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Talk #1

Why Did God Create the World?



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Why Did God Create the World?

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God Creates out of Goodness to Communicate Goodness Outside of Himself

Why did God create the world? We can eliminate any answer to this question except one. God cannot create so as to increase His own well-being, for He is infinite Goodness. He cannot receive anything that He does not already have in an infinitely perfect way. It follows that the only reason God can have to create the world is to share His own infinite goodness outside of Himself, by creating beings that participate in His eternal goodness. He cannot create so as to receive an increase, but only to give. He creates so as to make other subjects who can receive a participation of His infinite fullness.

The Greek philosopher Plato, without the benefit of Revelation, was able to grasp this truth by reason alone. In his dialogue, *Timaeus*, he wrote:

Let us now state the Cause wherefore He that constructed it [29e] constructed Becoming and the All. He was good, and in him that is good no envy ariseth ever concerning anything; and being devoid of envy He desired that all should be, so far as possible, like unto Himself.¹

God can have no envy because He is all goodness. This means that He can hold nothing back out of fear of any rival goodness, because there is no rival goodness. All the goodness that there can be is but a participation and manifestation of the divine Goodness. Every possible goodness can only serve to glorify God.

St. Augustine expressed the same idea as Plato with a brief saying: "For it is because He is good we exist; and so far as we truly exist we are good."² He means that God

creates man to manifest and share His glory and goodness, which is the final cause of creation.

God Creates Out of Love

What does God most love? It sounds strange to us, but God can only most love His own infinite Goodness, precisely because He is Goodness Itself.

When we love some great goodness, such as truth, or the sanctity or beauty of a person, we naturally wish to have that goodness known and loved by others. When we hear a great piece of music or see a work of art or a beauty of nature, we naturally wish it to be heard or seen and admired by others. We also desire to share participations of what we love, such as pictures and likenesses of the loved one. Often the first thing parents do is to show off pictures of their children and give or receive news of them. If we look for the reason for this, it seems to be that we recognize that what we love ought to be loved by others, precisely because what we love is capable of enriching, perfecting, and attracting others as well.

This applies analogously to God. The glory of God is infinitely great. The blessed Trinity is *the glory*. Therefore it stands to reason that God would wish His glory to be maximally manifested and communicated to others so that that goodness can attract others to itself through being known, loved, and shared in. This is God's purpose in creating the world.

Since God infinitely loves His Goodness, it is reasonable that God would will to maximize the communication of His goodness by creating all the levels of goodness. This hierarchical principle is a fundamental idea that we will return to various times in this lecture series.

Since God loves His infinite Goodness without measure, it follows that He loves all created participations of that Goodness. As we will see more clearly in the following talk, He loves all things, but in its own way and degree, according to the participation of goodness that it contains. God cannot fail to love any being, for all beings are created out of love.

Goodness Is Diffusive of Itself

St. Thomas Aquinas frequently quotes a profound statement of Pseudo-Dionysius: "Goodness is diffusive of itself."³ We see a natural inclination in all good things to spread their goodness to others. This can be seen in the biological world above all in the instinct to reproduction.

³ See *ST I*, q. 5, a. 4, obj. 2, corpus, and ad 2; I, q. 27, a. 5, obj. 2; I-II, q. 1, a. 4, obj. 1; I-II, q. 2, a. 3, obj. 2; q. 81, a. 2, sed contra; I-II, a. 112, a. 3, obj. 3.

¹ *Timaeus* 29d–30a (Perseus digital library).

² St. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* 1.32.35, trans. F. J. Shaw, in NPNF1, 2:531.

However, this inclination also operates in the inanimate world. Natural agents, such as fire or light, naturally imprint their own form on other things. The sun, diffusing its light and warmth through the solar system, is an example of this.

This principle is even more true for human society and culture. Everyone who has a treasure of knowledge or skill in some field is naturally drawn to communicate that knowledge. (Some people, like professors, often have a greater desire to communicate their expertise than others have to listen to them!) A great artist, performer, or athlete naturally desires to manifest his skill and pass it on. The very nature of culture is the playing out of the natural tendency of goodness to be spread so that it can reach future generations and increase over time. If the diffusiveness of goodness is a natural tendency displayed on every level of being, it is most true of rational beings, because they have the most to give, and because they diffuse goodness freely and passionately.

