other creatures, for it has no direct contact with the world, with mortals, with matter and the senses. The reason for this is simple: matter cannot enter into contact with the divinity, for spirit and matter are antithetical to one another. Hence a mediation between the two orders is provided, Plato says, by the so-called Demiurge. The term, from the Greek *dēmiourgos*, means “public worker.”⁴¹

The Platonic Demiurge divinity is unique, eternal, inalterable, invisible, intelligent, full of knowledge and power. In the *Tīmaeus* Plato explains that it shapes the world in two stages, first by contemplating the world of Forms,⁴² and then by organizing and constructing visible things on the basis of prime matter, that is, preexisting non-formed matter. The world produced by this process is called *kosmos*,⁴³ which literally means “order.”⁴⁴ Thus prime matter is the substrate of all beings, of

⁴⁰ PLATO, *Laws* 899b.

⁴¹ Cfr. NIDNTTE 1:682, s.v. Δημιουργός. The term is to be found only once in the New Testament (Heb 10:11), but is not referred to creation. Cfr. also K. MURAKAWA, *Demiurgos*, «Historia» 6 (1957) 385-415; A. DOUDA, *Platons Weltbaumeister*, «Altertum» 19 (1973) 147-56; E. LÉVY, *La dénomination de l'artisan chez Platon et Aristote*, «Ktēma» 16 (1991) 7-18.

⁴² Cfr. PLATO, *Tīmaeus* 29a.

⁴³ Cfr. BDAG 56:1-3, s.v. Κόσμος.

⁴⁴ Cfr. PLATO, *Tīmaeus* 30a.

every generation,⁴⁵ it is the receptacle of all forms,⁴⁶ the undifferentiated subject awaiting to be shaped and formed. Given its mediating role the Demiurge is often considered as a god and as provident for this world. Yet its role is limited, we have just said, in two ways: (1) by the Form, a kind of eternal and preexistent exemplar, which it must contemplate and imitate, and (2) by matter, both chaotic and stubborn, besides being preexistent. Thus the Demiurge may form matter, shape or fashion things material, but on no account does it *create* or give existence to things not previously existing. It is to be understood as a kind of second-god, intermediate and instrumental, inferior to the Good who produces and generates it and with which it acts in continuity. The reason for its existence is to make or fabricate the world. The fundamentals of the doctrine of the *Logos* are thus clearly laid out.

2. *Philo of Alexandria*

Philo, a Jew, contemporary of Jesus Christ, is of particular importance in understanding the Christian doctrine of creation.⁴⁷ He attempted to establish a synthesis between Old Testament revelation and the cosmological vision of Platonists and Stoics. Taking up the position of the latter, he offered an explanation overcoming an important lacuna in Plato's understanding of the Demiurge, especially in respect of the intrinsic intelligibility of created things. Besides, he held that the transcendent God of the Old Testament is truly the creator of the world, and that he created matter *ex nihilo*. "For God called the non-existent into being, order out of disorder, quality out of unqualified matter, similarities out of dissimilarity [... To create is] to introduce the non-existent into existence."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Cfr. *ibidem*, 49a.

⁴⁶ Cfr. *ibidem*, 50c.

⁴⁷ On Philo, R. RADICE (ed.), *Platonismo e creazionismo in Filone di Alessandria*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1989; IDEM, *Filone di Alessandria*, in *Enciclopedia Filosofica*, Bompiani, Milano 2006, 4120-22; J. DANÉLOU, *Philo of Alexandria*, James Clark, Cambridge 2014; G. REALE, *Filone di Alessandria e la prima elaborazione filosofica della dottrina della creazione*, in 'Paradoxos politeia.' *Studi patristici in onore di Giuseppe Lazzati*, edited by R. Cantalamessa, L.F. Pizzolato, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1979, 247-87.

⁴⁸ PHILO, *Spec. Leg.* 4, 187; IDEM, *De Opif. Mundi*, 31.

Philo uses the Greek term *ktizein* to designate God's action ("create," the standard translation of *bara'*), and not *poiein* (to "make") as Plato does. In effect, for Plato the intelligibility or "form" of things is not inherent in them but belongs to the divine realm. At best, for Plato, finite beings provide occasions with which the human mind contemplates the world of Forms; as we saw earlier on, knowledge involves remembering what was once seen or contemplated in the world of Forms. It does not involve abstracting inherent intelligible content from things, what Aristotle referred to when speaking about the *entelechia* present in beings, and the Stoics called the *logoi spermatikoi*, or seminal reasons. Philo however does hold that between the Platonic Demiurge (intelligibility on God's side as it were, the *logos theios*) and the intelligibility inherent in things (the *logos spermatikos*) there is an intermediate being, called the *Logos*, or Word. By means of the *Logos*, Philo says, God created the cosmos and continues his action in the world.

