

Jesus Christ, Incarnation and doctrine of Logos



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Christian theology looks at the mystery of Incarnation as one of its most powerful insights to understand the relation between God and nature, between biblical Revelation and the scientific interpretation of the world. In the Person of the Word-Son made flesh, without losing his transcendence God himself enters the world and history by taking on a created human nature (cf. Council of Chalcedon, DH 301-302), joining, in a sense, that same world that is the object of the natural sciences. Moreover, Sacred Scripture is quite clear in affirming the role of the Word-Logos over the whole of creation, mediating both in its beginning and in its fulfillment. The article that this Encyclopedia dedicates to the [Gospels](#) [2] treats of the relationship between faith and reason with respect to the historical approach to Jesus of Nazareth. The present article deals with the principal consequences, for science and faith, of the Incarnation of the Word and the doctrine of the Logos.

I. A Philosophical Reflection on the Concept of Logos in the Context of the Relationship between Faith and Reason.

1. Early Philosophical Thought on Nature and the World, and the Role of the Logos. At the heart of the message of the New Testament is the belief that the only-begotten Son of the Father exercised a mediation of universal importance in the creation of the world and in the revelation of the divine plan. It is the plan of a cosmic recapitulation which, in a human history marked by sin, also manifests the characteristics of a reconciliation. In the Johannine corpus (the Fourth Gospel, his *First Letter*, and the *Book of Revelation*), the word used to describe the role of mediator and redeemer of the Son of God become man is the Greek word *Logos* (Lat. *Verbum*), a term that pagan philosophers had already employed. The use of the Greek word *Logos* shows that, among those who received the proclamation of the Gospel, there were also the philosophers of that time, and it suggests that early Christians were likewise aware of the philosophical consequences that such a proclamation brought with it. To evaluate these consequences, it is necessary to make reference in the first place to the way in which the term *Logos* was understood and its relationship to the divine.

In Greek thought, the word *lógos* (Gr. *léghein*: to say, to tell, but also to enumerate, to choose, to gather) had diverse meanings. On the one hand, it contained the idea of reason, reckoning (lat. *ratio*), but also that of discourse, word (Lat. *oratio*). The first to develop a definite philosophy of the Logos was Heraclitus (550-480 B.C.). He spoke of the Logos as a universal mind, responsible for the harmony and order of the world, a mind which permeated everything but which most people were unaware of or did not understand. A mind which at times was identified with the concepts of life and fire, and therefore invested with a divine character. Plato (427-347 B.C.) principally used the concept of Logos according to its meaning of “discourse” and “reason,” though assigning to it a character of transcendence, both in its aspect of defining each thing (to give meaning to something by enumerating its elements), and in its predicative aspect (showing or demonstrating its agreement with the truth). The Platonic Logos belonged to the world of Ideas, that world to which the Demiurge-Artificer had to look at the moment of forming and ordering the cosmos according to harmonic and numerical relationships. In Aristotle’s *Organon* (384-322 B.C.), the Logos gives origin to the field of logic, understood as the analysis of rational discourse by which the conclusions of every field of knowledge are organized. Notwithstanding these diverse meanings, the Logos refers above all to the intelligibility of the cosmos, to the possibility of knowing and expounding the rational principles which govern it.

Nevertheless, beginning with the Stoic philosophers (from the 3rd century onwards), a more sophisticated doctrine of the Logos emerges, adopting the insights of Heraclitus and merging them with various Neo-Platonic currents, thus becoming a basic element of Greek-Roman philosophy. This way of thinking was still active when the books of the New Testament were being written and when the Fathers of the Church began catechizing the pagan world. In the *Acts of the Apostles*, St. Luke refers to the presence of Stoic and Epicurean philosophers at the discourses of St. Paul in the Athens Agorà, before he was led into the Areopagus (cf. *Acts* 17:18). In the Greek philosophy of that time, the Logos takes on more and more the characteristics of a divine, spiritual principle, which began to adapt itself to the relationship already conceptualized between “form” and “matter,” though adopts the properties of the Platonic form as much as that of Aristotle. It is prefaced by the adjective “divine” and at times substituted by the name “[God](#) [3].” However, if in Plato’s thought such a principle of intelligibility necessarily remains transcendent and ideal, according to the doctrine of the Stoics it is completely immanent in matter. The use of the word *lógos* thus starts to be consolidated in the different fields of philosophy: in Logic, it indicates the rules of discourse, in their interior dialectics (Gr. *lógos endiáthetos*) and in their exterior rhetoric (Gr. *lógos prophorikós*); in physics, the divine active principle present in things, a seminal, creative intelligibility that mixes itself in all the elements in the form of potential seeds (Gr. *spermatikoi lógoi*; Lat. *rationes seminales*); in ethics, the law against which one’s behavior is measured in order to live according to nature. Logos, Artificer of creation and Soul of the world all become synonyms referring to God.

We also encounter a doctrine of the Logos in Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.-50 A.D.), a Jewish philosopher from Hellenistic background. In Philo's doctrine of the Logos, two different worlds converge: the theological elements gathered from the Old Testament, above all the personification of God's Wisdom described in the Books of *Wisdom* and *Proverbs*, and the teachings of Neo-Platonic philosophy. The Logos of Philo coincided for the most part with the Wisdom of Yahweh, already referred to in the sacred text with the name Logos (word) of God (cf. *Wis* 9:1; 16:12; 18:14). According to this understanding, Wisdom intervened in the formation of a world it did not create, but of which it was a mediator. It has the task of leading human beings to God and of revealing the plan of salvation. It is the first of the powers emanating from God, something divine which is not God. The Logos-Wisdom of Philo seeks to bridge the transcendent intelligibility of the Platonic Demiurge (concerning the world of ideas) and the immanent intelligibility of the Stoic Logos (inherent in things). However, in Philo's Logos several characteristics of the Demiurge-Artificer, image of the order and of the goodness of the One, are also present, since it was by means of the Logos that the God of the Old Testament realized his creation. Philo thus sought to create the first synthesis between biblical doctrine and Greek thought, and his categories were destined to be very influential in the subsequent Christian era. If, in early Christian theology of the West, the discourse about God and creation continue to be centered on the Logos, Christian writers of the East prefer to develop the discourse about God around the role of Wisdom (Gr. *Sophía*).

Leaving aside for a moment the various philosophies of the Logos, the way in which ancient philosophers spoke of God or of the divine was based upon an undeniable speculative achievement, the notion of *universality*. We find this concept quite evident, for example, in the familiar reference of Plato to a "Maker and Father of all" (*Timaeus*, 28c). One cannot speak about God except in universal terms and it must be done in such a way, whether deductively or inductively, that the intellectual approach joins in the common effort to "understand the cosmos." Even where there appears to be a multiplication of principles, they always answer to a global logic, a philosophy of the whole. The appeal made to the Logos is nothing other than a proof of this "desiring to look for a reason (*ratio*) of the whole," by seeking above all the causes of intelligibility and of order.

Such a need for universality is also found in discourses about God that proceed along the lines of metaphysics, which seeks the causes of the existence of things. Starting with Plato and Aristotle—who provided the original development of a body of thought already present in Parmenides and Anaxagoras—Greek philosophy was on its way, in its search for the first and founding causes of being, towards an idea of the divine ever more spiritual and more elevated. With Socrates and Plato, it affirmed the hope for a life where the justice denied in this life would be realized, based upon the idea of a just and recompensing Deity, in contrast to the inconstancy and immorality of the divinities of popular mythology. Philosophical reflection also defended the reasonableness of a stable and universal [truth](#) [4], in opposition to relativism and opportunism of Sophists. The discourse about God and about the Absolute is certainly not univocal in the philosophies of antiquity, and it remains for the most part difficult to interpret, as shown, for example, by references to a plurality of gods or by the preferred adjective, "the divine" (Gr. *tò theîon*) over the substantive "God" (Gr. *o Theòs*). Nonetheless, it is without a doubt that Plato was approaching an ineffable and apophatic conception of the Absolute, understood as the One and the Highest Good, and capable of taking religious connotations since he saw the activities of philosophy as a whole to be *religious*. Aristotle's thought, though it manifests a less religious and more rational dimension, progressed even more clearly towards a sort of philosophic monotheism where, as in the well-known Book XII of *Metaphysics*, the Absolute comes to be understood as pure thought, as supreme substance and life. As we shall see further on (see below, n. 3), this will become the linguistic and conceptual background of the Logos and the Absolute, in the frame which the Christian message will understand its *logos*, i.e., its discourse, of God.