Since this principle seems to be operative on every level of being, increasing in intensity in proportion to the fullness of being of the subject, it is reasonable to think that it applies maximally to God. In loving His own fullness of being and goodness, He maximally desires to have His goodness diffused outside of Himself by being participated in, spread, known, and loved. Hence He creates the world and gives to creatures various levels of participation in His goodness.⁴

Furthermore, each being diffuses goodness according to the mode of its own being. Inanimate agents, such as the sun, diffuse goodness by the law of their nature; irrational animals diffuse goodness—reproducing and caring for their young—by natural instinct. Human beings as free creatures diffuse goodness with free will. If the human diffusion of goodness is free, this must be maximally true of God. Some philosophers, such as the Neo-Platonists Plotinus and Avicenna, fall into the error of supposing that the diffusiveness of the divine goodness is a necessary emanation. They hold that the Highest Being (the One) naturally and necessarily emanates another being (the Intelligence), from which two more emanate, and this process of emanation continues with increasing plurality and distinction. But if this were true, then the world would be a necessary byproduct of the divine nature, and would not be free. As a necessary byproduct, the divine creation

4 See *ST I*, q. 5, a. 4: “Now in causing, goodness and the end come first, both of which move the agent to act; secondly, the action of the agent moving to the form; thirdly, comes the form. Hence in that which is caused the converse ought to take place, so that there should be first, the form whereby it is a being; secondly, we consider in it its effective power, whereby it is perfect in being, for a thing is perfect when it can reproduce its like, as the Philosopher says (*Meteor.* iv); thirdly, there follows the formality of goodness which is the basic principle of its perfection.”

would thus be of lesser moral value than human creations, most of which are free and gratuitous.

In order to avoid this kind of error, St. Thomas Aquinas stresses that the principle of the diffusiveness of goodness must be understood above all as a final cause. The very nature of goodness is to be such as to order and attract other things to itself so that they can be perfected by sharing in it as much as possible.⁵ Goodness diffuses itself first and foremost by being the end for other things. That is, goodness diffuses itself by attracting other things to itself.⁶

The Freedom of Creation

God created the world freely out of love, and not by any inner necessity or law. This is a dogma of faith, but it can also be grasped by reason. Reason can know that God is infinite perfection and glory, and thus it follows that creation adds nothing to Him. God does not need creation to perfect Himself in any way, since He already has infinite perfection, goodness, love, glory, communion, and beatitude in Himself. Thus He in no way needs the world by any natural necessity.

Through faith, we know that God by nature (not freely)⁷ eternally communicates Himself in an infinitely perfect way in His intra-Trinitarian life. The Father begets the Son, who is His perfect image, and from them both the Holy Spirit is breathed forth as the infinite love between them. Thus we can see in the mystery of faith of the Blessed Trinity that God has perfect beatitude in the infinite self-gift of the divine Persons to each other. Without the revelation of the Trinity, it might be thought that God needs to create spiritual creatures in order to experience communion.

The doctrine of the Trinity helps show the full gratuitousness and freedom of God’s act of creation. God creates the world to manifest and communicate His glory in a finite way outside of Himself. This act of creation is completely free on God’s part. Thus the finite communication of Himself in creation adds nothing to God, but only to the things He creates.

Furthermore, God is free in creation not only because it is not necessary for Him to create, but also because He freely chooses this world order over infinite other possibilities which He equally could have chosen. Thus He is free in having infinite possibilities to elect from.

Finally, God is free in creation because, as the First Cause, nothing internal or external could necessitate Him

5 See *ST I*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 2: “Goodness is described as self-diffusive in the sense that an end is said to move.”

6 This is an important principle of the spiritual life and evangelization. We diffuse the faith or evangelize above all by living a luminous life that is attractive to others.

7 The eternal begetting of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit are not free, for those processions are the natural fruit of God’s immanent operations of knowing and loving (which are due to God and natural to Him), and not the result of a free choice.

to create. Creation is the product of a gratuitous love, and is in no way due to man (for he was nothing, and nothing can be due to nothing).