Philo compares God with an architect who, wanting to found a great city, "first thought the types and with them formed the intelligible cosmos to then produce the sensitive cosmos, using the former as a model."⁴⁹ On the basis of an analogy describing the construction of a building, he explains:

Passing on from these particular buildings, consider the greatest house or city, namely, this world, for you will find that *God* is the cause of it, by whom it was made. That the *materials* are the four elements, of which it is composed [earth, air, fire, water]; that the *instrument* is the word [*logos*] of God, by means of which it was made; and the object of the building you will find to be the display of the goodness of the Creator [*demiourgos*].⁵⁰

Philo identifies the *logos* with Wisdom or Reason. Drawing on the Old Testament, he likewise describes the *logos* as the Son, the Angel, the High Priest, the image, the model and idea of the world, its living law, its vital power, the bond between all the different elements it is made up of, and thus the instrument or mediator of creation. He expresses this mediating role in the following powerful words:

⁴⁹ IDEM, *De Opif. Mundi*, 19. "For Plato, the demiurge looks up towards Principles and Ideas, which measure/control his creative action. The God of Philo has nothing above him. The demiurge looks at intelligible world of Ideas, but this is ontologically inferior to God," (FABBRI, *Creatore e demiurgo*, in FABBRI, TÁBET (eds.), *Creazione e salvezza*, 149-57, 151).

⁵⁰ PHILO, *De cherubim* 12, 5-7.

The Father who created the universe has given to his archangelic and most ancient Word [*logos*] a pre-eminent gift, to stand on the confines of both, and to separate that which had been created from the Creator. And this same Word is continually a *suppliant* to the immortal God on behalf of the mortal race, which is exposed to affliction and misery; and is also the *ambassador*, sent by the Ruler of all, to the subject race. And the Word rejoices in the gift, and, exulting in it, announces it and boasts of it, saying, "And I stood in the midst, between the Lord and you" (Nm 16:48), *neither being uncreated as God, nor yet created as you, but being in the midst between these two extremities*, like a hostage, as it were, to both parties: a hostage to the Creator, as a pledge and security that the whole race would never fly off and revolt entirely, choosing disorder rather than order; and to the creature, to lead it to entertain a confident hope that the merciful God would not overlook his own work.⁵¹

It is commonly held that Philo made a direct contribution to the development of Christian theology in respect of the identity and creative role of the divine *Logos*, although not all authors hold this position.⁵² Zizioulas acutely observes: "Although Philo had tried to free God from creation, he had actually confined him to it. Philo made the world necessarily present to God, ever-present within him in the form of the *logoi*, the thoughts of God."⁵³ Yet the *Logos* of Philo is divine, but subordinate; in the words of Grillmeier, "in accepting gradations between God and the world into his Judaistic monotheism, Philo would feel less threatened than a Christian theologian who designated Christ (and the *Pneuma*) as God."⁵⁴

3. Plotinus

Plotinus, a third-century neo-Platonic philosopher, is another important figure in explaining the relationship between *Logos* and creation. Two terms mark his understanding of the world, its creation and dynamics:

⁵¹ IDEM, *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* 205 (emphasis added).

⁵² Cfr. McDONOUGH, *Christ as Creator*, 135-49. Cfr. also FABBRI, *Creatore e demiurgo*, 149-57.

⁵³ J.D. ZIZIOULAS, *Creation and Salvation*, in D.H. KNIGHT (ed.), *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, T&T Clark, New York-London 2008, 83-119, 86.

⁵⁴ GRILLMEIER, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 1:224.

emanation (in Greek, *aporroia*),⁵⁵ and as a result, hierarchy (*hieros*).⁵⁶ The term “emanation” is used only once in the Old Testament (Wis 7:25), but is typical of Platonic thought. In Plotinus emanation refers to the production of one reality from another, and in this case the production of the world from the substance of the divine; this is Plotinus’s equivalent to creation,⁵⁷ what may be called integral emanation.⁵⁸ In real terms, emanation is a kind of halfway-house between generation and creation.⁵⁹ And the world that results from it is clearly hierarchical, connected, and subordinated. Plotinus’s emanationist hierarchy⁶⁰ is composed of five elements.

At the top of Plotinus’s hierarchy is the supreme divinity, the One. Below the One is the *Nous*, thought or Mind, which represents the intelligible world, and is like Plato’s Demiurge. The One without the *Nous* is unthinkable, says Plotinus significantly: “just suppress otherness and all you get will be indistinct unity and silence.”⁶¹ “The *Nous* is therefore the *Logos* of the One,”⁶² God’s intelligibility as it were. Below the *Nous*, in third place, is situated the *psyche*, the soul, equivalent to Plato’s world-soul, which serves as a connecting link between the higher world and the world of the senses, “a mediating reality, looking at once upwards and downwards.”⁶³ Below again is the *physis*, or nature, the soul of the material world into which the human soul has fallen. At the bottom of the hierarchy, in fifth place, is matter itself which is equivalent to nothingness

⁵⁵ I. RAMELLI, *Emanatismo*, in *Enciclopedia filosofica*, Bompiani, Milano 2006, 3315-18. In Plotinus a more precise term might be “procession” (*prōodos*). Cfr. J. TROUILLARD, *La procession plotinienne*, PUF, Paris 1955).

⁵⁶ Cfr. BDAG 470, s.v. ἱερός.

⁵⁷ F. RICKEN, *Emanation und Schöpfung*, «Theologie und Philosophie» 49 (1974) 483-86; L.P. GERSON, *Plotinus’s Metaphysics: Emanation or Creation?*, «Review of Metaphysics» 46 (1992) 559-74; IDEM, *Eternal Truth: Plotinus, Aquinas, and James Ross*, «Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association» 67 (1993) 143-50.