2. *The Originality of the Christian Logos.* The prologue of the fourth Gospel (*Jn* 1:1-18) presents the Word (*Logos*) as he who “in the beginning was,” who “was with God,” and who “was God” (*Jn* 1:1). Even though distinct from God who begot him (i.e., he was with God, Gr. *pròs tôn Theón*, with the article), the Word is himself God (Gr. *Theós*). St. John explicitly affirms the role played by the Logos in the creation of the world: “He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. [...] the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him” (vv. 3 and 10). Subject of the divine attributes of life, holiness, and light, the Word was sent into the world, because “this” Logos “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (v. 14). The Johannine Logos is a real person, and does not only correspond to the logic of *ratio*, but also that of *verbum*. All the unfathomableness of the divine transcendence belongs to him, emphasized by his “being in the beginning (Gr. *arché*)” as the artificer of creation (in parallel with the beginning of Genesis and with the role of the word of God in the creation of six days), by his being in the bosom of the Father (v. 18), and by his fullness of grace, of truth and of glory (vv. 14,16). But he also possesses all the concreteness of what is visible and capable of suffering, emphasized by his being “flesh.” St. John himself also presents the Logos as he who is truly accessible, he who John’s own eyes have seen and his hands have touched (*1Jn* 1:1), and he who is, at the same time, the one and same heavenly Logos, the eschatological judge at the center of the apocalyptic vision of the final battle (cf. *Rev* 19:13).

Beyond the Johannine writings, other places in the New Testament, especially those bound to the theology of St. Paul (cf. *Eph* 1:3-10; *Col* 1:15-20; *Heb* 1:1-3; cf. also *Rom* 16:25-26; *1Cor* 8:6) affirm that the revelation of the divine plan of creation, the recapitulation/re-ordering of all things, and the reconciliation of creation to its Creator, take on in Jesus Christ a true “cosmic” significance. From its very beginning, the proclamation of the *Christian* Gospel shows the characteristics of universality and keeps a necessary link to [creation](#) [5]. The God that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is the same God that made the heavens and the earth (cf. *Acts* 14:15-16 and 17:24-31). This invisible God revealed himself visibly in his Word made man, in whose hands he placed not only the destiny of a people, but that of the entire universe (cf. *Jn* 3,35; *Eph* 1,10; *Col* 1,20). The early preaching of the mystery of Christ, however, does not renew the canons of pagan gnosis. Christ’s sovereignty over creation and the universality of salvation he offers do not move along the lines of an ideal and abstract plan, but rather a personal, existential plan in which every human being is involved. In Jesus Christ subsist the reasons of truth and life, the general plan of God for the whole of creation and the personal vocation of every single human person, created, chosen, and redeemed in his Son.

The *philosophical* originality of the Christian Logos rests in the simultaneous proposition of its transcendence and immanence. This depends on his two natures, human and divine, possessed by the sole uncreated Person of the Son of God, begotten as God by the Father before the beginning of time (cf. *Jn* 17:5 and 17:24), and born as man of a woman in the fullness of time (cf. *Gal* 4:4). Such a theology of the Logos was acknowledged by the professions of faith of the Councils of the first centuries as the authentic expression of the message contained in biblical Revelation. The Council of Nicea (325) affirms Jesus Christ as “God of God, light of light, true God of true God, born, not made, of one substance with the Father (Gr. *homousion*), by whom all things were made, which are in heaven and on earth” (DH 125). The Council of Chalcedon (451) speaks of “one and the same Christ, only begotten Son, our Lord, acknowledged in two natures without mingling, without change, indivisibly, undividedly, the distinction of the natures nowhere removed on account of the union, but rather the uniqueness of each nature being kept and uniting in one person and one substance, not divided or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son only begotten God Word (*lógos*), Lord Jesus Christ” (DH 302; cf. also DH 553-558; DH 290-295).

The “consubstantiality” of the Word-Son with the Father constitutes a decisive element of specificity because the Greek Logos, in its various, more or less personified meanings, remained always a creature, divine but inferior to God. The creative action of the Greek Logos, in fact, was limited by the existence of pre-existing matter and by the fixed rationality of the “world of ideas.” Its personality was not fully distinct from the One of whom, after all, it was only an emanation. Thus, the action of the pagan Logos in relation to the world was simply that of ordering, from *cháos* to *kósmos*, and the very reason for which the Logos existed was nothing other than the material world itself. On the contrary, the Christian Word-Logos is a personal subject, distinct from the God-Father, but remaining God as is the Father. His action is truly creative, because there was “nothing” before him, the “nothing” from which the Trinitarian God calls all things into existence. He is distinct from matter as is God, but he is able to take it on in becoming incarnate. On the original way in which biblical revelation unites the human and divine in the only person of the Word, when compared to approaches hitherto proposed by philosophy or religion, we will return later on (see below, IV). It is enough to mention that part of this originality is the specific role which the logic of the Incarnation gives to the importance of history.

3. *The “Choice” Made by the Early Christian Writers for the Logos, and Its Cultural Consequences.* The New Testament data about the cosmic importance of the Christian Logos, both his divine transcendence and his truly historical character, led to precise philosophical and cultural choices in relation to the Greek-Roman world. For there were two diverse conceptions of the divinity which coexisted in that world, one bound to the rational analysis of philosophy, the other bound to popular polytheistic religiosity and to mythical narrations. The two conceptions established themselves in two diverse and separate contexts: the philosophical one dominated the world of reason, reflective thought, the search for the cause of existence and of the principles of right human action; the religious one dominated instead the life lived out, comprised of feelings, of history, of the concrete problems of existence such as war and peace, art and beauty, justice and revenge, suffering and love... The most solemn representation of this second context was in the theatrical works of the great Greek tragedies. Although both conceptions speak of the divine and, especially before Aristotle, their terminology draws in part from the common language of myth, there was a clear contrast between them signified, for example, in Xenophanes’ and Plato’s criticism of polytheistic mythology. The rift between philosophy and religion also characterized ancient Roman thought. Terence Varro (116 B.C.-27 B.C.) spoke of the division between the Natural Theology (Lat. *theologia naturalis*) of the philosophers, whose conclusions were not normative for social life, and the Civil Theology (Lat. *theologia civilis*), which represented religion in the strict sense and regulated the life of the City. In a certain sense, therefore, Classical antiquity was dominated by the difficulty of merging a philosophical-impersonal idea of God with an existential-personal idea of God.

The first Christians and Fathers of the Church needed to ground their evangelization upon a specific understanding of God. In favoring the language used by philosophers to speak about the divinity, and at the same time refuting the language and context proper to polytheistic religiosity, they made a decisive choice. One usually indicates this choice as opting for the Logos and refusing the mythological (Gr. *mythos*) fable. Here, by the word “[myth](#) [6]” we do not mean that hermeneutic channel, present in every culture, through which archaic truths about humanity and the world are transmitted over generations. Rather, we refer to what mythology was in that epoch about, that is, “stories about the gods,” narrations proper to polytheism that entailed presumed implications for one’s daily life. The New Testament dismisses them simply as “fables” (cf. *1Tm* 1:4 and 4:7; *2Tm* 4:4; *2Pt* 1:16).

From the beginning of Christianity, a positive judgment was made in regards to pagan philosophical tradition. Already in the 2nd century, the foundations of a cultural synthesis were laid that was to reap its best fruit at the end of the 4th century. St. Justin (100-165) and Clement of Alexandria (150-215) were the first to undertake this courageous intellectual work, by following a course that had already been charted

by St. John and St. Paul. Justin saw in Socrates' exhortation to seek the truth an invitation to draw near, through reason, to the true God who men were still ignoring (cf. *Apologia*, II, X,6). In Clement's writings, the appreciation of true philosophy and its connection to the Gospel was explicit and unequivocal: "When I speak of philosophy, I do not mean Stoic, Platonic, Aristotelian or Epicurean. I apply the term philosophy to all that is rightly said in each of these schools, all that teaches righteousness combined with a scientific knowledge of religion." And again: "We make the simple assertion that philosophy includes questions concerning truth and the nature of the universe, the truth of which the Lord himself says: 'I am the truth' " (*Stromateis*, I, 6, 37 and I, 5, 32, 4).

