

Creation and Covenant in Contemporary Theology: A Synthesis of the Principal Interpretative Keys

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Introduction

THE RELATION between the categories creation and covenant is a question that has occupied theology since the middle of the twentieth century and has become one of its characteristic themes. This is by no means a new question, since it references perennial themes of theology, such as the relation between creation and salvation and also between the natural and the supernatural. The novelty arises from the fact that now there is a desire to begin from a point of view that is more profoundly rooted in the sacred Scripture, to start from genuinely biblical concepts.

In the theological literature of the past decades—here I refer above all to handbooks and theological dictionaries—it is easy to find allusions, often brief ones, to this question. Nevertheless, one does not find works that seek to synthesize the principal theological motivations that have guided the understanding of this theme for the authors who have most systematically studied it.¹ Such a synthesis is all the more necessary to the extent that there continues to be a fundamental dispute that, in my opinion, remains

This is the English version of my article “Creación y alianza en la teología contemporánea: síntesis de las principales claves de lectura,” *Annales theologici* 18 (2004): 111–54. Many reasons, besides the logical bibliographical updating, compel me to represent this essay, not the least of which is the explicit mention Pope Benedict XVI made to this point in his Easter Vigil homily of 23 April 2011, as well as the continuous reference in his teaching to the doctrine of creation.

¹ I have dealt with this topic in my book *La relación entre creación y alianza in la teología contemporánea: status quaestionis y reflexiones filosófico-teológicas* (Rome: EDUSC, 2003). In this article I offer a synthesis of its fifth and last chapter.

unresolved: is it necessary to understand creation entirely in the light of the covenant, or rather is it necessary to maintain a certain independence for creation, both at a biblical level and the level of dogmatic theology? I consider this to be by no means an exegetical problem; rather, it seems to me that by bringing to light this fundamental question, presuppositions and key theological implications (philosophical as well) are seen, as the recent history of treatises on creation and anthropology demonstrates.

In the following pages we propose, as a starting point for further considerations, a synthesis of the main interpretative keys for understanding the relation between creation and covenant that have been employed in contemporary theological reflection. We will seek to show that a metaphysical perspective, which is also necessary in theological discourse, provides fruitful assistance in harmonizing the demands of each interpretative key and that, after several decades of a certain estrangement, this metaphysical perspective has received a decisive endorsement from the encyclical *Fides et ratio*.² Beforehand, however, we will give a brief history of the origin and development of this question in twentieth-century biblical and dogmatic reflection.

A Brief Presentation of the Origin and Development of the Question³

Creation in the Light of the History of Salvation and of the Covenant

The coming together of the ideas of creation and covenant has its origin, as is commonly accepted, in a double context: the biblical thought of the Lutheran exegete from Germany, Gerhard von Rad (1901–71), and the dogmatic theology of the Swiss Calvinist theologian, Karl Barth (1886–1968).

In 1936 von Rad published an article that has since become highly influential and widely diffused. In it he asked himself about the origin and meaning of the Old Testament faith in creation. Beginning from the principal that the faith of Israel was essentially a salvation-history faith,

² John Paul II, encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio*, September 14, 1998 [AAS 91 (1999): 5–88]. The call for a recovery of metaphysics, not only in the philosophical field, but also in the theological one, must be considered one of the main teachings of this pontifical document; cf. especially §§61, 82, 83, 97.

³ Cf. C. Link, *Die Welt als Gleichnis. Studien zum Problem der natürlichen Theologie* (Munich: Kaiser, 1976), 96–101; P. de Robert, “Perception de la nature et confession du Créateur selon la Bible hébraïque,” *Études Théologiques et Religieuses* 65 (1990/1): 49–52; J. Morales, “El retorno de la creación en la teología bíblica,” in *Biblia, Exégesis y Cultura. Estudios in honor de José María Casciaro*, ed. G. Aranda et al. (Pamplona: Eunsa, 1994), 175–81.

von Rad concludes that the faith of the chosen people in God the Creator developed only as their knowledge of God the Savior deepened. “Our main thesis was that in genuinely Yahwistic belief the doctrine of creation never attained to the stature of a relevant, independent doctrine. We found it invariably related, and indeed subordinated, to soteriological considerations.”⁴ With words that have been repeatedly cited afterwards, the Old Testament is characterized by a “soteriological interpretation of the work of creation” (*soteriologisches Verständnis des Schöpfungswerkes*).⁵

A few years later, in 1945, Barth published, as part of his vast project for a dogmatic ecclesial theology that was never completed, the volume that corresponds to the doctrine of creation, whose essential structure is given by this double principle: “the Creation as the external basis of the covenant;” “the covenant as the internal basis of Creation” (*die Schöpfung als äußerer Grund des Bundes; der Bund als innerer Grund der Schöpfung*).⁶ This now-famous bipolar formula places from the beginning the doctrine of creation within the perspective of the faith, with the clear and explicit intention of distancing itself from the search for any comparison or foundation in the sciences or in philosophy. Creation has not been revealed in the Bible as a neutral concept, but rather as the beginning of the history of the Covenant, as a preparation for grace. To think of the Creation within the perspective of the faith, and therefore as directed towards the Covenant, supposes that one already considers the Creation to be a Christian event. In this way, Creation is interpreted from Christ, thus offering a Christian protology based in the fact that Christ is both the origin and the end of Creation, as is inferred by biblical revelation. So it is that faith in the Creation is, above all, faith in salvation.