⁵⁸ J.-M. NARBONNE, *Plotinus and the Secrets of Ammonius*, «Hermathena» 157 (1994) 117-53.

⁵⁹ RAMELLI, *Emanatismo*, 3317.

⁶⁰ Cfr. G. SCHOLEM, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Thames and Hudson, London 1955, vii, 256.

⁶¹ PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, V, 1:4.

⁶² G. FAGGIN, “Plotino,” in *Enciclopedia filosofica*, Bompiani, Milano 2006, 8701-12, 8704.

⁶³ C.E. GUNTON, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1998, 34.

(in Greek, *to me on*, relative nothingness when it is without form, just as light gets weaker and weaker the further it is removed from the source, until it simply disappears).⁶⁴ In the *Enneads* Plotinus says that “the entire intellectual order may be figured as a kind of light with the One in repose at its summit as its king.”⁶⁵

Colin Gunton notes the continuity between Plato and Plotinus: “What we have in Plotinus is the world view of the *Timaeus* almost entirely freed of the mythological background which still pervades that work.”⁶⁶ Some authors argue that Plotinus’s process of emanation—his equivalent to creation—takes place necessarily,⁶⁷ others that it is spontaneous.⁶⁸ Whatever the case, the production of the universe may not be looked upon as an act of the divine will in the Christian sense of the word, for the triad which structures reality—the One, the Mind, and the soul—is not equivalent to the Christian Trinity of persons which serves as an interpersonal locus for free divine action. In the words of Gunton:

The real contrast [between Plotinus and the Christian understanding of the world] is between the flowing forth of the lower from the higher, in which the material order is grudgingly given a small place, and the personal act of creation which affirms the whole of the world, matter and spirit alike. It is between creation as the result of the One’s concern with itself, and the triune God’s love of that which is not himself.⁶⁹

Perhaps we may say that the divinity for Plotinus’s emanation is conditioned, whereas for Christianity’s creation it is not.

Plotinus is important in his own right, as the maximum representative of the neo-Platonic philosophical movement. But he is of particular importance because his works, like those of Philo, were influential in the writings of Christian authors, especially Dionysius the Areopagite and Augustine, but also in Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Arius, who set

⁶⁴ Cfr. J. OPSOMER, *Proclus vs Plotinus on Matter*, «Phronesis» 46 (2001) 154-88.

⁶⁵ PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, V, 2:2.

⁶⁶ GUNTON, *The Triune Creator*, 35.

⁶⁷ Cfr. F. COPLESTON, *History of Philosophy, vol. 1: Greece and Rome*, Doubleday, New York 1993, 467.

⁶⁸ Cfr. J.M. RIST, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1967, 72.

⁶⁹ GUNTON, *The Triune Creator*, 36.

the scene for Christology, Trinitarian and creation theology during much of the critical fourth century. Each one of them developed in different ways a theology of the *Logos* in its mediating role between God and the created world. Let us now examine one of them, Arius.

4. Arius of Alexandria

Arius, a fourth-century Alexandrian presbyter, is of particular importance in our understanding of the *Logos*.⁷⁰ On the basis of a series of important biblical texts, Arius took it that the Word/Son, made incarnate in Jesus Christ, was subordinate to the Father in such a way that “there was a time in which he [the Word] did not exist.”⁷¹ In a non-extant work attributed to him, the *Thalia*, we read: “The Son has age and magnitude from the will of God. His origin from God has a ‘from when,’ a ‘from which’ and a ‘from then.’”⁷² This understanding of the Son is structurally similar to Plato’s *Timaeus* Demiurge. Rooted in Plato, the writings of Plotinus paved the way for Arius.⁷³ According to his adversary Athanasius, Arius held that “the Father is alien in being to the Son, and he has no origin. Know that the monad [a single subject, the Father] was, but the dyad [a double subject, the Father and the Son] was not, before it came into being.”⁷⁴ In other words, God once existed as one, but subsequently, at creation, the Son came into being, giving rise to a twosome, or dyad. In other words for the purpose of creating the world, God generated the Son and thus “became” a Father.

The following text attributed to Arius expresses his position well.

We know *only one God*, who alone is uncreated [unbegotten], who alone is eternal, who alone is without origin, who alone is true, who alone possesses im-

⁷⁰ Cfr. G. BARDY, *Recherches sur saint Lucien d'Antioche et son école*, Beauchesne, Paris 1936; T.E. POLLARD, *The Origins of Arianism*, «Journal of Theological Studies» 9 (1958) 103-111; L.W. BARNARD, *The Antecedents of Arius*, «Vigiliae Christianae» 24 (1970) 172-88; GRILLMEIER, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 1:219-48; R.D. WILLIAMS, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 2nd ed., Longman and Todd, London-Darton 2001, 181-98.

⁷¹ According to the historian SOZOMEN, *Hist. Eccl.* 1:15, and ATHANASIUS, *Contra Arian.*, I, 5, who quotes Arius.

⁷² ATHANASIUS, *Synod.*, 15.

⁷³ GRILLMEIER, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 1:224.