At the basis of the Christian choice for the Logos was the conviction that the Absolute which Greek philosophy had understood as the foundation of Being, precisely because it had been sought out starting from the reality of the world and presumed the universality of reason, must have something in common with the God of Israel. The "God who made heaven and earth" could not be identified with any of the gods of the Pantheon, not even the greatest of them. Myth had assigned each one of these gods a determined essence, a specific and defined role, capable of calming subjective existential anxieties: a god for peace, and one for war, one for the house and one for a voyage, one for security and one for fear, one for life and one for death... Moreover, the human desire to dominate all circumstances of life led to a multiplication of their number and functions. Although invisible, the God of Israel who was revealed by the visible sending of his Son, was more easily connected to that philosophical intuition of a transcendent, more elusive —and thus truer— Absolute who leads human beings to the gates of mystery, without however obliging them to enter (cf. Ratzinger, 1990). This was why St. Paul, seeking a point of departure for his discourse in the Athens Areopagus, refused to associate any of the gods which already had a name to his God, preferring to take advantage of the "Unknown God" to begin his preaching (cf. *Acts* 17:22-25). Although the Pauline preaching would lead to the scandal of the cross and incredulity towards the [Resurrection](#) [7], paradoxes which could but not scandalize the wisdom of the Greeks (cf. *Acts* 17: 31-32; *1 Cor* 1:22-25), at first his speech resonated with his hearers, since it sought a reference to universality found in the cosmos and in reason.

Upon the linguistic and conceptual foundation of Greek thought, Christian evangelization reveals without compromise the true face of God hidden in the Logos of the philosophers. In the Logos, then, are joined reason and feeling, philosophy and religion, and truth and life, thus healing the rift which Greek and Roman cultures had not been able to bridge. The Absolute ceased being the pure Being of Parmenides, the pure intelligence of Anaxagoras, the pure Goodness or One of the Platonists, the highest life or being capable of self-awareness of the Aristotelians, when it became a personal being, someone who could be named without being dissolved or changed. In fact, this Logos *became flesh* and has a definite face, that of Jesus of Nazareth, whose human traits are those of the Word of God made man, the living Word of a personal God who addresses himself to every human person. The weak determinations of Being as understood by philosophy continue to subsist as seeds of truth which result from a study of reality. The first Christian authors recognized them as "attributes" of the Being of God. They coexist in God without emptying his transcendent image of value and without dissolving the mystery: "If we wish to designate God and we do it improperly by calling him One, or the Good, or Intellect, or Being itself, or Father, or God, or Demiurge, or Lord, we do not do it as if pronouncing his name, but in the absence of something better, we take as a support these designations [...]. Each individual term cannot signify God, but all of them together are indicative of the power of the Omnipotent" ([Stromateis, V, 12](#) [8], 82).

In the encounter between the message of the Gospel and Greek thought, which took place principally in the world of Neo-Platonic philosophy, whatever thought was suitable to a Christian *lógos* about God was employed: "Thus Greek philosophy appears in the Christian perspective. There is a certain knowledge of God, innate in every human being, which is its manifestation through its work. Philosophy, by

abstraction, purifies this idea of God from its anthropomorphisms, arriving through a negative theology, an ‘invisible search,’ to the affirmation that God transcends all that which is, but at this point philosophy cannot proceed further. Only the Son, who possesses the knowledge of the Father, can lead one to it. The originality of Christianity is therefore essentially the revelation of the Son, both on account of the knowledge of existence that comes with this, and because he alone can lead one to the knowledge of the unknowable” (Danielou, 1961, p. 315). The appeal to reason and to its search for the truth therefore played a decisive role in the initial diffusion of the Christian faith. However, this rational foundation did not usurp the centrality proper to Revelation, which always concerns the person of Jesus Christ and his paschal mystery: “No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him” (*Jn* 1:18).

II. The Mediation of the Word in the Work of Creation Reveals God’s Project for Humankind and for the World

The term “word” (Heb. *dabar*) has in Sacred Scripture a meaning which is much richer than that it has in modern languages: it includes the noetic as well as the dynamic aspect. The word of God does not solely communicate a content, nor does it solely inform: it is also, always, an efficacious word, which brings about that which it says. The word of God creates, guides history, works [miracles](#) [9], saves, ensures the providential unfolding of the events of creation. It is a word which demands attention and adhesion, which moves to action and gives the strength to accomplish that which it asks. Creation, the most radical divine operation, is presented as tightly bound to the Word. The Book of *Genesis* shows the origin of all things as an effect of the divine word. The Sapiential Books attribute to the word the role of sustaining the universe and providentially guiding it (cf. *Wis* 11.24-26; *Ps* 33.6; *Ps* 104.27-29). Precisely because it stands in relationship to the Word, creation participates in a covenant with God: the stability of the sky is a manifestation of his fidelity (cf. *Prv* 3:19-20; *Prv* 8:27-30; *Sir* 43:9-10); the existence of the [laws of nature](#) [10] speak of his wisdom (*Sir* 42:23-24; *Is* 61:11; *Ps* 19). Creation as such asks for the motive of its beauty and order, and refers back to its Author (cf. *Wis* 13:1-5; *Jb* 37:14f).

As a result of the blend between the Old Testament doctrine about Wisdom and the Greek doctrine of the Logos, the Fathers of the Church preferred to explain the mediation of the Word in creation employing the category of “exemplar causality.” Once some uncertainties about the relationship between the Logos and the Father were cleared up (they are still present, for example, in St. Justin and several apologetic Fathers), the necessary clarification in relation to the Arian error prompted a more mature elaboration. Athanasius offers a wonderful example in a passage that harmonizes creation’s dependence on God’s Word and the autonomy which every creature enjoys: “There is nothing that is and takes place but has been made and stands by Him and through Him, as also the Divine says, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; all things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made.’ For just as though some musician, having tuned a lyre, and by his art adjusted the high notes to the low, and the intermediate notes to the rest, were to produce a single tune as the result, so also the Wisdom of God, handling the Universe as a lyre, and adjusting things in the air to things on the earth, and things in the heaven to things in the air, and combining parts into wholes, and moving them all by His beck and will, produces well and fittingly, as the result, the unity of the universe and of its order, Himself remaining unmoved with the Father while He moves all things by His organizing action, as seems good for each to His own Father [...]. For with the single impulse of a nod as it were of the Word of God, all things simultaneously fall into order, and each discharge their proper functions, and a single order is made up by them all together” (St. Athanasius, *Oratio contra Gentes*, 42-43: PG 25, 83-87; cf. also *De Incarnatione Verbi*, I). Similar reflections will be proposed later on by Thomas Aquinas, though in a more rigorous metaphysical scheme proper to Medieval theology (cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV,

ch. 13).

The passages of the New Testament, however, that link the divine Word to the [creation](#) [5] of the world have as their subject not only the Word-Logos, Son of the eternal Father, but also the Word-Logos as united, in Christ, to human nature (cf. *Jn* 1:1-3.14; *Eph* 1:3-10; *Col* 1:16-20; *Heb* 1:1-3). Jesus Christ, Word of the Father become man, maintains a special relationship with creation, for at least two reasons: a) It was the very same divine Word, who created all things, that became flesh; b) through the gift of the Incarnation, God himself desired to “bind” himself to creation. We shall briefly examine the biblical contents involved, under two aspects: 1. Creation has in Christ its principle of subsistence; it was made in Him, by Him, and *for Him*; the humanity of Christ, therefore, can be considered as the *fullness of creation*, most fully revealing God’s plan; 2. The logic of a *new creation* is already present in Christ, the new creation begun with the reconciliation in his blood and leading to its eschatological fulfillment in his glorious resurrection.

1. All Things Hold Together in Christ and Were Created through Him and for Him. The hymn in the first chapter of the Letter to the *Colossians* shows Christ at the heart of the divine plan for creation and salvation, in a three-fold involvement: “For in him (Gr. *en auto*) were created all things” and furthermore “all things were created through him (*tà pánta di autoû*) and for him (*kai eis autòn*)” (*Col* 1:16). There is a certain similarity between this text and an analogous formula of faith found in *1 Corinthians*: “for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things are and for whom we exist (Gr. *eis autòn*), and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and through whom (*di autoû*) we exist” (*1Cor* 8:6). To affirm that all things were made *for him* suggests that creation tends towards the humanity of the Word as one tends towards an apex, towards its most perfect expression. The dynamic character of this expression is evident in the original Greek *eis autòn*, which in the Latin of the New Vulgate was translated as *in* plus the accusative: *omnia in ipsum creata sunt*. The expression speaks of the unity and coherence of the whole divine plan, and how the person of the Man-God is capable of expressing and revealing in Himself such coherence. In the words of a contemporary exegete, “Christ, inasmuch as he is divine Wisdom, is the mirror in which God contemplated the plan of the cosmos” (A. Feuillet, *Le Christ Sagesse de Dieu d’après les épîtres pauliniennes*, [Paris: 1966], p. 365).