At the heart of these perspectives is the idea that the people of Israel (and also the Church) address the question of God not from a metaphysical perspective but rather from that of history and their encounter with

⁴ G. von Rad, “The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation,” (1936) in *From Genesis to Chronicles: Explorations in Old Testament Theology*, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 177–86, here 186. Cf. idem, *Old Testament Theology I: The Theology of Israel’s Historical Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 136–65.

⁵ Von Rad, “The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation,” 183.

⁶ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/1: The Doctrine of Creation*, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and H. Knight (London: T & T Clark International, 2004) (orig. 1945), respectively, 94–228 and 228–329. For a synthesis, cf. H. U. von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. J. Drury (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 108–13; H. E. Mertens, “Karl Barth’s Teaching on Creation,” *Louvain Studies* 10 (1985): 341–53.

the living God who determines their way of thinking and their faith. This is consistent with the dialectical theology held by Barth: there is no reflection that leads to God which arises from the world or from the person, but rather an irruption of God himself into human living that can be accepted only by faith. The people of Israel and Christians do not experience the God of the philosophers, but the God of history.

Von Rad's soteriological understanding of the creation and Barth's conception of creation and covenant quickly experienced a wide diffusion and acceptance in biblical studies and dogmatic reflection. Subsequently, they served as a support for the process of renovating theological treatises on creation that began to take place in the middle of the twentieth century.⁷ In confrontation with a Neo-Scholastic manualistic tradition that tended to center itself on the philosophical aspects of creation and to present them as disconnected from their primary dimension within the mystery of the Christian faith, there arose a generalized movement toward theological recovering of creation; that movement set about to conceive this creation as the beginning of the history of salvation, the presupposition of the covenant, and therefore creation in Christ.⁸

An important landmark was Rahner's suggestion to consider the doctrine of creation as a formal moment of theological anthropology.⁹ From this time on, the desire for a new configuration of the subject matter began to materialize, one that reunited the old treatises on creation and grace under the title of theological anthropology; the search was on for a unified theological vision of the mystery of man. Afterwards, before the risk of a certain "anthropocentrism," it was realized that the much desired unified vision of God's design for man could only be realized

⁷ Cf. M. Flick, "La struttura del trattato 'De Deo Creante et Elevante,'" *Gregorianum* 60 (1955): 284–90; G. Colombo, "Die Theologie der Schöpfung im 20. Jahrhundert," in *Bilanz der Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert*, Band III, ed. R. Vander Gucht and H. Vorgrimler (Freiburg: Herder, 1970), 36–62; C. Theobald, "La théologie de la création in question, un état des lieux," *Recherches de science religieuse* 81, no. 4 (1993): 613–41; F. G. Brambilla, "Teologie della creazione," *La Scuola Cattolica* 122 (1994): 615–59.

⁸ M. Flick, Z. Alszeghy, *Il Creatore. L'inizio della salvezza* (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1959); W. Kern, F. Mussner, G. Muschalek, "Die Schöpfung als bleibender Ursprung des Heils," in *Mysterium Salutis. Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik*, vol. II, ed. J. Feiner and M. Löhrer (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1967), 440–558; J. Ratzinger, "Schöpfung," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. IX, ed. J. Höfer and K. Rahner (Freiburg i/B: Herder, 1964), 460–66; K. Rahner, "Schöpfungslehre I. Die Schöpfungslehre in der katholischen Theologie," in *ibid.*, 470–74; P. Schoonenberg, *Covenant and Creation* (London: Sheed & Ward Stagbooks, 1968).

⁹ Cf. Rahner, "Schöpfungslehre," 472.

through a more decided assumption of Christocentrism. This has been the dominant line of thinking within Italian theology during the last decades, one that has struggled to develop an insight into the supernatural from a Christological point of view. Based on the primacy of the covenant over the creation, this theology has proposed a significant change in the name of the treatise *De Deo creante et elevante* (or rather *De homine creato et elevato*), changing it to *De Deo elevante ideoque creante* (or, in its anthropological version, *De homine elevato ideoque creato*).¹⁰

The Makeup and Independence of the Biblical Notion of Creation

Beginning in the 1970s, after a period in which the theses of von Rad and Barth regarding creation were accepted without particular discussion, there arose a series of critical voices, within both biblical and dogmatic theology. One of the most prominent was the German exegete Claus Westermann (1911–2000) who, before the subordination of the creation to the history of salvation (election, covenant), defended the independence of the Old Testament notion of creation. Westermann has noted that the idea that all things originate from God was not unique to Israel but was shared with its surrounding world, as is revealed by an analysis of the myths and stories of the beginnings of nearby peoples. That the world and mankind had been created by a divine Being constituted a fundamental presupposition of their thinking, an accepted truth that was not subject to discussion. Thus the recognition of God as Creator does not depend upon the covenant or upon faith in a saving God, but rather precedes these ideas. This defense of Creation's independence with respect to the covenant seeks only to point out that there exists a distinction between the two concepts, and that it is not possible to include totally one within the other without distorting the biblical message itself. "The work of the Creator both in the Old and in the New Testament has its own setting; it has a different origin and history from the work of the saviour."¹¹ In the end, according to Westermann and other authors