⁷⁴ ATHANASIUS, *Synod.*, 15.

mortality, who alone is wise, who alone is good: the sole ruler, the judge of all, the ordainer and governor, unchanging and immutable, righteous and good, the God of the Law and the prophets of the New Covenant, who *brought forth the only-begotten Son* before eternal times, by whom he created the aeons and all things [...] as God's perfect creature, but not as one of the creatures; brought forth, but not as others are brought forth [...] For he is not eternal or as eternal or as uncreated as the Father, nor does he have identical being with the Father [...] rather, as monad and *archē* [origin] of all, he (the Father) is God before all. So he is also before the Son.⁷⁵

Unlike Plato and Plotinus, the Christian Arius holds to the doctrine of God's creation of the world *ex nihilo*. But this means of course that the created world is clearly distinct from the creating divinity. So a question arises that did not present itself for Plato and Plotinus: which side of the divide is the Son on? On God's or on creation's? Arius concludes that the Word is clearly on the side of creation, as a supreme creature, but a creature nonetheless. Grillmeier comments that, for Arius,

the gulf between creation and the transcendent God is unbridgeable, because the "Son" too is on the other side of the gulf and therefore cannot know the Father as he is in himself, but only in the way in which he has the right, that is only with creaturely knowledge [...] Arius would have found it difficult to lay the foundations for a theology of revelation. He sees the Son chiefly as the mediator of creation [...] his *Logos* doctrine is determined cosmologically.⁷⁶

For Arius the *Logos* has to belong to the creaturely realm, "for an immanent principle of form, movement and order cannot belong to the sphere of the transcendent creator God."⁷⁷ It is clear that for Arius the *Logos* is on the side of the created world: "the Son does not exist of necessity, but only in dependence on a decision by the Father."⁷⁸ When Arius speaks of the relationship between the Father and the Son, he is really talking of a relationship between God and the world.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Letter of Arius to Alexander of Alexandria, cited in GRILLMEIER, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 1:226n25 (emphasis added).

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 1:228.

⁷⁷ F. RICKEN, *Nikaia als Krisis des altchristlichen Platonismus*, «Theologie und Philosophie» 44 (1969) 321-41, 326.

⁷⁸ Cf. *ibidem*.

⁷⁹ GRILLMEIER, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 1:231.

When God wanted to create nature and bring it into being, he saw that it could not participate in the unmixed hand of the Father and his creation; therefore first of all he created and made only the sole, unique one and called this the Son and *Logos*, so that he might be the middle one (i.e. intermediary in a cosmological sense); in this way the rest of the universe could come into being through him.⁸⁰

In the *Thalia* Arius draws the following conclusion:

For God was alone, and the Word as yet was not, nor was Wisdom. Then, *wishing to form us, thereupon He made a certain one*, and named Him Word and Wisdom and Son, that He might form us by means of Him.⁸¹

So why then did God generate the Son? Clearly because “the *Logos* is only created *when the Father wanted to create us*.”⁸²

This position of course marks a significant departure from the proper understanding of the Trinity and creation: according to Arius the Father’s prime intention was one of creating the world, the cosmos, of forming humans, and for that to take place he created the *Logos*. In God’s mind the existence and activity of the *Logos*/Son is subordinated to the work of creation. The Word’s sonship is instrumentalized, as it were, for the sake of the fabrication of the world.⁸³ It is true that several earlier Christian authors likewise situated the generation of the Word in function of creation.⁸⁴ But with Arius the theological conclusions are better delineated; according to Alexander of Alexandria, Arius said that “He (the Son) was created *for our sake*, so that God might create us *through him* as through an instrument; and he (the Son) would not exist if God had not wanted to create us.”⁸⁵

Grillmeier comments: “The Son of the baptismal creed has become the created mediator of creation. His exclusive pre-eminence consists in the fact that he alone was created directly by the Father, the only true

⁸⁰ Arius, cited by BARDY (ed.), *Recherches sur saint Lucien*, frag. IV, 263; ATHANASIUS, *Contra Arian. Or.*, I, 24.

⁸¹ Cited by ATHANASIUS, *Contra Arian. Or.*, II, 5 (emphasis added).

⁸² Cited by BARDY, *Recherches sur saint Lucien*, frag. IV, 262.

⁸³ Cfr. P. O’CALLAGHAN, *Children of God in the World. An Introduction to Theological Anthropology*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington 2016, 255-262.

⁸⁴ Among them, Justin, Theophilus, Tatian, Aristides.

⁸⁵ Cited by GRILLMEIER, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 1:231n43.

God. So everything else was created through him [...] True, Arius assigns the created Logos the role of demiurge. But in his view [...] this demiurge is created.”⁸⁶ And in the words of Rowan Williams, for Arius “the *Logos*, as mediator, principle of plurality, source of intelligible structures, exists primarily for the sake of creation, and has no discernible role prior to the Father’s decision to create [...] It could be said [...] that creation is the sole *raison d’être* of the Logos.”⁸⁷

5. *Nicaea and Athanasius*

The Council of Nicaea provided a substantial answer to the teaching of Arius, in the wider context of the teachings of Athanasius, Hillary of Poitiers and other Church Fathers. In a variety of different ways Christian teachers employed the idea, already broached in the New Testament, of Jesus Christ as the Demiurge or *Logos* or mediator not only of redemption but also of creation. From a Christian standpoint, the issue, though complex in detail as we have just seen, is quite straightforward in general terms: does Christ, the Word, in his inner essence, belong to the realm of God, or to that of creation? Or is he an intermediate being, not fully divine, not entirely created? Put in another way, is the Christ—the Word, the Son—to be understood in the light of revelation, of God’s word, of Scripture and the living tradition of the Church, or, rather, in the light of the philosophy of the time, which was of course predominantly Platonic and neo-Platonic?