Thus the only purpose of creation is to freely communicate a participation in God's divine Goodness to other things, to manifest His glory outside of Himself out of love. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 293-294 explains this beautifully:

Scripture and Tradition never cease to teach and celebrate this fundamental truth: "The world was made for the glory of God." St. Bonaventure explains that God created all things "not to increase his glory, but to show it forth and to communicate it," for God has no other reason for creating than his love and goodness: "Creatures came into existence when the key of love opened his hand." The First Vatican Council explains:

"This one, true God, of his own goodness and 'almighty power,' not for increasing his own beatitude, nor for attaining his perfection, but in order to manifest this perfection through the benefits which he bestows on creatures, with absolute freedom of counsel 'and from the beginning of time, made out of nothing both orders of creatures, the spiritual and the corporeal.'"⁸

Theologians make a distinction between God's intrinsic and extrinsic glory. God's intrinsic glory—the glory He has in His own inter-Trinitarian life—is infinite and cannot be increased by creation. However, God creates the world to communicate His goodness to creatures and allow them a finite participation in the "inaccessible center of His eternal mystery,"⁹ and this communication is His extrinsic glory. We can add to God's extrinsic glory by our cooperation with His plan of salvation, and the exemplar in this is Mary, who magnified the (extrinsic) glory of God¹⁰ by her complete fidelity.

All Creation Receives Some Likeness of God

It follows from what we have said that everything that God creates is some kind of finite likeness of Himself and His infinite Goodness. No creature can be an infinite likeness, because then it would not be a creature, but God Himself. This is the case of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son is an infinite image of the Father, falling short in nothing whatever. Thus the Son is eternal and consubstantial with the Father. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is the perfect self-gift of the Father and the Son, falling short in nothing of the substance of the Father and the Son.

On the other hand, no creature can be entirely lacking in likeness to God and His Goodness. Every creature is a certain share in the fullness of Being that is God. The variety of creatures is determined by the fact that they share different aspects and degrees of God's fullness. We

shall speak further about the complementarity of creation in the following talks.

All Creation Is Good

If all creation is a likeness of God, it follows that all creation is intrinsically good. But what is the good? Aristotle defines goodness as "what all things desire."¹¹ This is not a proper definition, because good is such a primary notion that it cannot be defined by something more primary, and thus it is defined by its effect, which is to attract an appetite as an end. Thus *the good is what is suitable as an end for something*—that is, for an appetite or a natural tendency. Something is the end of something else insofar as it perfects and preserves it. Thus the good is that which perfects; it is the final cause. St. Thomas says: "The notion of goodness consists in the fact that something is capable of perfecting another by being its end."¹² God is infinite Goodness, because He is capable of perfecting every possible thing by being its final end.

Philosophers speak of goodness as a *transcendental property of being*. This means that everything, insofar as it is, is good. Goodness transcends all particular categories of being and is found in varying degrees on every level, in accordance with the nature of the thing. However, insofar as a thing is lacking the being that it ought to have, it will be lacking in goodness, and thus will be evil. For something will be capable of perfecting and attracting other beings only insofar as it has the full being that it ought to have. Goodness differs from being in the consideration of the mind, for goodness adds the idea of perfection and a relation to desire, for goodness is being considered as desirable in some respect, and thus worthy of love in some way.

That being, insofar as it is, is good, can be seen in Genesis 1, in which after each day of creation it is said that God saw that it was good, and after the work of the sixth day, He saw that it was "very good." Similarly, Wisdom 1:14 states: "For he created all things that they might exist, and the creatures of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them." St. Paul, in 1 Timothy 4:4, says that "everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving."

How do we demonstrate philosophically that everything, insofar as it is, is good? We can give three demonstrations. The simplest is based on the common observation that everything naturally desires its own being and tries to preserve it as much as it can. This is easy to see in ourselves and in the animal world. However, in an analogical sense, it can also be seen in the world of plants and inanimate things, for each thing naturally resists cor-

⁸ *Dei Filius* 1: DS 3002.

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2809.

¹⁰ See Lk 1:46; "And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord...'"

¹¹ Aristotle, *Ethics*, I. See St. Thomas, *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 1: "All who rightly define *good* put in its notion something about its status as an end. The Philosopher accordingly says that they excellently defined good who said that it is "that which all things desire."

¹² St. Thomas, *De veritate*, q. 21, a. 2.

ruption and substantial change. It is also true on the level of human culture and interpersonal relations. Love seeks to preserve the good of the other. From this we can infer that the being of everything is naturally desirable, just as corruption is naturally repugnant to every being. Thus the being of everything is good, in that its preservation is naturally desired.