¹⁰ Cf. G. Gozzelino, *Il mistero dell'uomo in Cristo. Saggio di protologia* (Leumann [Turin]: Elle Di Ci, 1991). We have to mention some pioneering voices as fore-runners of this handbook: G. Barbaglio, G. Colombo, "Creazione," in *Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia*, ed. G. Barbaglio and S. Dianich (Cinisello Balsamo: Paoline, 1977), 184–210; G. Colzani, "Creazione," in *Dizionario Teologico Interdisciplinare*, vol. 1, ed. L. Pacomio and others (Turin: Marietti, 1977²), 601–14.

¹¹ C. Westermann, *Creation*, trans. J. J. Scullion (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) (orig. 1971), 117. Westermann develops these ideas in other important and influential works, such as *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. J. J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) (orig. 1974); and *Elements of Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. W. Scott (Westminster, MD: John Knox Press, 1982) (orig. 1978).

who have followed him, the idea of creation is not a consequence of the covenant, but it is rather the case that the covenant is inserted within a context marked out by the creation, the dominion of God over all peoples, which then explains the special predilection for Israel.¹²

On the other hand, sufficient attention is not always given to the fact that von Rad himself was aware of the difficulty of integrating his soteriological understanding of creation with wisdom literature, and he sought to purify it at the end of his life in *Weisheit in Israel*, where the creation is central since the starting point of sapiential reflection is not the action of God in history, but his manifestation in the order of creation.¹³ This work has since been considered a retraction of his previous vision that tended to subordinate unilaterally the creation to salvation.¹⁴

Through the lens of dogmatic theology, Barth's formula regarding creation and covenant began to receive various criticisms from different Protestant theologians. On the one hand, Moltmann and Pannenberg

¹² For example in H. H. Schmid, "Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation: 'Creation Theology' as the Broad Horizon of Biblical Theology," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. B. W. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 102–17. Among the criticisms that have shown some deficiencies in von Rad's approach from a biblical point of view, we should mention B. W. Anderson, "Mythopoeic and Theological Dimensions of Biblical Creation Faith," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, 1–24. We find a criticism of both von Rad and Westermann in B. S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), 31–38; *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 102–3 and 109–16.

¹³ Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1970); see particularly the chapter entitled "The Self-Revelation of Creation" (144–76).

¹⁴ Cf. de Robert, "Perception de la nature et confession du Créateur selon la Bible hébraïque," 50–51; R. Rendtorff, "Wo warst du, als ich die Erde gründete? Schöpfung und Heilsgeschichte," in *Kanon und Theologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag: 1991), 95–112; W. Vogels, "The God Who Creates Is the God Who Saves," *Église et Théologie* 22 (1991): 315–17; *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, ed. R. J. Clifford and J. J. Collins (Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992), 1; R. A. Simkins, *Creator and Creation: Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 10; this important point is also found in some handbooks, such as D. Sattler, T. Schneider, "Schöpfungslehre," in *Handbuch der Dogmatik*, vol. I, ed. T. Schneider (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1992), 154; and L. M. Armendáriz, *Hombre y mundo a la luz del Creador* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 2001), 32n14. According to R. Albertz, the reason for the subordination of creation to salvation history and the election of Israel in von Rad's early works (1930s) was his intention to defend the doctrine of creation from political abuse: cf. R. Albertz, *Weltschöpfung und Menschenschöpfung. Untersucht bei Deuteroseja, Hiob und in den Psalmen* (Stuttgart: Calwer Theol. Monographien 3, 1974), 174; for all these questions and more bibliographic resources, cf. K. Löning, E. Zenger, *Als Anfang schuf Gott: Biblische Schöpfungstheologien* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1997), 14–15.

noted that, from the perspective of Barth, the notion of creation would be reduced to the past (where it is only the beginning or preparation for the historical covenant), while the genuine biblical notion of creation also includes the future plenitude of the new eschatological creation.¹⁵ On the other hand, within the same Calvinist tradition of Barth, Gisel has pointed out the need to understand the relation between creation and covenant according to an ontological perspective.¹⁶

The Current Situation

With regard to Catholic theology, as we saw, the first reaction was to receive the theses of von Rad and Barth to the extent that they were an excellent basis for the renovation of the treatise on creation according to a salvation-history perspective. This is why a clearer critique, like the one realized among Protestants, was not made. The tendency has been to search for a reconciliation between the positive aspects of von Rad's and Westermann's positions, whereas the terminology of "creation-covenant" (or rather, "covenant-creation") has solidified itself as a more biblical way of alluding to the classic question of the relationship between nature and grace. This approach has the advantage of offering a unified understanding of the divine plan in Christ and thus avoiding the danger of a certain "extrinsicism" that lay behind a good deal of previous Neo-Scholastic theology.