Arius as a Christian believer could not easily accept the notion of an intermediate being, neither fully divine nor completely created, as Plotinus had suggested, because he took it that the world had been created *ex nihilo*, and so had to posit a clear distinction between God and creation. But it would seem that his understanding of Christ borrowed more heavily from the dominant philosophy than from revelation. In the words of Leslie W. Barnard, Arius’s “system was simply one of philosophical dualism—although not without a biblical coloring in its idea

⁸⁶ IDEM, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 1:232 and 236. Arians also speak of the *logos-sarx* Christology, according to which Christ had no human soul: “The Logos has taken over the place and function of the soul” (*ibidem*, 238).

⁸⁷ WILLIAMS, *Arius*, 190 and 196.

of the Sole, Unoriginate God.”⁸⁸ Thus the Word/Son belongs primordially to the realm of creatures, and though the highest of them, is *subordinate* to the Father. Arius insisted on this, as we saw, because he wished to hold on to the unassailable oneness of God and the realism of the incarnation of the Word: if God is one and the incarnation is real, then the Word must be intermediate, situated between one and the other, though clearly on the side of creatures.

And Athanasius with the Council of Nicaea would oppose him on this very front. Grillmeier observes that “the Nicenes will be the better theologians—and philosophers. They rule out the middle sphere which Arius occupied with his created Logos and pneuma, and thus reject the Middle Platonic picture of the world.”⁸⁹ The Council of Nicaea taught as follows: “One Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial [*homousios*] with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven. And by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.”⁹⁰

The text makes it quite clear that the *Logos* in his inner essence belongs fully to the realm of the divine, for he is consubstantial with the Father. It adds of course that “through Him” all things were made, in keeping with the New Testament, and that he became flesh in the power of the Holy Spirit in order to save us. Thus only in an ample sense may it be said that Christ is the mediator of creation, for mediation normally involves a certain distance from the extremes mediated, as Plato, Philo, Plotinus, and Arius explained in a variety of different ways.⁹¹

⁸⁸ L.W. BARNARD, *The Antecedents of Arius*, «Vigiliae Christianae» 24 (1970) 172-188, at 187.

⁸⁹ GRILLMEIER, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 1:243.

⁹⁰ DH 150 (emphasis added).

⁹¹ This is also the position of Athanasius, according to J.M. ROBERTSON, *Christ as Mediator: A Study of the Theologies of Eusebius of Caesarea, Marcellus of Ancyra, and Athanasius of Alexandria*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2007, 172-74.

The principal opponent of Arius of course was Athanasius.⁹² The latter explains the role of the Word (*Logos*) in creation in a highly vivid way, as a divine principle of inner cohesion and life in the world, entirely on the side of God the creator. The following extensive text from his work *Contra Gentes* shows this.

The Father of Christ, most holy and above all created existence, who like an excellent pilot, by his own Wisdom and his own Word, our Lord and Savior Christ, steers and preserves and orders all things [...] But if the world subsists in reason and wisdom and skill, and is perfectly ordered throughout, it follows that the one that is over it and has ordered it is none other than the Word of God. But by Word I mean [...] the living and powerful Word of the good God, the God of the Universe, the very Word which is God, who while different from things that are made, and from all Creation, is the One own Word of the good Father, who by his own providence ordered and illumines this Universe. For being the good Word of the Good Father he produced the order of all things, combining one with another things contrary, and reducing them to one harmonious order [...] The holy Word of the Father, then, almighty and all-perfect, uniting with the universe and having everywhere unfolded his own powers, and having illumined all, things both seen and invisible, holds them together and binds them to himself, having left nothing void of his own power.⁹³

Athanasius goes on to explain the role of Christ as that of a musician performing harmoniously.

And elsewhere he continues:

For by a nod and by the power of the Divine Word of the Father that governs and presides over all, the heaven revolves, the stars move, the sun shines, the moon goes her circuit, and the air receives the sun's light and the ether its heat, and the winds blow: the mountains are reared on high, the sea is rough with waves, and the living things in it grow, the earth abides fixed, and bears fruit, and man is formed and lives and dies again, and all things whatever have their life and movement; fire burns, water cools, fountains spring forth, rivers flow, seasons and hours come round, rains descend, clouds are filled,

⁹² On Athanasius, the bibliography is vast. Cfr., for example, K. ANATOLIOS, *Athanasius: the Coherence of his Thought*, Routledge, London-New York 1998; G. FLOROVSKY, *The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius*, edited by E.A. Livingston, Akademie, Berlin 1962, («Studia Patristica» 6), 36-57; J. ROLDANUS, *Le Christ et l'homme dans la théologie d'Athanasie d'Alexandrie. Étude de la conjonction de la conception de l'homme avec sa christologie*, Brill, Leiden 1977; A. PETTERSEN, *Athanasius, Outstanding Christian Thinkers*, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1995; T.G. WEINANDY, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2007.