The theme of the “pre-existence” of Christ is therefore implied, that is, the presence of the “mystery of the incarnate Word” at the dawn of the divine creation. Scripture affirms that He who makes visible that which in God is mysterious and invisible, “is before all things” (*Col* 1:17) and “is the firstborn of all creation” (v. 15). By these expressions, one is not affirming that he had been created first, nor that he is the temporal principle from which the series of all creatures would originate; rather, one is affirming his preeminence as universal mediator of all that was called into existence with creation. The Christ preached by John existed before creation because “in the beginning was the Word” (cf. *Jn* 1:1; *1Jn* 1). The Baptist points him out to his disciples by saying: “A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me” (*Jn* 1:30). The love which binds this Son to God his Father is “before the foundation of the world” (cf. *Jn* 17:5.24). Also for Peter, who witnessed together with John of the glory of the Transfiguration, He “was known before the foundation of the world but revealed in the final time for you” (*1Pt* 1:20). The *Letter to the Hebrews*, pointing out that the word of God, which had been given to the Fathers and to the Prophets, had entered the world in the sending of God’s only Son, adds that this Son is He “through whom he created the universe... and who sustains all things by his mighty word” (*Heb* 1:2-3).

This pre-existence of Christ does not imply any necessary or deterministic connection between creation and Incarnation, nor does it wipe away the gratuity of redemption. It simply shows that, in the sole historical economy that we know, the one marked by an original fall and by a promise of salvation, there

exists between creation and Incarnation a relationship already foreseen in the plan of God. The creation of adoptive children of God, children elected and chosen in his only begotten Son (cf. *Eph* 1:4-5), already implies God's gratuitous will to restore and renew in them His "image and likeness" darkened by human sin. God the Father does so precisely by means of the created humanity of the Word, in order to reveal all its original beauty. Already at the beginning of the 4th century, St. Athanasius explained this divine logic in these words: "It is, then, proper for us to begin the treatment of this subject [the Incarnation of the Word] by speaking of the creation of the universe, and of God its Artificer, so that it may be duly perceived that the renewal of creation has been the work of the self-same Word that made it at the beginning. For it will appear not inconsonant for the Father to have wrought its salvation in Him by Whose means He made it" (St. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi*, 1: PG 25, 98; on this theme cf. also John Paul II, *Dives in misericordia*, 7).

If all things were created *for* Christ, the created reality of the humanity of the Word is thus seen to be the most perfect divine work. In Him, "dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily" (*Col* 2:9). In the glorious body of the risen Christ, it is as if the whole of the divine world to which his divine uncreated Person belongs, is recapitulated and revealed; but also all of the natural cosmos, to which belongs his created human nature, since the fullness of the deity dwells *bodily* in him, in the concreteness of his corporal dimensions.

Scripture had already presented the headship of human beings over creation, in that they were placed at the summit of the divine work accomplished in the six days. They are the sole creature made in the image of God and capable of recapitulating in themselves the co-existence of spirit and matter, virtually a synthesis of the whole created world. "Though made of body and soul, man is one. Through his bodily composition he gathers to himself the elements of the material world; thus they reach their crown through him, and through him raise their voice in free praise of the Creator" (*Gaudium et spes*, 14; cf. *Lateran Council IV*, DH 800). Such an "anthropocentric" headship is taken up and brought to fulfillment in a "Christocentric" kingship. Besides being the perfect image of the Father, the incarnate Word is, in fact, also the image of the true man, of whom the first Adam was a figure (cf. *Rom* 5:14). In Him it is no longer a matter of a synthesis of spirit and material that is expressed, but rather the unconfused and hypostatic union (namely a union performed in the divine Person) of his divine nature with a human nature, corporeal and spiritual: "*Nam sicut anima rationali et caro unum est homo, ita Deus et homo unus est Christus* — For just as the rational soul and body are one man, so God and man are one Christ" (*Pseudo-Athanasian Creed*, DH 76). Unveiling the countenance of the perfect man in the plans of God, the Word incarnate also expresses in a perfect way all of creation, of which the human person was placed at the top. This is realized not only on account of his divinity, that is, by means of his divine mediation in creation, as eternal Word begotten before all things, but also on account of his true and perfect humanity.

In addition to the above mentioned elements of the originality of the Christian Logos in relation to Greek thought (see above, I.2), other elements can be suggested. Stoic and Neo-Platonic philosophies were aware of a personification of nature (Gr. *physis*), somewhat similar to the Old Testament's treatment of divine Wisdom. In Greek thought, however, the origin of all things of nature and their ability to be traced back to it (Gr. *ek, en, eis*) took on more the meaning of a cosmic harmony, that of an archetypal model, than that of a true and proper [finalism](#) [11]. Scripture does not say that creation "derived" from Christ, nor that creation is a harmonic whole, complete in itself, because it was made using Him as an exemplary model. Rather, the role of Christ is that of being the cause, the end and the subsistence of the cosmos: it was not solely created in him and by means of him, but also has its *ubi consistam* in him alone. All that exists has in him its specific subsistence, because he is the Lord, the head of the Body (cf. Lohse, 1986). When it is affirmed that the fullness of the divinity dwells in Christ, one is not thus making reference to a cosmological fullness, as in the Greek tradition where the cosmos constitutes the body itself of the

divinity, but rather to a soteriological (i.e. *salvific*) fullness, which expresses the power of the works of God manifested in him, and consequently the ideas of satisfaction, peace, reconciliation. If in Greek thought the world is seen as something which is necessary and the role of the Logos as something which is contingent, in the logic of Christian creation it is the world that is contingent and the Word, as God, is necessary (cf. O'Callaghan, 1995): it was not the Word that was made for the world, but the world for the Word.

2. *The New Creation in Christ.* The incarnate Word is also the universal mediator of a “new creation,” which began with his glorious [resurrection](#) [7]. The vision of the Word-judge, the eschatological fulfillment of the new heavens and the new earth, is a solemn expression of this new creation (cf. *Rev* 21:1-6). This mediation is easy to understand if one realizes that the Word-Logos, for whom all things were made, is the risen Christ of the paschal mystery. Creation, darkened by human sin, acquires again in Him a new dignity, which it had at the beginning in the plan of God. This renewal, realized in his humanity susceptible to suffering, does not entail a direct or extrinsic action of Christ upon creation—as a kind of miraculous intervention upon the cosmos—but rather it allows the redeemed humankind and the new people of God to bring all things back to God and to make use of them wisely, according to his salvific plan. This cosmic reconciliation, in which God's people participate, is not extrinsic into the world; rather, it is carried out from *within* the logic of creation, i.e., precisely *in Christ*. Such a renewal is mysteriously *already begun* in Christ, and therefore already present in his Church as a universal sign and sacrament of salvation, but *not yet realized*, because it involves his mystical body in a sacramental economy which will last until the end of [time](#) [12].

The correspondence between the first creation and the new creation is symbolically expressed by Easter Sunday, the dawn of the Church, and the first day of Genesis' Hexaemeron (cycle of six days). Having as the point of reference the transfigured humanity of the risen Christ, the new creation does not destroy but rather transforms the preceding creation. Between the two concepts there is certainly discontinuity, but also continuity: it is the reconstruction of an primeval order whose original meaning one now discovers. To the idea of a new creation is joined the definitive submission of all of creation to Christ, with a special reference to victory over death, and a universal recapitulation that has as its finality the reordering, restoring and leading of all things to the Father in the Spirit.

Creation is for Christ a filial inheritance (cf. *Heb* 1:2; *Rom* 8:17) upon which he exercises his royal Lordship. All of creation was destined for this submission (cf. *Heb* 1:22) because it is necessary that at the end of history “God may be all in all” (*1Cor* 15:28). In the *Epistle to the Colossians* it is said that “He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent” (*Col* 1:18). Christ is the head (Gr. *kephalé*) under whom is the body (Gr. *sôma*) of the cosmos, but according to a predominantly salvific perspective. This body, in fact, is the Church herself; that the whole of creation finds in him its grounds and justification, means that in him alone is salvation and victory over death. His condition as the firstborn from among the dead becomes normative of a new universal lineage, as was that of Adam.

Christ's glorious resurrection is the definitive manifestation and guarantee of this submission of all created things to him, whose salvific fruits can now be made visible in the lives of believers (cf. *Heb* 2:6-7; *Col* 3:1-4). Because of his resurrection, Christ can bring to life in the Church, his mystical Body, the first fruits of this new economy-covenant, thus allowing the members of this Body to give back to the Father a creation renewed in the Spirit (cf. *Phil* 3:20-21; *1Cor* 15:28; *Rom* 9:5; *Col* 3:11; *Eph* 4:6). The created world awaits with impatience a final transfiguration, in which the victory over the corruption of death will be extended to every creature, and in which the image of filiation, in which the whole cosmos was called to participate, will be definitively revealed and brought to fullness (cf. *Rom* 8:19-22).