Nevertheless, there have been several authors who have pointed out the risks of a complete absorption of creation into salvation history. Such risks can be summarized as a difficulty of sustaining the autonomy of created realities, or also the possibility of envisioning the divine plan as a necessary process in which the novelty of grace would disappear and the irruption of men's sin into the history of salvation would lose its proper importance.¹⁷ Before this tendency to include the theology of creation within the first part of anthropological theology—something that is present in those who

¹⁵ Cf. J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1985); W. Pannenberg, "The Creation of the World," in *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 1–174. On Pannenberg's proposal of an eschatological ontology, cf. my study, S. Sanz, *El futuro creador del Dios trinitario. Un estudio en la Teología Sistemática de W. Pannenberg* (Valencia: Edicep, 2007).

¹⁶ P. Gisel, *La Création* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1980 [1987]).

¹⁷ In this sense, see the following handbooks and monographs: J. Auer, *Kleine Katholische Dogmatik. III: Die Welt—Gottes Schöpfung* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1983); L. F. Ladaria, *Antropología teológica* (Madrid/Rome: UPCM/ Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1983); G. Lafont, *Dieu, le temps et l'être* (Paris: Cerf, 1986); A. Gesché, *Dieu pour penser IV: Le cosmos* (Paris: Cerf, 1994); L. Scheffczyk, *Katholische Dogmatik III: Schöpfung als Heilseröffnung. Schöpfungsglehre* (Aachen: MMVerlag, 1997).

completely accept Barth's formula—the majority of these authors prefer to maintain creation as a treatise apart.¹⁸

In this sense it is indispensable to make reference to the so-called “eclipse of creation”¹⁹ into which theological reflection fell, after an initial period of optimism regarding the salvation-history perspective, especially during the 60s and the 70s of the last century. Paradoxically, what began as a source of renovation in creation theology finished in a certain sense as a source of forgetting about creation itself, in favor of an anthropological concentration that solidified in the 70s. It is significant that in Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith* (1976), creation stands out because of its absence, being reduced to the question of man's creatureliness. Nor do we find in Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity* (1968) a particularly relevant place for this truth of faith.²⁰ The scarce production of handbooks on this topic in the 70s is equally significant. Over the past few decades this situation has changed notably, thanks to various factors. The need has been felt for a decisive renovation of the faith in creation in the face of the marginalization that it has suffered, not only in theology but also in the catechesis of the Church.²¹ It is significant that Ratzinger himself, when assuming the position as Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Doctrine of Faith, spoke of “an almost complete disappearance of the doctrine on creation from theology,” mentioning, among other factors, the fact that “the decline of the doctrine on creation includes the decline of metaphysics.”²²

¹⁸ In addition to some authors quoted above, we find a treatise on creation in A. Ganoczy, *Schöpfungstheologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1987); J. L. Ruiz de la Peña, *Teología de la Creación* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1986); and M. Kehl, *Und Gott sah, dass es gut war. Eine Theologie der Schöpfung* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2006).

¹⁹ The first one to denounce the situation with these words, which were then used by others, was G. Hendry, professor at Princeton, in a lecture held in April 1971 before the assembly of the American Society of Theology: G. Hendry, “Eclipse of Creation,” *Theology Today* 28 (1972): 406–25.

²⁰ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990) (orig. 1968); K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. W. Dych (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978) (orig. 1976). We have to specify that in Ratzinger's book there is a real treatment of creation in several moments, even though it does not receive a particular chapter or section. See J. Rodríguez Mas, “La verdad de la creación en ‘Introducción al cristianismo’ de J. Ratzinger,” in *Fede e ragione. Le luci della verità*, ed. A. Porras (Rome: Edusc, 2012), 213–24.

²¹ Cf. C. Schönborn, “Schöpfungskatechese und Evolutionstheorie. Vom Burgfrieden zum konstruktiven Konflikt,” in *Evolutionismus und Christentum*, ed. R. Spaemann and others (Weinheim: VCH, 1986), 91–116.

²² Ratzinger, “Difficulties confronting the faith in Europe today,” *L'Osservatore Romano* (English version), July 24, 1989, 6–7. This is his opening address at the meeting with the presidents of the European Doctrinal Commissions, at Laxenburg (Vienna) from

There is no doubt that this turmoil has enriched theological reflection on creation. At the same time, one must note the methodological diversity that exists within the handbooks, between those who conceive of the theology of creation as an independent treatise and those who choose to include it as the first part of anthropology.²³ It seems to me that this diversity reveals that the alternative between understanding creation as either subordinate to or independent of the covenant and the history of salvation continues today, and that it has not yet received a harmonious solution.