The goodness of being can also be seen from the fact that each thing naturally desires not only the preservation of its being, but also to reproduce itself. If the reproduction of being is desirable, it is because being is good, and thus more being is better. Finally, we also see that things have a tendency to actualize and perfect themselves by acting in accordance with their nature. Philosophers refer to this as the passage from potency into act. Potency is what can be, whereas act or actuality is what has been actually realized. Now being in act is what is most fully meant by being. Thus since all beings seek their own actualization, they are seeking their maximum being. Thus it can be seen that being itself is desirable, and the maximizing of being (passing from potency into act) is maximally desirable.¹³

God Is the Source of All Creation

Creation in the proper sense of the word is an action of bringing something into existence out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), and thus it is proper to God alone. Although the word is also used to refer to other acts of production, such as artistic creation, this is by analogy. Creation properly indicates a total production in which no part of the product is presupposed. It is interesting to note that the Hebrew Bible uses a special word, *bara'*, בָּרָא, to exclusively indicate the creative action of God. Although Genesis does not explicitly say that God created everything *out of nothing*, this is revealed in the later Jewish Scriptures. The second book of the Maccabees takes it for granted, as when the heroic mother of seven martyred sons exhorts one son to maintain his faith through torture: “I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed” (2 Mac 7:28).¹⁴

God’s creation of the world out of nothing is a revealed truth, but it is also a truth that natural reason can grasp. This

13 St. Thomas explains that goodness is a transcendental in *ST I*, q. 5, a. 1: “Goodness and being are really the same, and differ only in idea; which is clear from the following argument. The concept of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable. Hence the Philosopher says (Ethics, bk. 1): ‘Goodness is what all desire.’ Now it is clear that a thing is desirable only insofar as it is perfect; for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is in act. Therefore it is clear that a thing is perfect so far as it exists; for it is being that makes all things actual, as is clear from the foregoing (3, 4; 4, 1). Hence it is clear that goodness and being are the same in reality. But goodness presents the aspect of desirability, which being does not present.”

14 Creation *ex nihilo* is more clearly expressed in the New Testament; see Jn 1:3, Col 1:16, and Heb 11:3.

does not mean that philosophers grasped the full truth about creation *ex nihilo* by reason alone. The greatest Greek philosophers fell short,¹⁵ though they were able to understand some very important aspects of this truth. It was left for medieval theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas to lay out the principle, for creation from nothing is an implied conclusion of his third and fourth proofs for the existence of God. On the basis of the third proof, for example, he shows that all changeable (contingent) participated being is an effect which needs a First Cause. The First Cause can only be God alone. Thus all contingent being (all that which can be or not be) derives entirely from God and must be created from nothing by Him.

That God creates from nothing is also shown by St. Thomas in the fourth way, by considering the grades of perfection in creation. Everything which participates in some pure perfection to a greater or lesser degree must derive from something that is that perfection by essence. Thus everything which participates in *being* with greater or lesser perfection—the hierarchy of creation—must derive from He who is essentially *being*: I AM WHO AM. God’s essence is Being itself, the fullness of being and all its perfection without any limitation. Therefore everything that is must have come from God alone. St. Thomas shows the truth of creation in this way in *ST I*, q. 44, a. 1:

I answer that it must be said that every being in any way existing is from God. For whatever is found in anything by participation, must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially, as iron becomes ignited by fire. Now it has been shown above (q3, a4) when treating of the divine simplicity that God is the essentially self-subsisting Being; and also it was shown (q. 11, aa. 3, 4) that subsisting being must be one.... Therefore all beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation. Therefore it must be that all things which are diversified by the diverse participation of being, so as to be more or less perfect, are caused by one First Being, Who possesses being most perfectly.

15 Plato discusses creation in the *Timaeus*. He falls short in that it seems that he considers matter to be eternal and uncreated. Also, the identity of the Creator is ambiguous, and seems perhaps to be a lower divinity, the demiurge, who creates by imitating the Ideas (divine exemplars of all corruptible things), as if the Ideas were metaphysically separate from himself. Nevertheless, the *Timaeus* has great insights with regard to creation.

Aristotle briefly mentions the principle of creation in book II of the *Metaphysics*, in which he implies that everything other than God has its being from God as participated, in the same way that every created truth has its source in the First Truth, who is God. He writes: “A thing has a quality in a higher degree than other things if in virtue of it the similar quality belongs to the other things as well (e.g. fire is the hottest of things; for it is the cause of the heat of all other things); so that that which causes derivative truths to be true is most true. Hence the principles of eternal things must be always most true (for they are not merely sometimes true, nor is there any cause of their being, but they themselves are the *cause of the being of other things*), so that as each thing is in respect of being, so is it in respect of truth.” St. Thomas cites this text in his fourth way to demonstrate the existence of God.

