

BETWEEN TWO INTELLECTS

*Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei et opera manuum eius annuntiat firmamentum.
Dies diei eructat verbum, et nox nocti indicat scientiam.
Non sunt loquela, neque sermones quorum non audiantur voces eorum.
In omnem terram exiit sonus eorum, et in fines orbis terrae verba eorum...*

Psalm 18, vv. 2 - 5

In his *De Veritate* (I, a. 2) St Thomas Aquinas teaches *res naturalis inter duos intellectus constit[uitur]...* The natural thing [is] established between two intellects. This short phrase can leave you pondering its implications for hours. For every thing that exists — the sun and its rising; the light it brings forth; the air and its freshness; the frost on the grass; the grass itself; the blackbird and its chirruping; my daughter singing, (my daughter *and* her singing); the hencoop and the hens released; the earth where they begin to forage; the ground under my feet; the eggs I collect; my wife; her loving greeting; the breakfast she is diligent to prepare; the saw I select for my work; the wood under my hands; the form my mind imposes on it; the work produced after many hours, (the very hours!); the warmth at midday; the draught from the water-bag that cools me; my children at their studies; the admonitions of the teacher (their mother); the gamboling of my fox terrier as we ramble through the bush; the ducks on the pond that complain at our disturbance, (the pond and its water); the children at play; their noise; the sun setting; the chatter around the dinner table; the wine; the smile of my youngest son; the new moon - a sliver there low in the western sky; *Venus* (the jewel!) a hand span to its left; the stars that shine in that ineffable entity, infinite in extent, that allows no impediment to the passage of light from a million stars; the blessedness of rest - and sleep — everything, stands between two intellects, the Intellect of the Creator and the intellect He has created.

In his *Summa Contra Gentiles* St Thomas approaches the issue from the aspect of knowledge. I know a thing from its effects. It elicits – *determines* – my knowledge. Without some existing thing my intellect would have nothing on which to focus, on which to exercise its power (for the proper formal object of the human intellect is the quiddity of sensible things).¹

But this is not the way with God. “The divine intellect,” says St Thomas, “does not gather knowledge from things, rather... through its knowledge it is the cause of things.” (SCG I, ch. 65, n. 7) Thus knowledge in God produces knowledge in me via the thing He creates. The revelation contained in *Psalm 18* cited in the epigraph seems to confirm the teaching. “Day utters word to day, and night reveals knowledge to night.” *Day* speaks to *day*; *Night* conveys knowledge to *night*. In the very first lines of his Gospel, St John spells out the involvement of the Word of God in creation. *Omnia per ipsum facta sunt et sine ipso nihil est quod factum est*. English poet Eleanor Farjeon (1881 – 1965) was theologically correct, then, when she wrote:

¹ Cf. A. M. Woodbury S.M., Ph.D, S.T.D., *Natural Philosophy/Psychology*, 1950-51, n. 921; available at austinwoodbury.com : the reader will need to register on the site to gain access to the text.

Morning has broken
Like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken
Like the first bird;
Praise for the singing,
Praise for the morning,
Praise for them springing
Fresh from the Word.

...
Mine is the sunlight,
Mine is the morning,
Born of the one light
Eden saw play;
Praise with elation,
Praise every morning,
God's re-creation
Of the new day.

Logical truth, conformity between what the intellect knows and what is, reality,² may be expressed, the Muslim commentator Avicenna remarks, as *the adequation of intellect with thing*.³ But logical truth is derivative, underpinned by *ontological truth*, conformity of thing with the pattern in the Divine Intellect.

Man is dependent and contingent. He did not bring himself into existence; he does not keep himself there. He did not create this world in which, one day, he wakes to find himself. He did not give himself the intellect which lifts him above the brute and *enables him* (as Aristotle says) *to become all things*. He may be confused about many things but one truth he grasps instinctively: *More does not come from less*. If he is a person so must that influence be who created him – not just *something* but *Someone!*⁴ And if the One who created him is an intellect – the Intellect Supreme – it is reasonable to acknowledge that God has made Himself known to man. Here is the ground for our acceptance of a divine revelation. But how are we to know it is God who does the revealing? St Thomas provides the principle as he argues against the ‘revelations’ of Mohammed for, says the Angelic Doctor, he produced no works in a supernatural way which alone fittingly gives witness to divine inspiration, *for a visible action which can only be divine reveals an invisibly inspired teacher of truth*.⁵

Cardinal Manning put the whole business succinctly 160 years ago:

² *Res* (‘thing’ in Latin) is contrasted in language with *realitas*, reality, or ‘the collection of things’.

³ See *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, ch. 59, n.2, fn. 2 in transl. by Anton C. Pegis, Image Books, New York, 1955, p. 201.

⁴ As French poet, Paul Claudel, exclaimed when God’s reality came to him in an inspiration in Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris, on Christmas Day, 1886: *Et voici que vous êtes Quelqu’un tout à coup!* That there is not just one but three persons in God we can, of course, know only from His revelation.

⁵ *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, ch. 6, n.4. *Operatio visibilis quae not potest esse nisi divina ostendit doctorem veritatis invisibiliter inspiratum.*

“[I]t is a violation of reason not to believe in the existence of God... it is a violation of our moral sense not to believe that God has made himself known to man... that the revelation he has given is Christianity; and... that Christianity is Catholicism... ”⁶

It is natural to the person that he love himself and that he love the perfections he has been given. It is natural, too, that he love others who share those perfections. But man is not unique in this: every thing God has created loves itself.⁷ Among living things the inclination to love in others the perfections it possesses itself is the ground for the aphorism *similes cum similibus congregantur* or, as we are wont to say, ‘birds of a feather flock together’.

Here, in His creatures, is found the indicium of the truth of God’s revelation of Himself as the God of Love, in contrast to the assertions of ‘prophets’ such as Mohammed or Joseph Smith whose ‘gods’ are mechanical deities, impersonal forces or tyrants.

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⁶ *The Temporal Mission of the Holy Ghost*, 1865

⁷ Cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, ch. 72, n.4