In my opinion, at the heart of the problem lies a disagreement between a metaphysical perspective—strongly present in previous handbooks, with a certain tendency to essentialism—and the renewed perspective of salvation history that has arisen within the last decades.²⁴ Thus a fundamental

the 2nd to the 5th of May 1989. In this line, we can also highlight his criticism of the marginalization of the doctrine of creation, expressed some years before, in the context of a famous address at Paris and Lyon on the crisis of catechism (cf. "Sources and Transmission of the Faith," *Communio* 10 [1983]: 17–34, here 30–31); in these interventions we can appreciate a certain nuance in Ratzinger's thought compared to the previously quoted text *Introduction to Christianity*, as we can see likewise in *In the Beginning . . . A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and Fall*, trans. B. Ramsey, O.P. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1990); it is significant that Ratzinger's thought coincides here with the teachings of John Paul II on the mystery of creation. John Paul II developed these teachings in several general audiences in the context of his catechesis on the Creed, from January 8 to April 23, 1986; the English version of these audiences has been published in *God Father and Creator: A Catechesis on the Creed* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1996).

²³ We can find in the Spanish area a clear reflection of this diversity of methodological options. There is a preference for an independent position in J. Morales, *El Misterio de la Creación* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 1994) [*Creation Theology*, trans. M. Adams and D. Cleary (Dublin: Four Courts, 2001)]; Armendáriz, *Hombre y mundo a la luz del Creador*; and J. A. Sayés, *Teología de la Creación* (Madrid: Palabra, 2002); there are others who prefer to include creation in anthropology, as M. Ponce, *El misterio del hombre* (Barcelona: Herder, 1997), and A. Martínez Sierra, *Antropología teológica fundamental* (Madrid: BAC, 2002); it is significant that, at the beginning of each of the last four quoted handbooks, some pages are explicitly devoted to the biblical debate on creation and covenant.

²⁴ Although we cannot elaborate on this point, perhaps it is useful here to mention the thesis, born in liberal theology, about the hellenization of Christianity, formulated by Adolf Harnack (1851–1930). Even though it is difficult today to find any theologian who does not challenge this thesis, it is admittedly true that it had a great influence in its time and contributed to the creation and nourishing of an atmosphere of suspicion towards metaphysics within theology. Here the encounter between Christianity and Greek philosophy is considered negatively, as a corruption of faith. Nevertheless, as some important historians of theology maintain—among them we can mention A. Grillmeier and J. Quasten—this encounter has instead manifested itself as a Christianization of Hellenism:

motivation for the synthesis that we are about to undertake is the search—one that follows recent attempts and the suggestion of *Fides et Ratio*—for an equilibrium between the different perspectives.²⁵

The Main Keys of Interpretation

The brief review of the state of the question that we have just completed seems to me sufficient to show that the way of understanding and presenting the relation between creation and covenant obeys very specific theological motivations. We propose, therefore, to elaborate a synthesis of the fundamental theological reasons that have propelled the search for more convincing ways of establishing this relation. In other words, the task is to set forth theological keys of interpretation that will permit an exact understanding of the diverse proposals that have been given in formulations of the relation between creation and covenant.

We think that it is possible to distinguish five such keys: an anthropological, a cosmological, a Christological, an eschatological, and an ontological. It should be said that each one of these keys seeks to respond to a real demand of Christian revelation and therefore expresses a true dimension of our question that cannot arbitrarily be put aside. In describing them we will focus our attention on the more significant arguments—making reference to the respective biblical foundations—in order to keep each interpretative key in relation with the problems that it tries to answer; this does not imply that the authors who sustain them have not also developed or at least alluded to other perspectives.²⁶ For the same reason, we will highlight those cases in which it seems to me

cf. L. Clavell, “Necesidad de la filosofía para la teología en la actualidad,” *Seminarium* 3 (2000): 513–36; here 515–16, with a reference to C. Geffré, “Thomas d’Aquin ou la christianisation de l’hellénisme,” in *L’être et Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 23–42.

²⁵ In maintaining that revealed and natural truth are not in opposition, because the unity of truth is a postulate of human reason itself, John Paul II affirms: “Revelation renders this unity certain, showing that the God of creation is also the God of salvation history. It is the one and the same God who establishes and guarantees the intelligibility and reasonableness of the natural order of things . . . and who reveals himself as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This unity of truth, natural and revealed, is embodied in a living and personal way in Christ . . . ; what is revealed in him is “the full truth” (cf. Jn 1:14–16) of everything which was created in him and through him and which therefore in him finds its fulfillment (cf. Col 1:17)” (*Fides et Ratio* §34; cf. also §11).

²⁶ In my synthesis of these keys, I have deliberately mentioned only those authors who adopt these keys in a fundamental or programmatic way in order to lighten the creation-covenant binomial. The theological thought of every author contains, in a certain sense, references to the other perspectives.

that an interpretative key has been explained in a way that tends to exclude certain demands that are present in others.

We do not, therefore, pretend to give a complete systematic vision, but rather we undertake to indicate certain necessary aspects that must be kept in mind when offering a theological interpretation of the present theme. This is necessary in order to avoid that reductionism of the divine plan of creation and salvation that does not account for some of its essential elements. For this reason, we will close this article with some conclusive reflections—reflections that can also serve as a starting point for further study and investigation—in which a proposal is made for an interpretation of the formula creation-covenant in light of the interconnectedness of the interpretation that will have been set forth. In this way we believe there is achieved a harmonious equilibrium with regard to a question that has provoked contrasting opinions, because of the fact that it has been argued from partial perspectives.