Hence Plato said (*Parmenides* 26) that unity must come before multitude; and Aristotle said (*Metaphysics* 2.4) that whatever is greatest in being and greatest in truth, is the cause of every being and of every truth; just as whatever is the greatest in heat is the cause of all heat.

Creation Is the Work of the Trinity

Although the Creed appropriates the work of creation to the person of the Father, all three Persons are one principle for the work of creation. The Father creates through His perfect Word of Wisdom and through the life-giving Spirit. As John 1:3 says of the Word, “all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” Likewise nothing was made without the breath of the Spirit of love and truth. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains:

The Old Testament suggests and the New Covenant reveals the creative action of the Son and the Spirit, inseparably one with that of the Father. This creative cooperation is clearly affirmed in the Church’s rule of faith: “There exists but one God . . . he is the Father, God, the Creator, the author, the giver of order. He made all things by himself, that is, by his Word and by his Wisdom,” “by the Son and the Spirit” who, so to speak, are “his hands.”¹⁶

The inseparable union of the three divine Persons in the work of creation is mysteriously hinted at in the first lines of Genesis. There God creates through His Word of power, as the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.

The Doctrine of the Trinity and Creation

The doctrine of the Trinity sheds great light for rightly understanding creation. Because God is infinite Communion in Himself, He does not create so that He can be enriched by entering into a communion with others.

As mentioned above, if someone is ignorant of or rejects the doctrine of the Trinity, they could easily suppose that God needs the world to be able to give of Himself and have the good of inter-personal relations. The world would thus benefit God by removing his solitude. If this were true, creation would not be a perfectly gratuitous gift. This error is best expelled by the doctrine of the Trinity. Because He God is a Trinity of Persons in perfect Communion, He is in no *need* of other created persons to remove His solitude. God indeed desires communion with created persons, but not to fill a need in Himself based on a lack. On the contrary, precisely because He is infinite Communion, He wishes that good of communion to be extended outside of Himself so that His glory of communion be shared.

God seeks to communicate a participation in what is most noble. Among the perfections of God, there is the great glory of the infinite communion of the divine Persons. Therefore, the highest thing that God can communicate

to creation is a share in the divine inter-Trinitarian communion.

***Creation Is for the Sake of the Kingdom*¹⁷**

All the levels of God’s creation, even the lower levels such as rocks, plants, and bugs, manifest God’s goodness. However, God can fully communicate His goodness only to rational creatures—human beings and angels—who have the ability to appreciate the gift they have received, and to return the gift back in love so as to enter into a relationship of communion with the Trinity.

This communication of His goodness culminates in drawing His rational creatures into a union of love and intimate friendship with Himself. It follows that God created rational creatures for Himself, that they might know and love His Goodness and enter into friendship with Him. The other creatures on the face of the earth, by contrast, were created for man, in order to help man live and achieve his end of friendship with God.

The union that God wishes to establish with mankind has two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. First and foremost, the union is a vertical one by which the souls of men are united with the Blessed Trinity. However, by a necessary consequence, God wishes His rational creatures who are to be drawn into union with Him also to be drawn into a horizontal communion with one another in the bonds of charity. All those who are called to union with God are also called to an intimate union of charity with one another.

The vertical union with God brings us into communion with the Blessed Trinity by making us children of God the Father, sons of God in the Son, and spouses of the Holy Spirit. The horizontal communion is the supernatural fraternity and charity of all those who have been made sons and daughters of God.

This dual communion into which we are called has been eloquently presented by the Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et spes* 24, a text cited time and again by John Paul II:

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, “that all may be one . . . as we are one” (John 17:21–22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God’s sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.

This text is very dense. God, who is a communion of Persons, willed to create human persons to enter into friendship and communion with Him. Thus human beings, alone among material beings, have been created for their own sake to be recipients of God’s love and brought into

¹⁶ CCC, 292; St. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 2, 30, 9; 4, 20, 1, quoted in CCC 292.

¹⁷ This section is taken from Lawrence Feingold, *The Mystery of Israel and the Church*, vol. 3, *The Messianic Kingdom of Israel* (St. Louis, MO: Miriam Press, 2010), 17–19.

union with Him. However, just as God loves man by giving a complete gift of Himself to man (by becoming incarnate, dying for us on the Cross, instituting the Eucharist, giving us the Holy Spirit), so man is called to find his fulfillment in making a sincere gift of himself to God and to his fellow men. The union between man and God that is our salvation must also include the horizontal dimension of communion among men, which is “the unity of God’s sons in truth and charity.” This horizontal communion is meant to be a kind of mirror and “enlargement” of the ineffable communion of the three divine Persons.