⁹³ ATHANASIUS, *Contra Gentes*, 40.

hail is formed, snow and ice congeal, birds fly, creeping things go along, water-animals swim, the sea is navigated, the earth is sown and grows crops in due season, plants grow.⁹⁴

For Athanasius, the divine Word of the eternal Father is the One who makes the world go around.

6. Augustine, Aquinas and Other Theologians

Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and other theologians substantially repeat what Athanasius had said. “For Athanasius, the Cappadocians, John Damascene, and Augustine it was precisely *creatio ex nihilo* which slipped the chains of the destructive dualism prevalent in late antiquity where matter was bad and spirit was good,” observed Janet Soskice.⁹⁵ Augustine speaks of creation as a beautiful hymn.⁹⁶ He comments on the following words of John’s prologue: “that which was made in him [the Word] was life” (Jn 1:3),⁹⁷ a text dealt with similarly by Thomas Aquinas in his commentary on John’s gospel. Aquinas excludes the interpretation of the Manicheans who said that all life is at heart none other than divine life, for there is such a thing as created life.⁹⁸ Likewise he avoids the position of Scotus Eriugena who—in his view—gives a similar, quasi-pantheistic interpretation of John,⁹⁹ and says that all things “are life” in the Word because “the cause of all effects produced by God is a life and an art full of reasons or living ideas.”¹⁰⁰ Thomas also follows the position of Augustine according to which created things may be considered in two ways, either as they are in themselves (some are alive, some or not), or as they are in the Word. In the latter sense all things are alive

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, 42-44.

⁹⁵ J.M. SOSKICE, *Why Creatio Ex Nihilo? for Theology Today?*, in G.A. ANDERSON, M. BOCKMUEHL (eds.), *Creation Ex Nihilo. Origins, Development, Contemporary Challenges*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 2018, 37-54, 49.

⁹⁶ AUGUSTINE, *De Civ. Dei*, XI, 18.

⁹⁷ IDEM, *In Tr. Io.*, 1:17 (on Jn 1:3). Cfr. G. REMY, *Le Christ médiateur dans l'œuvre de Saint Augustin*, 2 vols., H. Champion, Paris 1979; IDEM, *Du Logos intermédiaire au Christ médiateur chez les Pères grecs*, «Revue Thomiste» 96 (1996) 397-452.

⁹⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Io.*, I, 2 (no. 89).

⁹⁹ Cfr. SCOTUS ERIUGENA, *Hom. super Prol. Io.*, (PL 122:288).

¹⁰⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Io.*, I, 2 (no. 90).

insofar as their ideas are spiritually present in living divine Wisdom and are identified with it. *Creatura in Deo est creatrix essentia*, concludes Thomas: "In God, the creature is the creating essence."¹⁰¹ As far as God is concerned, the creature is identified with the creator.¹⁰²

When we say that the world was made "through him," this does not mean, for Aquinas, that the Word or *Logos* is a kind of inert instrumental cause (a Demiurge) which acts in a way extrinsic to the efficient cause, as a blueprint for an artifice, as an agent in building, as a pilot for a boat, as a map for a journey, but rather that the living God creates by the Word and for the Word. Augustine had already said as much: "the Word is art, full of the ideas of all living things."¹⁰³ As a result of this living presence of the Word in the world, Thomas adds, each and every creature becomes *vox Verbi*,¹⁰⁴ "the voice of the Word." The *logos ut ratio* derives directly from the *logos ut verbum*.

III. CHRIST AND CREATION: THE CONTRAST BETWEEN GREEK AND CHRISTIAN MIND-FORMS

But what does it mean to say that the created world has been created in and through and for the Word, that the *logos ut verbum* is the origin of the *logos ut ratio*? We have just considered the role of the *Logos/Demiurge* in the making of the world proper to the Platonic tradition in four authors: Plato, Philo, Plotinus, and Arius. In spite of the differences and shifts between and among each of them, a basic structure emerges regarding the relationship and mediation between God and the world, what I shall refer to in general terms as the "Greek *Logos*," located between the creator and the creature. A similar structure may be found within Christian theology, developed in Old Testament Wisdom literature, in Paul and John, with Irenaeus and Justin, with Origen and Athanasius, with Augustine and Thomas, and many others, as we saw above. This may be designated in general terms as the "Christian *Logos*."

¹⁰¹ Cfr. *ibidem* (no. 91). Cfr. REMY, *Le Christ Médiateur*.

¹⁰² THOMAS AQUINAS, *SCG*, IV.13.10.

¹⁰³ AUGUSTINE, *De Trin.*, VI, 10:11.

¹⁰⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *I Sent.*, d. 27, q. 2, arg. 3, ad 3.

Drawing on what was explained above and simplifying somewhat the two positions—centered respectively on the Greek and Christian *Logos*—we may contrast and explain them as follows on the basis of five elements: the function of the *Logos* with respect to the creation of the world; the kind of continuity to be found between God and the world that the *Logos* expresses; the relationship between the *Logos* and God; the divinity of the *Logos*; and, last of all, the purpose of the existence of the *Logos*. Let us consider them one by one.