The Anthropological Key

Anthropology is one of the first areas in which the formula regarding creation and covenant has had a strong resonance. Here the central preoccupation is to understand who man is before God. The answer, with a strong biblical foundation, can be summarized by stating that *man is a being created for the covenant*. In this way various authors have proposed a theological anthropology in which the notion of the human creature and his creation are constitutionally open to the invitation of a covenant with God (Rahner; Muschalek and Kern in *Mysterium Salutis*; Ladaria).

The biblical basis of this vision of man was initially set forth by von Rad and Barth. As a result of the wide reception of their theses, today it is generally accepted to consider theologically the creation of man within his orientation towards the covenant. This sensibility has brought about the proposal of understanding the category of creation within a personalistic light.²⁷

The fundamental motive that is at work here is none other than the theological focus on anthropology, so characteristic of the last decades, that has been decisively inspired by the desire to present a concrete and

²⁷ This indication, in the biblical field, is found in W. Foerster, “ktizô,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. III, ed. G. Kittel, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 1014; cf. also H. Volk, “Schöpfung III. Systematisch,” in *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, vol. II, ed. H. Fries (Munich: Kösel, 1963), 516–7; Schoonenberg, *Covenant and Creation*, 79–93; P. Smulders, “Creation,” in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, vol. II, ed. C. Ernst, K. Rahner, and K. Smyth (New York: Herder, 1968), 27–28.

unified vision of man as he really exists.²⁸ The desire has been to confront in this way what was perceived as one great problem of previous theology: an “extrinsicism of grace” that is in its turn a consequence of the impoverishment of several categories that had become abstract, categories that belong to a metaphysics that is more cosmological than anthropological. There derived from this a vision of man on two levels, the fruit of a juxtaposition between the natural and what is “added” by grace. The intrinsic orientation of creation towards the covenant—so proper to a biblical perspective—had thus been lost, and it was seemingly replaced by a theological reflection which preferred as its starting point a concept of nature for talking about man.²⁹

The strength of the argument of this anthropological key is based on its recourse to the history of salvation³⁰ as the only way of giving back a real, concrete basis to a theological vision of man. Man as he really exists is a man who lives in history, and for this reason the primary access to an understanding of who man is before God comes, not by abstract reflection, but by the history of salvation in which God has sought out mankind, revealing Himself as the God who created with the intention of calling man into covenant. From this comes the strong insistence, found throughout contemporary theology, on underlining the theological relevance of the anthropological-phenomenological itinerary of the biblical experience—both of the people of Israel and of the first Christian community—and of man’s relation with God, which is primarily historical and salvific.

Within this perspective, therefore, the formula of Barth is understood in the sense that *creation is ordained towards the covenant*; this is what is fundamental in the design of God, since it constitutes the intrinsic final-

²⁸ Ladaria expresses this idea by saying that the only valid point of departure for the solution of this problem is man who exists. Existing man, rather than any theoretical hypothesis about human nature, is the only one who can really be called man, because he is the only one God has willed to call to existence: he is called to communion with God and has been created by God only for that end (cf. Ladaria, *Antropología teológica*, 166).

²⁹ This is the most-repeated criticism of Neo-Scholastic theology in the decades of the diffusion of de Lubac’s thesis on the supernatural. Nevertheless the debate has been the object of new developments in the last years; see *Supernatural: A Controversy at the Heart of Twentieth-Century Thomistic Thought*, ed. S.-T. Bonino, trans. R. Williams, and rev. M. Levering (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2009); and especially L. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010).

³⁰ “Der volle theologische Schöpfungsbegriff wird nur erreicht, wenn die Schöpfung von der Heilsgeschichte her als deren notwendige Voraussetzung verstanden wird” (*Mysterium Salutis*, vol. II, 440).

ity of creation. In this way creation is integrated into the history of salvation as its first stage, is inseparable from that history, and is not complete in itself but rather culminates in the covenant.

Consequently, the theological understanding of man before God is now expressed, no longer through the natural-supernatural duality, but through the proposal of new terms that seem more consonant with the dynamism of the divine plan, such as Rahner's term "the supernatural existential" (taken up by Muschalek), or the "supercreational condition" of man, put forward by Ladaria. Both of these ideas result from a speculative effort to achieve a unified vision of the person before God as a being created for the covenant.³¹

Sharing the true aspects of the basis of this hermeneutical key, certain authors have called attention to the risks that might derive from an exaggerated focus on anthropology when interpreting the divine plan.³² If the salvific relation between God and man is conceived only in its associative or covenantal dimension, the concept of creation can end up being reduced to a mere subjective sentiment of dependence (creatureliness), and the significance of creation as origination (*ex nihilo*), inclusive of both the person and the universe, is marginalized.³³ A radical anthropocentrism can cause one to forget the necessity of the cosmological dimension present in the divine plan, as will be seen later. From this arises the oscillation of contemporary handbooks that is still unresolved today,

³¹ Muschalek closes the part on creation in *Mysterium Salutis* by saying that, in the only concrete order of salvation, creation is always *de facto* understood as condition for the covenant, and, in this sense, human (historic) nature has a supernatural existential as its intrinsic element (cf. *Mysterium Salutis*, vol. II, 557). With an analogous motivation, Ladaria maintains that to define our relation to God and consequently our being as creature is insufficient. We are creatures of God and at the same time more than this. Therefore, he continues, we must distinguish, not separate, two 'moments' of gratuity ordered to one another: the divine creative freedom and his higher freedom of delivering to us his Son; the second moment does not depend upon the first, otherwise we would make God dependent on what is not God. At the same time, this second moment requires the first one, one of a free creation that, in our concrete case, has no other finality than to make possible the communication of God Himself. Man is a creature called to divine filiation; the original unity of our being in the diversity of its aspects corresponds to the unity of the salvific design (cf. Ladaria, *Antropología teológica*, 166–67).