This mirroring of God’s inter-Trinitarian love means that mankind achieves salvation and redemption not individually, but as a social body tied together with bonds analogous to the mysterious bond of eternal charity that unites the Blessed Trinity. God’s plan was not for us to be redeemed and become sons of God independently from one another, as islands. We live in a society profoundly marked by the spirit of individualism, born in part by the Protestant rejection of the Catholic Church, and thus it is an effort for us to overcome this individualistic mentality. Pope Benedict XVI alluded to this in his encyclical on hope.¹⁸

Man is by nature a social creature, and since grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, it is necessary that grace also perfect man as a social and communal being. The redemption of man must have a fundamental social aspect, which is the Church, prepared for and prefigured in ancient Israel. Man cannot be redeemed without his social dimension being redeemed as well.

Furthermore, man’s social nature can be seen in the fact that he naturally desires communion and fraternity, such that he cannot be completely happy without deep interpersonal relations. It follows that the perfect happiness of man, to be brought about by the Incarnation and Redemption, must culminate in the redemption and perfect restoration of a life of communion which is to be fully realized in the Kingdom of heaven, but also anticipated here in God’s Kingdom on earth.

The Second Vatican Council expressed this truth in *Lumen gentium* 9:

At all times and in every race God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right. God, however, does not make men holy and save them *merely as individuals*, without bond or link between one another. Rather has *it pleased Him to bring men together as one people*, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness.

Natural and Supernatural Goodness

We have seen that God has created man to enter into a relationship with Him. There are, however, two possible levels of friendship which God can enter with the creature: natural and supernatural.

¹⁸ Benedict XVI, encyclical *Spe salvi* 13–16.

A natural relationship between the rational creature and God would be for the rational creature to come to know God through the things of creation. Thus the Creator would be known as the first source of all created goodness and would be loved as such. The only kind of relationship that the creature can have with God on the natural level is knowing and loving Him as the infinite transcendent source of creation.

This natural knowledge of God is spoken of in Wisdom 13:1-9:

For all men were by nature foolish who were in ignorance of God, and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing Him who is, and from studying the works did not discern the artisan; but either fire, or wind, or the swift air, or the circuit of the stars, or the mighty water, or the luminaries of heaven, the governors of the world, they considered gods. Now if out of joy in their beauty they thought them gods, let them know how far more excellent is the Lord than these; for the original source of beauty fashioned them. Or if they were struck by their might and energy, let them from these things realize how much more powerful is he who made them. *For from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen. . .*
 . But again, not even these are pardonable. For if they so far succeeded in knowledge that they could speculate about the world, how did they not more quickly find its Lord?

St. Paul also affirms reason’s natural capacity to grasp God’s existence in Romans 1:18-23: “What may be known about God is manifest to them. For God has manifested it to them. For *since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen—his everlasting power also and divinity—being understood through the things that are made.*”

A supernatural relationship with God requires God to reveal Himself to man beyond the natural revelation of creation. This requires God to speak to man directly, revealing Himself and elevating man to a veneration that is no longer merely that between creature and Creator, but a friendship between father and son, and between bridegroom and bride.

The supernatural relationship between God and man is spoken of in salvation history as a “covenant.” God makes a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. This covenant establishes a filial and spousal friendship between Israel and God. Such a relationship is infinitely above what any creature could have by nature, for God is infinitely above any nature that He could create. In the covenant God elevates the creature to share a gratuitous intimacy with Him that “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.”¹⁹

¹⁹ 1 Cor 2:9.

Creation and the Incarnation

The supernatural Revelation of God to man and His call to a filial and nuptial communion were begun in Eden. Even though mankind is gravely injured by the original sin and countless personal sins, God's revelation and promise continue, taking concrete form with the call of Abraham and the covenant made with him. Both the Revelation and the promise reach their fulfillment in the fullness of time with the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. He, being the eternal Son of God, becomes a son of man in time to make the sons and daughters of men into sons of God, calling them to an eternal inheritance which is nothing less than God Himself. This is the New Covenant, in which every other covenant is fulfilled, and in which man finds his own perfect fulfillment.