- (a) The function of the Greek *Logos* with respect to the creation of the world is one of giving form, of shaping, of ordering the prime matter that already exists; in that sense the *Logos* does not give existence to beings, it does not create them. On the contrary, through the Christian *Logos*, the perfect Image of the Father, God creates the world, giving it existence *ex nihilo* directly by means of the Word.
- (b) The continuity between God and the world that the *Logos* expresses. The Greek view envisions a profound though hierarchical continuity between all the different elements of reality: between the Supreme Divinity (the Good or the One) at the top, then the demiurge, the *Logos*, the World Soul, the souls of heroes and humans in-between, right down to the purely material world. For Christianity, however, there is a clear and insuperable distinction between the divine and the created sphere, involving two completely distinct ontologies. No ontological continuity—whether hierarchical or otherwise—may be posited between God and the world. All finite beings without exception share the created condition.
- (c) As regards the relationship between the *Logos* and God, we may say the following. Within the hierarchy of beings, the Greek mediating *Logos* is inferior or subordinate to God, because God cannot enter directly into contact with pre-existing matter, or with matter of any kind. Whereas the Christian *Logos* is ‘consubstantial’ with the Father, and through the Incarnation has direct contact with the created world, both material and spiritual, without modifying the nature of either.
- (d) What may be said of the divinity of the *Logos*? The Greek *Logos* is not fully divine because it is limited on the one hand by the world of *Ideas* to which it refers, and on the other hand by the facticity and

opacity of preexisting *matter*. The Christian *Logos* however is limited neither by God (because everything the Father has, the Son also has), nor by preexisting matter (because matter comes into being, whole and entire, at the moment of creation).

- (e) Finally, what may be said of the purpose of the existence of the *Logos*? Why did God generate or emanate the Word? The Greek *Logos* was made or created *on account of the world*, because God, the Good or the One, wished to provide harmony, goodness, beauty and light to all that was disorderly, chaotic, ugly and dark; this provides a cosmocentric or anthropocentric vision of humanity and the created world. From the Christian standpoint the world was made *on account of the Logos*, the Son, and not the other way around; in that sense the Christian vision of the world is 'logocentric,' or better Christocentric; it is neither anthropocentric nor cosmocentric. In absolute terms, in fact, the created world need never have existed.

The last of the five points mentioned above is of particular relevance. From the standpoint of Christian faith, we have seen that the work of creation should be considered as logocentric or Christocentric (or perhaps theocentric), rather than cosmocentric or anthropocentric (closer to the Greek understanding). What does this mean?

For the Greeks, the *Logos* or Demiurge was produced by the supreme divinity with a view to putting order (*kosmos*) on unruly pre-existent matter. In doing so the *Logos*/Demiurge was not fully free in making or shaping the world, but was conditioned to some degree by factors beyond itself. God's hand was forced, to some degree, to give life to an intermediate first-being that would build or shape up the world as we know it. That is, the *Logos*/Demiurge exists in function of the world and not the other way around. The *logos ut ratio*, the rationality of the universe, precedes the *logos ut verbum*, we might say. Thus the world is necessary and the *Logos*/Demiurge is contingent, for it depends on the eternal Platonic Forms.

For the Christian understanding, conversely, the consubstantial *Logos*/Son who became flesh in Jesus Christ exists with the Father for all eternity, in the absence of matter or created objects of any kind. The world therefore is simply and solely the fruit of a completely free act of God through and for the *Logos*/Son, Jesus Christ, in the Holy

Spirit, an entirely unconditioned creative action. That is to say, the world exists on account of the *Logos*/Son—that is, Christ—and not the other way around. At every level, the *logos ut verbum* precedes the *logos ut ratio*. In effect, from the standpoint of Christian faith, the world is fundamentally contingent and completely dependent, whereas the *Logos*, Christ the eternal Son, is necessary and eternal, as necessary as God himself is.

This explains why Scripture speaks not only of the mediating or exemplary role of the *Logos* in the work of creation, but also of Christ as the final cause or ultimate purpose of the created world, a position that is particularly clear in Paul's letter to the Colossians: "all things were created *through* him and *for* him" (1:16). Arius, however, taught that the *Logos* was created so that the Father could create the cosmos, the *Logos* was created 'for our sake, so that God might create us through him as through an instrument.' This was clearly not the Christian position.¹⁰⁵

Christian thinkers saw things differently.¹⁰⁶ According to Maximus the Confessor, the divine work of creation is directed to Christ and not to creation itself.¹⁰⁷ The one divine *Logos* as the source and end of all.¹⁰⁸ McFarland comments on Maximus's position: "all *logoi* abide equally in the one divine *Logos*, and none provides access to the *Logos* apart from the grace of divine illumination [...] In short, the light streaming from Christ enables us to understand the world as God's creation, thereby confirming Jesus as the necessary reference point for all human knowledge of God and the world alike."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Cfr. TERTULLIAN, *De res. carnis*, 6; IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.*, III, 22:3, 21:10; *Epidexis I*, 2:22.