³² This criticism is directed to certain ambiguities present in Rahnerian thought, and not to Ladaria, who tries to avoid them.

³³ Cf. Auer, *Die Welt—Gottes Schöpfung*, 24; Scheffczyk, *Schöpfung als Heilseröffnung. Schöpfungslehre*, 34. Rahner had indicated that the first point in the doctrine of creation is not *creatio ex nihilo*, but creatureliness as fundamental and permanent relation from man to God: cf. Rahner, "Schöpfungslehre," 471.

which fluctuates between dedicating a special section to creation or including creation as the first part of theological anthropology.

Another limitation comes from the tendency to consider the person as created for the covenant only in his historical dimension. Since the focus is on understanding the person as he really exists, the “protological” and the “eschatological” are considered from the historical-salvific situation that is actually immanent in the person in his condition as covenant-partner with God. From this arises the tendency—clearly present within the thought of Rahner—to include as something belonging to the interior of the person the dimension of grace that the covenant presupposes, thus making less clear the specific character of the protology and the eschatology.³⁴

A dynamic that reflects a vision of the person created for the covenant has favored interesting developments in a theology of earthly realities, such as the call to transform the existential structures of human life and history, following the argument of the conciliar teachings contained in *Gaudium et Spes*. The supremacy that is bestowed upon man in the work of creation has brought about a focus upon the process of personal self-realization. At the same time, within moral theology, this has been manifested in the priority of the person’s conscience, which self-determines itself in its historic-salvific relationship with God.

What is at work here is a deeper understanding of the specifically human, which does not reduce itself only to nature, but is above all person: a dialogical structure, a relational character, a constitution open to hearing and to being called. Although it is true that no one denies the possibility of speaking of a human nature as such, this concept has nevertheless wound up being emptied of its content in preference of historic and personalistic categories. The disassociation of nature and person and also of nature and history present here, without a doubt requires further reflection to harmonize these basic philosophical concepts. In short, the task is to grasp more deeply that “the human person is *naturally historical or historical by nature*, not because his nature substantially changes with history, but because he possesses a free nature.”³⁵ There is space for an ontology of the historicity of the human person that does not reduce the novelty of historic events to

³⁴ In this regard, see the critical observations in J. Ratzinger, “Salvation and History,” in *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. M. F. McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 162ff.

³⁵ F. Ocariz, “Dignidad personal, trascendencia e historicidad del hombre” (1984), in *Naturaleza, gracia y gloria* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2000), 55. As Millán Puelles writes, the horizon of freedom constitutes the specific sphere of history, the metaphysical framework where historical realities find their own and more suitable place. But this freedom of our being, from which history is made possible, is not super-added to human nature. On the contrary, it is the freedom which that nature

pre-established outlines,³⁶ but that attempts to understand the metaphysical dimension that makes it possible to speak of history. “Even more, it is precisely metaphysics that makes it possible to open ourselves to an understanding of history that is not limited to a mere succession of events or cultures, but that is authentically a history of salvation (with metaphysical reach).”³⁷ For this reason today, and especially after *Fides et Ratio*,³⁸ it is possible to consider an anthropology with metaphysical depth that, without either assimilating the person into the rest of created reality or understanding him on the basis of it, captures what is specific of the person in his free and historical dynamic, in his connection with a nature that has been given to him and makes him be precisely this way.

The Cosmological Key

In some authors one can single out a theological line of thinking that, while it decries the forgetfulness of the cosmos that follows upon the aforementioned anthropological inversion, argues for a consideration of the created world as an essential element of the structure of man’s salvation (Gesché, Ganoczy, Moltmann).

This line of thinking also has a strong biblical foundation that has been highlighted especially by those exegetes who have emphasized a certain independence of the idea of creation in the Old Testament (Westermann, Schmid).³⁹ Here could also be included the growing importance acquired

possesses: cf. A. Millán Puelles, *Ontología de la existencia histórica* (Madrid: Rialp, 1955), 194.

³⁶ We must recognize with Millán Puelles that man necessarily has a history, but not that man has a necessary history. Human freedom makes possible this apparently contradictory situation: *to have necessarily a history is in fact very different from having a necessary history* (cf. *Ontología de la existencia histórica*, 206–7).

³⁷ L. Romera, “Pensiero metafisico e apertura a Dio,” in *Dio e il senso dell’esistenza umana* (Rome: Armando, 1999), 49.