The theme of “recapitulation” is principally evident in the prologue of the *Epistle to the Ephesians*: “He has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times, to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth” (*Eph* 1:9-10). At least two meanings, “to re-establish a chief” and “to elevate,” converge together in the biblical expression “to sum up all things in Christ” (Gr. *anakephalaiósastai tà pánta*). In Him, all things are contained, recapitulated in the sense of being summarized, especially in the salvific works of God. But they are also “restored” or “established”, i.e., “well-grounded.” Lastly, in Christ all things find a head or, in other words, need to be placed under his sovereignty; thus the idea of universal submission is also present, as already noted. The universal recapitulation of Christ has a cosmic influence: it involves things “in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible” (*Col* 1:16; cf. *Eph* 1:11), those of the present age and those of the world to come (cf. *Eph* 1:21). The Church, first fruit of the Kingdom of God on earth, is the sacramental and theological place where the logic of this new creation *already* occurs, *but not yet*.

III. Scientific and Philosophical Consequences in a World that is Created through Christ and for Christ.

1. The Created World Participates in the Mystery of the Risen Christ. Theology makes use of the biblical data concerning the mediation accomplished by Christ, the incarnate Word, at the beginning and at the fulfillment of creation, by understanding the dynamics of this mediation in relation to the Trinitarian mystery. The Father created the world in his Son and out of love for his Son, and the Son returns everything to the Father by means of the Spirit. The relationship between God and the world is thus interpreted in terms of an *exitus-reditus* scheme (going out - return). Medieval theology, especially that of Thomas Aquinas and of Bonaventure, shows a clear example of such an approach. In continuity with an outlook already present in the Fathers of the Church and in several medieval authors, contemporary theology discusses the consequences of the universal mediation of Christ within a vision known as “Christocentrism.” While the consequences of Christocentrism have been widely investigated at the theological and philosophical level, less attention has been given to the repercussions at the level of our scientific understanding of the created universe. Some of these deserve a fuller treatment, which we will consider under the five marks that theology ascribes to creation —its temporality, freedom, goodness, rationality and [finalism](#) [11].

In the first place, the physical world, paradigmatically recapitulated by the humanity that Jesus Christ took on, is in some way united to his paschal mystery. The invitation addressed to every human being, created and redeemed in Christ, to enter into communion with the Trinity, as sons in the Son, involves the material universe too. This ordering of creation to being present *in Christ* beside the life of God, is a consequence of the ordering of the whole of creation to Him (cf. *1Cor* 15:26-28). The humanity of the Risen One is the sign of the presence of all of creation in the glory of its Savior. “Father, in your mercy grant also to us, your children” —prays the Roman Catholic Church in its Fourth Eucharistic Prayers— “to enter into our heavenly inheritance [...] in your kingdom, freed from the corruption of sin and death, we shall sing your glory *with every creature* through Christ our Lord.” The original goodness of creation, affirmed by the account in Genesis, is certainly an “exemplary” goodness, because the universe is like its Creator (cf. *Gn* 1:18; 1:31), but it is also a “final” goodness, because God desired the universe for the Word made flesh. Therefore, by his incarnation, the Word enters a world and a history which already belong to him. He does not “come to earth” as a stranger from a world far away, but as a king who comes to take possession of his Kingdom. In this respect, the [miracles](#) [9] of Jesus are not interventions of a wonderworker, but rather demonstrations of the submission of a nature which exists in Him and by means of Him. The awaiting of the Messiah by the people of Israel, a Messiah whom Christian believers identify

as Jesus of Nazaret, has been the expectation of all creation

The fact then that the humanity of the Word experiences the mystery of suffering and of [death](#) [13], reveals that creation is also subject to frailty and weakness. Within creation there is a kind of incompleteness and the possibility —historically evident— of a disorder introduced by human sin, that will be overcome by the definitive lordship of Christ. The logic of the paschal mystery has a cosmic importance: the limitation, pain, and inadequacy remain present in creation until it is renewed by the coming of a new heaven and a new earth (cf. *2Pt* 3:13; *Rev* 21:1.6). The future participation of the created world in the eternal life seems to foretell its mystery of awaiting and of travail, of death and of resurrection, its capability of being transfigured. The importance of this renewal doubtless exceeds the forces present in the material universe —the subject of the final recapitulation will always be Christ victorious over death— but the physical cosmos is also involved in this renewal. The original goodness of creation and the taking on of human nature by the Word assure that the “continuity” between the first and new creation is also a physical and material continuity.

In second place, it must be pointed out that a universe created in Christ and for Christ acquires a “unity” and a “coherence” never before stated. From a general point of view, it is true that the unity of the [universe](#) [14] and the coherence of its overall design depend upon the uniqueness and personal nature of its First Cause, i.e., upon the existence of one sole Creator God. Nonetheless, to realize that such an overall divine plan has found its fulfillment in the advent of human beings and, even more, in the Incarnation of the Word, strengthens its unity and its global significance. In a universe esteemed on account of Christ and for Christ, matter is for life, life is for man, man for Christ, Christ for God (cf. *1Cor* 3:22-23). Every segment of the world’s natural history is then meaningful. Notwithstanding the great extension of spaces and times, one can reasonably affirm that nothing occurs by chance, nothing is superfluous. In the dynamism of [time](#) [12], the unity and coherence of a universe created in Christ can also be understood as “development” or even as “evolution,” without fear of encountering opposition to what is theologically associated with the concept of creation. In fact, the notion of [evolution](#) [15] itself acquires in such an outlook a more profound meaning and greater noetic importance. If the historical and hermeneutic center of the universe is the incarnation of the Word, then evolution is better understood as a global phenomenon, capable of giving coherence and intelligibility to the entire universe on a cosmic scale, and no longer solely as a simple attempt to explain or morphologically interpret that which has come about on a relatively local scale such as that of the earth. In such a broad evolutionary outlook, we are better able to perceive purpose in the universe, from its beginning towards its fulfillment, leading us to reject the idea that life is a phenomenon resulting solely by chance processes and local coincidences, originated in or depending upon a space-time realm of limited proportions. This broader view, rather, interprets life as something towards which the “whole” universe was directed from the beginning, a fruit which the whole of creation had prepared by the slow transformation of its elements and with the patience of its cosmic times.

2. Teilhard de Chardin’s View. Among the contemporary authors, French paleontologist P. Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) cast the most light upon the possibility of a “Christocentric” understanding of cosmic evolution, by making explicit several of its consequences on the scientific level.

Relying on the biblical doctrine contained in the Pauline and Johannine writings regarding the centrality of the Incarnation in the divine plan for creation, Teilhard arrived at a synthesis between the phenomenology of cosmic evolution towards life and the headship/recapitulation of Christ over all of creation (cf. Latourelle, 1983, ch. 3; Maldamé, 1998, pp. 200-201). As his works *The Divine Milieu* (1927) and *The Phenomenon of Man* (1947) bear witness, in considering the progress from inferior and simpler forms of life to superior forms, especially the continuous growing of nervous system and

brain, finally arriving at the human being, the French scientist placed biological evolution within the context of a physical evolution that should be active on a cosmic scale, having thus an intuition which anticipated by several decades the results of contemporary [cosmology](#) [16].

Teilhard de Chardin thus conceived a science of the universe that would re-join cosmology to anthropology: the human being is placed at the center of the universe, because man and woman constitute the crown and summit of its evolution. This evolution is progressive and irreversible, bearing witness to a plan which from matter leads to conscious thought and then to the highest manifestations of the [spirit](#) [17] and love: evolution finds its meaning in Someone who gives consistency to the whole process, who constitutes its finality and its highest expression. Initially denoted with the term “Omega Point,” Teilhard identifies the summit and the meaning of the evolution of the whole universe with Christ, understood now not only as the Word of the Father and the historical Jesus, but also as the “cosmic Christ.”