¹⁰⁶ Bonaventure for example saw Christ as the "absolute final cause of creation," (BONAVENTURE, *III Sent.*, d. 1, q. 2, a. 2). Cfr. L. SCHEFFCZYK, *Schöpfung und Vorsehung*, Herder, Freiburg i. B.-Basel-Wien 1963, 88.

¹⁰⁷ Cfr. MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Quaest. ad Thalass.*, 2. Cfr. T.T. TOLLEFSEN, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Cfr. MCFARLAND, *From Nothing*, 82.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, 82. McFarland adds: "Because the unity of creation can be established only in the *Logos* and not through reference to any feature of created being considered in itself, it is not enough to say that God created the world, but it is necessary to specify that God created it *from nothing*," (*ibidem*, 83). Cfr. also A. LOUTH, *Maximus the Confessor*, Routledge, London-New York 1996, 107.

IV. CREATION, THE *LOGOS*, SCIENCE AND REVELATION

In conclusion, two issues may be considered as we compare the Greek-classical and Christian understandings of the divine *Logos*, and the corresponding position of the *logos* or *logoi* present in creatures.¹¹⁰

The first issue is the following. As we have seen, in the Platonic and Neo-Platonic world-view a certain unease may be detected in the relationship between the *Logos* in God and the *logos* present in the created world, which translates into a tension between the *logos ut verbum* and the *logos ut ratio*. The Greek *Logos* is subordinate to the divinity; the created world is a kind of degradation of the divine *Logos*, and thus represents a loss of intelligibility. Indeed, as we have seen, the very existence of the *Logos* as a contingent intermediary being goes to confirm that the material world is fallen and decadent. The fact that the *Logos* exists, as subordinate to the Divinity, therefore, disqualifies at least in part the ability of created human reason to arrive at true knowledge, for both *Logos* and created *logoi* are degradations. Significantly, in the *Phaedo* Plato considers that the empirical world and scientific reflection that flows from it is an obstacle to our knowledge of the truth.¹¹¹ Philosophy and science do not support one another.

In the Christian view, however, the inherent rationality or *logos* present in the world and in the human mind may be considered as a faithful reflection of the divine *Logos*, the *logos ut ratio* of the *logos ut verbum*. Not a perfect reflection, mind, but yes a faithful one... perhaps we could even say, a *filial* reflection, thus providing a path to truth that is fully trustworthy for humans. In simple terms, Christians basically trust reason and created beings because God made them, and made them well. Creating the world through his Son and for his Son, connects the origin and rationality inherent in the created world directly to God, and to God alone. Everything that God does, every mark he leaves on created beings, expresses this divine paternal-filial logic, and nothing else but

¹¹⁰ P. O'CALLAGHAN, *L'incontro tra fede e ragione nella ricerca della verità*, in G. MASPERO, M. PÉREZ DE LABORDA (eds.), *Fede e ragione: l'incontro e il cammino. In occasione del decimo anniversario dell'enciclica Fides et ratio*, vol. 2, Cantagalli, Siena 2011, 35-59; IDEM, *Faith Challenges Culture. A Reflection on the Dynamics of Modernity*, Lexington Books, Lanham 2021, 52-53.

¹¹¹ Cfr. PLATO, *Phaedo*, 65-67.

this logic. ‘I do not call you servants any longer,’ Jesus said to the apostles, ‘because a servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you’ (Jn 15:15). For this reason, the Christian view of the world actually makes science possible, whereas the Greek (or at least the Platonic) one does not to the same degree.¹¹²

But there is second issue to be considered. The rationality (or word) within the created world and present to the human mind, besides being a faithful (though imperfect) reflection of the divine *Logos*, in turn points unequivocally to God in Christ, is addressed to him, is directed to him. After all, the world was made *for* Christ, for the Word Incarnate, so it finds its meaning by returning to its source. Thus human reason is not merely a calculating machine that provides results and analysis, but points back to God just as it originally derives from God. With the human word, something of a kind happens. The words we pronounce not only reflect what we think (the *logos ut ratio*): they also (attempt to) give rise to a response directed from the recipient to the author (we may speak of the *logos ut verbum*), they are what John L. Austin called ‘performative.’¹¹³ In fact, the prophet Isaiah tells us, the divine word ‘shall not return [to God] without effect, without having done what I desire and without achieving the end for which I sent it’ (Is 55:10f.).

Within creation there is a rationality, a word, an intelligibility, but it is a word that has its origin in God, in the God of Jesus Christ. And God created a mind, that of man, made in his ‘image and likeness’ (Gen 1:27), capable of accepting this word and recognizing in it both its intelligibility and its divine origin. If this process in its double aspect of knowledge and recognition is not verified, as Paul explains at the beginning of the letter to the Romans (1:18-25, cfr. Wis 13:1-9), humans may commit a relevant moral transgression.

¹¹² “Not a few historians of science have pointed out that the Christian faith in a Logos-Creator favored the development of Western scientific thought,” (TANZELLA-NITTI, “Jesus Christ, Incarnation and Doctrine of Logos,” *Interdisciplinary Encyclopedia of Religion and Science* [2008]: <https://inters.org/jesus-christ-logos>).

¹¹³ Cfr. J.L. AUSTIN, *How to Do Things with Words* (1955), Oxford University Press, Oxford 1989.