Basically, Teilhard’s work has two merits. The first is to have offered a [non-materialistic](#) [18] understanding of evolution. He provides a paradigm to interpret evolution profoundly different from the one employed by H. Spencer (1820-1903) and C. Darwin (1809-1882), which had strongly conditioned theology until then, to the point of distancing the latter ever more from the analysis of the sciences. In opposition to an evolutionism which sought its answers backwards in time, in the ever simpler forms of life and in matter, Teilhard proposed an evolution which gazes forward, to the human world and to the spirit, and, at the highpoint, to Christ. We can find traces of this proposal many centuries earlier, in the Christocentrism of Maximus the Confessor (580-662). Maximus was a strenuous defender of the perfection of the two natures of Christ. Against the Monothelite heresy he taught: “In seeking his end, man encounters his beginning, which is there, where he finds his end... It is not necessary, as I have already said, to look for the beginning in the past, but it is necessary to reveal the end which is in the future, in order to know the beginning hidden within the end” (*Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 59: PG 90, 631).

The second merit of Teilhard is to have traced out the lines of a Christology “proportioned to the dimensions of the universe,” broad enough to engage the perspectives of contemporary scientific knowledge. The gradual loss of cosmological and philosophical centrality that the image of man experienced during the modern and contemporary eras also called into question the Christian world-view, which had been the principal supporter of that centrality in the cultural and spiritual synthesis of the Middle Ages. However, once we acknowledge with Teilhard that the incarnation and [resurrection](#) [7] of Christ possess universal attributes capable of unifying the meaning of the whole cosmos, the Man-God is once again placed in a privileged situation. From Teilhard’s view Christianity acquires an unexpected uniqueness within the panorama of other religions. Only the Christian religion has a “founder” who is both universal mediator in the beginning and at the end of the world, because he is intimately bound to the meaning of all of creation. If cosmic and human evolutionary phenomenology point towards an apex, only Christianity can place in this apex an historical and personal subject, a life which has triumphed over death.

However, several aspects of Teilhard’s synthesis have remained less convincing. For example, how is one to harmonize the natural, material continuity of evolution with the discontinuity represented by the appearance of life, of consciousness, and also of the Incarnation of Christ, without ending up by proposing a simple deterministic process. In an eschatological perspective, such insufficiency shows itself in the scarce explanation given of what ought to rule such continuity/discontinuity regarding the relationship between the first and the new creation. A better clarification of the relationship between the history of the cosmos and the history of salvation is thus required; moreover, his view is open to further improvements, which should not ignore the role of sin in history. Teilhard’s language, difficult to

understand and not too rigorous, gave way to misunderstandings. This is the reason, I guess, why a declaration of the Holy Office, years after the death of the scientist, pointed out that several aspects of his thought contained serious errors, without however specifying which ones (cf. AAS 54 [1962], p. 526). Nevertheless, theology embraced several intuitions of his (cf. H. De Lubac, *The Religion of Teilhard de Chardin*, Image Books, Garden City 1968). Physical cosmology has recently revived some of his thought within the philosophical discussion of the [Anthropic Principle](#) [19], in order to interpret what might be the logic and final direction of cosmic evolution (cf. J. Barrow, F. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986]).

3. *The Intelligibility of the Christian Universe is Where the Dialogue between Human Beings and God Takes Place.* A world created *through* the Word is essentially dialogical in character. The universe is capable of putting forth and transmitting, therefore, a meaningful content. The human person, created by God in his image and likeness, is able to recognize this meaning and decipher it. In this way, the universe becomes a privileged place for the dialogue between God and human beings; the scientist fully participates in this dialogue, perhaps frequently unaware of it, every time he or she acknowledges an objective intelligibility in nature. In the logic of research and discovery, scientists often perceive in the universe the existence of a rationality (a *logos ut ratio*, understood as reason), and at times they consider that this ordered reality is something *given*, that it is *objective* and speaking in an intelligible language (a *logos ut verbum*, understood as word), and thus making them feel attracted to the search for the [truth](#) [4]. From a philosophical point of view, the possibility of a natural knowledge of God starting from created things has its foundation in the relationship between creation and the Word, as well as human capacity to speak (at least something) of God by making use of our knowledge of creatures.

Not a few historians of science have pointed out that the Christian faith in a Logos-Creator favored the development of Western scientific thought. Belief in the rationality of the world and in the objective and universal meaning of the [laws of nature](#) [10] paved the way for scientific research. This conviction is also shared by a good number of scientists. Nevertheless, one might think that this development was merely the product of a functional association. In other words, a particular order of ideas, coming from a *Christian* view of the world, was able to nurture a gnoseology better fitted to the analysis of the sciences without demanding that such a view have any objective foundation in reality. However, the Christian theology of creation does not limit itself to making note of this functional success, but upholds that this view of the world is rooted *in re*, i.e., in things. To place the Word as the foundation of reality, including physical reality, does not concern only the possible flourishing of scientific activity, but also intends to reveal the intimate structure of reality as such, that of being the effect of a rational, divine Word, and thus maintaining a constitutive openness to the dialogue between man and nature, between man and God.

On the strictly scientific level this issue could be related to the debate about the “unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics” ([E. Wigner, “The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences,”](#) [20] in *Communications in Pure and Applied Mathematics* 13 [1960], pp. 1-14). It is always possible to hypothesize an universe which does not have the property of being so easily mathematized as our own, where the basic laws of physics do not possess integrals which converge, or which can be represented with simple scientific formulas; a world in which, for example, the geometry of space does not allow radial potentials to decrease according to the inverse of distance, or the law of gravity to attract following the inverse of its square distance. Even if the human mind exercises a projection of its intellectual canons over the physical world, by seeking “to mathematize” it, the latter must be at the same time “mathematizable.” There are reasons to reject the idea that order in nature is merely imposed by the scientist. The language of scientific rationality, that of logic and mathematics, is not a completely conventional idiom, one among many possibilities. As John Polkinghorne points out, things are exactly the opposite: “Physicists laboriously master mathematical techniques because

experience has shown that they provide the best, indeed the only, way to understand the physical world. We choose that language because it is the one that is being ‘spoken’ to us by the cosmos” (*One World. The Interaction of Science and Theology*, [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987], p. 46). Behind the idea of a cosmos “capable of speaking” it is not difficult to catch sight of its constitutive connection to an original Word.

If all of creation abides by the logic of a Word, source of rationality and of intelligibility, then there ought to exist cognitive categories capable of embracing the whole of the world, thus giving the cosmos a strong gnoseological unity, with relevant consequences on the level of our global understanding. Only in such a *universe* do the categories of identity and of universality, so important for the analysis of the sciences, become truly meaningful. The process of deducing large scale properties from observations of local properties —as, for example, in the methodology of contemporary cosmology— takes on new significance, as well as the desire to conceptualize the universe as a whole, searching for unifying properties such as the principles of symmetry and of invariance, or for an all-encompassing methodological approach, such as the principle of Mach. The “comprehensibility” of the universe no longer causes surprise —something which awakened the wonder of Einstein —, nor the fact that the same elementary particles are all rigorously identical. On this latter “wonder,” John Barrow turned his attention: “Every electron that we have encountered, whether it comes from outer space or a laboratory experiment, is found to be identical. All have the same electric charge, the same spin, the same mass, to the accuracy of measurement. They all behave in the same way in interaction with other particles [...]. We do not know why particles are identical in this way. We could imagine a world in which electrons were like footballs — everyone slightly different to all the others. The result would be an unintelligible world” (J.D. Barrow, *Theories of Everything. The quest for Ultimate Explanation* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991], p. 197).

Generally speaking, we should say that, because of its dialogical nature, it is reasonable that the cosmos should express, or even embody, a project. If the universe is the effect of an intelligent Word, its development points toward an end, embodies a meaningful history, and it is the Logos who expresses this plan. Therefore, besides [matter](#) [21] and energy, [information](#) [22] must also be recognized as an “original component” of the cosmos. The world possesses a positive quantity of information that is preserved, developed and disclosed throughout cosmic evolution: the history of the universe bears a true meaning.

In its privileged relationship with history, Christian Revelation seems to have a specific originality when compared to other religious traditions. The biblical vision differs considerably from those conceptions of time typical of Greek thought or of Eastern philosophies in general. These latter are more familiar with the myth of the “eternal return,” which results in the denial of any information that history could have produced, since every emergence and novelty is destined to dissolve into nothing. Instead, the universe created by Christ-Logos and for Christ-Logos has a beginning and a scope, an “Alfa” and an “Omega,” both points transcending history and belonging to His mystery. Theology as well as the history of science have noted the importance of such a view in the formation of Western philosophical thought (cf. J. Mouroux, *The Mystery of Time* [New York - Rome: Desclée, 1964]; S. Jaki, *Science and Creation. From Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe* [Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986]).

4. The Christian Logos and the Philosophical Realism of the Sciences. It has already been pointed out that the rationality associated with the Christian Logos presents itself simultaneously with the characteristics of transcendence and immanence, with all the solemnity of the mystery of the divine plan for the world and with the concreteness of history and of the flesh. It is not a rationality confined to the Platonic circle of the world of ideas, but it intersects the physical nature with all the actuality of the earthly event of Jesus of Nazareth. It is not a rationality totally immanent in matter, as that of the Logos of the Stoics, nor totally immanent in the subject, as that of the philosophical a-priori categories proposed by Kant.

The Christian Logos has a properly transcendent personality, who nonetheless wished to bind himself to space, time, and matter. A universe created through the Christian Logos appears much more compatible with a realistic gnoseology, with the inductive methodology of science, than with various forms of idealism from functionalism to psychologism. In such a universe the conviction is favored that the truth of things does not exist solely in our mind, nor does it imply an abstract coherence; rather, it belongs to things themselves. The richness of [truth](#) [4] can certainly go beyond the paradigm of the *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, but the conformity of intellect to the object remains an irreplaceable moment in the process of knowledge. One might note therefore a consonance of this approach with the classical [realism](#) [23] of the scientific enterprise, as expounded for example in the epistemological reflections of authors such as Planck or Einstein, which accord with the primacy of [experience](#) [24]. Much less consonance exists with those interpretations of the physical world dependent upon an [idealistic perspective](#) [25], for example the vision of [quantum mechanics](#) [26] offered by the school of Copenhagen, or the vision of a [cosmology](#) [16] that is concerned exclusively with the internal coherence of its own formulations, without demanding that its models necessarily maintain a link with observable reality. A “realistic” universe also demands that the relationship between mathematics and physics be such that the foundation of every scientific theory, even one which makes recourse to the most abstract formalism, be based upon empirical foundations.

The theology of the Incarnation of the Word, of course, does not explicitly appear in the explanation of realism made by scientists. There exist, however, interesting exceptions. Maxwell makes a remote reference to Incarnation when, commenting upon the conceptual path which lead him to the formulation of his famous equations of the electromagnetic field, he affirmed that mathematics, in order to represent reality efficaciously, needed to materialize itself, “to bring itself down to the corporeal.” Einstein makes use of the same image in speaking of the order and rationality of nature as a cosmic intelligence “incarnated in matter.”

The comparison between the realistic and idealistic approach to our knowledge of the universe is well expressed by the following images proposed by two different authors. Arthur Eddington imagines the scientist who investigates nature to be like the person who, walking along the beach, seeks the origin of certain rather interesting footprints, only to discover that they are the footprints made with his own feet, and who thus concludes that science only conveys those ideas which we have laid down with our very own activity of research. On the contrary, Newton, imagining himself taking a walk on the beach, compared himself at the end of his scientific life to a little child who had solely been able to play with a little stone and a little seashell, whereas the boundless ocean of knowledge still remained before him, in all its objectivity. In the first image, we have a vision of research (and consequently a interpretation of the universe) idealistic in character: all that science tells us is merely the echo of our mental correlations, because nothing that exists is objectively given. In the second image, the activity of science is seen as a discovery, as something which we do not create but receive: nature, and the *lógos* which governs it, are seen instead as a “gift.”

The Christian theology of the Word also bears interesting consequences regarding the “objectivity” of nature. The begotten Word remains completely distinct from the created world. All things were made in the sole Word, “through whom all things were made (*per quem omnia facta sunt*),” but he is “begotten, not made (*genitum, non factum*)” (DH 150). Nature is not divine: it does not proceed from God as the Son does, he who is God from God. Thus nature can be investigated by considering it objectively, as something autonomous, whose rationality is the effect a Logos, the exemplar and final causality of the world, but separated from the world itself. Every form of [pantheism](#) [27] is then excluded, so too is every dualistic temptation. Creation proceeds *ex nihilo*, thus confirming that its exemplary principle is only one,

and not the result of a dialectic between spirit and matter or between good and evil. There is no other logic that governs the destiny of the cosmos if not that of the “Logos that became flesh” (*Jn* 1:14).

IV. The Mystery of Jesus-Christ, Logos made Flesh, as the Key to Understanding the Relation between God and the World.

1. The “Lex Incarnationis” Goes Beyond the Language of Mythos and Characterizes the Specificity of Christian Religion. The fact that the fulfillment of revelation and the gift of God to the world comes about in the Person of the Word definitively characterizes the relationship between man, the world and God. The adjective “Christian,” inasmuch as it expresses a specific way of uniting the human and the divine, has in itself the capacity to give birth to and to illuminate coherently a whole theological-cultural panorama; in fact, it directly refers to the relationship between that which is human and that which is divine, between nature and grace, as one capable of determining a great number of issues. It includes as well the relationship between creation and redemption, immanence and transcendence, history and eternity, sign and sacrament, reason and faith, culture and Gospel, work and prayer, the city of men and the city of God, being human and being Christian. From our understanding of the Incarnation also depends our conception of the world and of the human person, and our conception of God. However, theology’s insistency on the role of Christian Logos in framing correctly the ultimate meaning of our material cosmos, could lead the reader to express a latent question: is the mystery of the Christ-Logos, God and man, nothing but the survival of a [myth](#) [6], one ever wishing to unite the human with the divine? In order to provide an answer to this legitimate suspicion, a further clarification is to be made.

It is a historical fact that the doctrine of the hypostatic union (namely the union of the two natures, human and divine, *in the one subject* or “hypostasis” of the uncreated Son of God) is unprecedented. It seems to have a unique place in the history of religions. Pagan mythology knew of various ways to unite the human and the divine, for example the demigod (such as Achilles), or the apotheosis (such as the death of Hercules). With such processes one sought to elevate a human person to the sphere of the divine or the holy, to the point of being transformed or losing the characteristics of one’s humanity. This could happen either at the moment of his conception, since a demigod was born of the union between a god and a human being, or after his death, by means of a mythical exaltation which joined him to the kingdom of the gods. The sacral context in which these persons took form as demigods is that of an absolute mixture between human and divine characteristics. As one sees, for example, in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* or in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, everything —animals, men, gods— could give origin to anything else, and everything could transform itself into anything else. In the encounter between man and the gods, the desire to give origin to something that is intermediary, something that is novel, led to the loss of every distinction, thus bringing about a true and proper confusion. The divine was then able to unite itself to the human when certain men came to be invested, in a transitory way, with delegated special powers; or when a god took hold of a human body, joining himself to the human and thus depriving him of his liberty and autonomy.

The mystery of the Incarnation takes place in a radically different context. In the virginal conception of Mary, the mother of Jesus (cf. *Mt* 1:18-21; *Lk* 1:27-35), the divine action preserves all of its transcendence in continuity with the image of God found in the Old Testament. In the son of Mary, the divine and human natures are not confused but remain distinct in their respective operations: being true and perfect God does not impede Christ from being at the same time a true and perfect man. The uncreated person of the Word guarantees the full respect of the divine transcendence, whereas the assumption of (i.e., taking on himself) a true, created human nature guarantees the genuineness of its immanence in the world. The unconfused union of the two natures in Christ ensures that the one is not dissolved into the other. That which ascends to the divine sphere is not a human person, but the human

nature taken on by the divine Person: the whole dynamic has a descending origin; solely as a fruit of this *con-descendence*, will there come about a corresponding ascending motion of humanity towards God. In Christ, the apostles see God by gazing upon a human countenance, as Jesus himself reveals to Philip (cf. *Jn* 14:8-10); and they see a man by gazing at the countenance of God, as Peter, James and John will experience before the glory of Tabor (cf. *Mk* 9:2-4). In contrast with the demigods of the Greek Pantheon, who in order to make credible their ascension had to sever all connection with earth and with history, in order to eternalize the memory of Jesus Christ there is no need for him to erase the traces of his earthly history, nor to exit history and become a mere idea. Jesus Christ's true capacity to suffer, to the point of undergoing death and burial, bounds him to space and time in a real, and not merely apparent way. In his resurrection it will not be history to render him eternal; rather, will He will render history eternal.

Due to this originality of the union of the human and divine, the Incarnation takes very seriously human nature and every individual human being. The human being is no longer the gods' battleground; man ceases to be a creature deceived by a mystical but unreal divinization, or humiliated by an unbridgeable gap between God and his creatures. Intimacy with God leaves intact the personality of the creature: the Holy Spirit, who after the Incarnation can dwell in every human being because He is the Spirit of Christ (cf. *Gal* 4:4-6), does not take hold of the human person and remove his liberty, but rather He provides a new foundation of it in the life of grace (cf. *2Cor* 3:17).

2. *The Created World can be fully understood only in the Light of the Incarnate Word.* In section II we considered how the world belongs to the mystery of Christ which is, ultimately, the mystery of the Father's will. The world emerges from the mystery of the will of the Father, who wishes everything in the Son and through the Son, and arises from that love, the Holy Spirit, who seals their mutual relation. The world is not solely "God's parable," or his "icon," but it is *in Christ* also his "sacrament." In a certain sense, there is nothing in the world that is purely "worldly" or "neutral", but rather all that exists places human beings before the choice of embracing the [mystery](#) [28] that is therein contained or refusing it. On an ethical level, it means the choice between living according to a law that God wrote in the nature of things or making use of things according to one's own will (cf. *Gn* 2:16). To take a position regarding the nature of God and to take a position regarding the nature of the world are two sides of the same coin.

The fact that the world belongs to the mystery of Christ and, through Him, to the One and Triune God, implies that one cannot thoroughly understand the material world, that is, the ultimate reasons for its existence and its becoming, when one leaves aside "religious" categories, namely those categories which correctly address the relationships between human beings and God: "The material world has its origin in the action of the divine Persons and is called to be taken up again and transfigured by the divine Persons. This is one of the fundamental aspects for the vision of the world. The desacralization of the cosmos is one of the great temptations of modern man, who seeks to understand the world of nature, in which science is at work, as something foreign to religious destiny. Modern man tends to separate a religious destiny which would be purely personal, from a cosmic destiny which would be profane and material: as if religion were a private affair, and the religious problem were an individual problem, not the problem of the meaning of the entire universe and, therefore, of its material reality" (J. Danielou, *La Trinité et le mystère de l'existence* [Paris: Desclée, 1968], p. 16). The incarnation of the Word and his solidarity with the history of the world represent the fundamental reason for maintaining that there does not exist any earthly reality which is totally profane: "Strictly speaking, we cannot say that there is any noble human reality that does not have a supernatural dimension, for the divine Word has taken on a complete human nature and consecrated the world with his presence and with the work of his hands" (St. J. Escrivá, *Christ is Passing by* [Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1982], n. 120). Every human activity and every earthly reality, in the measure in which they are joined to the mystery of the Incarnation and brought back, in a filial way, to the Father by means of the Spirit, reveal their relationship to Christ, their capability of being

recapitulated in him and joined to his salvation. The paschal mystery is the hermeneutic principle for deciphering not only the mystery of Christ, but also the mystery of the world (see above, III.1). The freedom of love, the supreme law of charity, thus become the sole criterion for evaluating the truth of every authentic [progress](#) [29] and perfection in the cosmos (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 38).

A perspective like this, which seeks to interpret reality by means of religious categories, as something that is not merely profane, could raise a second latent question: how is it possible to hold the [autonomy](#) [30] of nature, of created things and their secular value? A first argument to answer this legitimate question is offered by the metaphysics of [creation](#) [5]. The autonomy (Gr. *autós nómos*) of the creature has a necessary ontological reference to the First Cause, the ultimate reason for its existence (Lat. *esse*) and essence or nature (Lat. *essentia*): without this tether to Being, the creature has no proper law (*nómos*). This is true both on the level of natural phenomena and on the anthropological level, where autonomy is called freedom, and its fulfillment charity. In this regards, it is worth recalling the reflection made by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in the document *Gaudium et spes*: “If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. [...] But if the expression, the independence of temporal affairs, is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator, anyone who acknowledges God will see how false such a meaning is. For without the Creator the creature would disappear” (n. 36).

A second argument for the proper autonomy of creation in the light of a religious interpretation of the world can be found in the convergence between “being” and “meaning.” The relation of creature-Creator, indeed, is a source of meaning not only for existence and activity. Every human being, for example, cannot embrace the reality of his or her existence without perceiving at the same time that he or she possesses a filial being, that is, a being that bears some meaning. And he or she cannot fully realize his or her life except by understanding this filiation and its normative model. Furthermore, when one passes from simply observing the world to seeking its meaning, asking oneself how things ought to be seen, understood or used in agreement with the plan of a possible Creator, then one is admitting the capacity of the world to be interpreted by means of religious, and not only metaphysical, categories. Whenever one recognizes that the world’s ultimate design is the headship of Christ over creation, that the logic (*lógos*) which permeates the world is the filial logic of a Word-Son who refers all things to the Father out of Love, and that the only way in which such a logic is realized is that of freedom lived in charity; then, one is judging, interpreting, understanding the world by means of “Christian” categories.

To deny this close relationship between existence and meaning, which is nothing but a deeper aspect of the relation between existence and [information](#) [22] emphasized before, would result in a profound cleavage: that of admitting the existence of a Creator-God, but holding that this ought not to influence or modify one’s own relationships with the world and with oneself. In reality, along with the gift of the existence of the world, one ought also to receive the gift of its “meaning,” thus avoiding the risk of exercising over it a despotic dominion. “The Christian metaphysics of creation separated from the Easter hermeneutics of filiation, which articulates its meaning for man, ends by transforming itself into a ‘science of being,’ which offers man the ‘raison d’être’ of every thing. In proclaiming that God is the foundation of being, man takes hold of His transcendence, and making use of it for his own Titanism, he makes of it the “raison d’être” which allows him to establish the sense of the world and dominate it” (Le Guillou, 1973, pp. 236-237).

On a philosophical level, the conviction that the created world can be fully deciphered only in the light of

God's plan revealed by the incarnate Word was efficaciously summarized by two well-known Christian views. They are Augustine's expression *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to understand) and Bonaventure's or Thomas Aquinas' concept of *lumen fidei* (faith as a light to see and comprehend). Both manifest a perspective that considers the world as belonging to the primeval mystery of God, a perspective that they saw as the ultimate key to fully understand the world's meaning and all its implications. In this case, faith in a "principle of creation" becomes a "light" for human reason (cf. [Fides et ratio](#) [31], nn. 16-23).

Fruitful applications of this "principle" can be found in the theology of the Fathers of the Church, in the best of the medieval scholastics, and in contemporary Christian personalism. On an ethical and anthropological level, the consequences of refusing to interpret the world and human life according to the light of faith have historically led to what is called "atheistic humanism," an attempt to formulate an ethical foundation that sets aside every relationship to the transcendent and to God is not void of internal contradictions. According to the judgment expressed in some documents of the Roman Catholic Church (see for example *Redemptor hominis*, 15-16; *Evangelium vitae*, 18-20), atheistic humanism does not seem to be able to produce a model of society that is fully in conformity with the dignity of the human person. As someone acutely observed, this approach, wherever it has been carried out, has been destined to turn into a "drama": the man who seeks to organize his life without God will end up organizing it, in the end, against himself, because an absolute humanism is an inhuman humanism (cf. H. De Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* [Cleveland, OH: World Publishing, 1963]). To propose an anthropology by ignoring the earthly event of Jesus of Nazareth and the novelty of his doctrine would, in the end, be philosophically reductive (cf. Latourelle, 1983). From a theological viewpoint, the necessity to penetrate the paschal mystery of Christ in order to understand the vocation of the human being and his and her role in the divine plan for creation, is a theme frequently addressed by the Roman Catholic Magisterium in these years surrounding the change of millennium (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22; *Redemptor hominis*, nn. 13, 18; *Veritatis splendor*, nn. 84-87).

The uniqueness of the mystery of Christ and of his incarnation does not originate, in the end, any obstacle to the dialogue between Christianity and other religious perspectives which look at the world as God's creation. This dialogue, rather, compels Christian theology to clarify the relationship between the Christian Logos and the universality of truth, between the God of Jesus Christ and the discourse about God present in other religious traditions. The bond between Christ and the cosmos, which the Christian faith confesses, precisely seeks to give the reason for that universality, and ensures that such a path exists.

Read also: [Anthropic Principle](#) [19]

[Creation](#) [5]

[God, notion of](#) [32]

[Gospels](#) [2]

[Laws of Nature](#) [10]

Additional Related Documents: Leo the Great, [The Design of God in the Incarnation](#) [33], 461

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, [Science and Christ](#) [34], 1921

Documents of the Catholic Church related to the subject:

[Abbreviations and complete titles of the documents](#) [35]

Letter of Eusebius of Cesarea, DH 40; Sixtus III, Formula unionis, DH 272; Leo I, Epistle to Flavian, DH 290-295; Council of Chalcedon, DH 301-302; Council of Constantinople III, DH 553-558; [Gaudium et spes](#), 22, 38 [36], 45; [Redemptor hominis](#), 13 [37]; [Tertio millennio adveniente](#), 3-8, 10 [38]; [Novo millennio ineunte](#), 21-22 [39]; [Verbum Domini](#), 6-21 [40].

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