³⁸ “Metaphysics should not be seen as an alternative to anthropology, since it is metaphysics which makes it possible to ground the concept of personal dignity in virtue of their spiritual nature. In a special way, the person constitutes a privileged locus for the encounter with being, and hence with metaphysical enquiry” (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* §83). A commentary on the perspectives that arise from here can be seen in Clavell, “Necesidad de la filosofía para la teología en la actualidad,” 528ff.

³⁹ For Westermann, “the simple fact that the first page of the Bible speaks about heaven and earth, the sun, moon and stars, about plants and trees, about birds, fish and animals, is a certain sign that the God whom we acknowledge in the Creed as the Father of Jesus Christ is concerned with all of these creatures, and not merely with humans. A God who is understood only as the god of humankind is no longer the God of the Bible” (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 176).

by the covenant made with Noah, understood as a divine pact that encompasses all of created reality.⁴⁰

It is clear that the problem that one wishes to avoid here is that of a certain anthropocentrism that has actually led to an attitude of manipulative domination on the part of man over the created cosmos. Nevertheless, today there is a special sensibility, caused, among other things, by growing ecological concerns, which has brought about a particular interest in what has been called “responsibility towards creation.”⁴¹ Within this sensibility one can detect a growing dissatisfaction with certain trends of contemporary theology to completely absorb the topic of creation within a history of salvation discourse, such that one ends up considering the distinction between the natural and the supernatural as inadequate.⁴² Among Protestants who desire to recover a certain harmony in man’s relation with the

⁴⁰ Cf., among others, W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984), where the author offers an interpretation of the universal dimension of the covenant with Noah; R. Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1992), proposes the biblical topic of covenant, not reducing it to the deuteronomic tradition of the covenant with Moses, but amplifying it to the whole creation, in contrast with the opinions that exaggerate the importance of the historical dimension (cf., for example, 164–65); Simkins, “God’s Covenant with Creation,” in *Creator and Creation*, 152–72.

⁴¹ See *Responsabilità per il creato*, ed. S. Biolo (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1998). Along with John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI has shown in different documents his concern for this topic, as for example in the homily given at the Easter Vigil 2011: “One might ask: is it really important to speak also of creation during the Easter Vigil? Could we not begin with the events in which God calls man, forms a people for himself and creates his history with men upon the earth? The answer has to be: no. . . . The Church is not some kind of association that concerns itself with man’s religious needs but is limited to that objective. No, she brings man into contact with God and thus with the source of all things. Therefore we relate to God as Creator, and so we have a responsibility for creation. Our responsibility extends as far as creation because it comes from the Creator. Only because God created everything can he give us life and direct our lives. Life in the Church’s faith involves more than a set of feelings and sentiments and perhaps moral obligations. It embraces man in his entirety, from his origins to his eternal destiny. Only because creation belongs to God can we place ourselves completely in his hands. And only because he is the Creator can he give us life for ever. Joy over creation, thanksgiving for creation and responsibility for it all belong together” (Benedict XVI, *Homily*, April 23, 2011).

⁴² Along these lines, see the contribution of A. Marchesi to the volume quoted in the previous footnote, entitled “Il ‘teorema della creazione’ e la responsabilità della comunità umana nei confronti dell’ambiente e delle generazioni future,” 189–200. We can also call to mind here the warning from Gesché not to enlarge improperly von Rad’s thesis on the primacy of soteriology over the theology of creation: cf. Gesché, *Le cosmos*, 44n37.

cosmos, Moltmann has articulated an ecological doctrine of creation that seeks to address these new demands made upon theological reflection.⁴³

The fundamental objection against the anthropological key could be enunciated thus: Has the creation–covenant relationship been reduced to its anthropological dimension as if that were the only one pertinent for a theology of the history of salvation? In this way do we not lose the religious character—that is profoundly human and relevant from a soteriological perspective—of respect for the created world, created as a work of God’s wisdom?

Based on these queries, the task is to make evident that the salvific plan of God has not only a *quando* (history) but also an *ubi* (cosmos). This is the cosmos with which man shares the status of creature and that has been entrusted to him as his dwelling. As a result, it is possible to develop theologically a vision of the world as a place of salvation so that the theology of creation might be a cosmology of salvation.⁴⁴

Understood in this way, we think that the cosmological key offers a nuance that was not present previously. Now the creation is not simply the first step towards the covenant in a historical (or anthropological) sense. It is something more; *the creation is the place proper to the covenant*. This must be understood not in the sense that creation is an external backdrop, necessary but in itself irrelevant, but rather in the sense that creation has its own make-up and its own internal logic that belongs to the plan of God.

In effect, the world, in a certain sense, precedes the human person and has its own substantiality apart from him, one that derives precisely from its having been created by the Word (*Logos*). If the world has been made by the Word of God, which is always the Word of salvation, it is then clear that creation is not only the dwelling of the *Logos*,⁴⁵ but also that it possesses within its very constitution a *logos* of salvation, even before that of history.

⁴³ To this motivation responds his *cosmological theocentrism*: “It is true that, as the image of God, the human being has his special position in creation. But he stands together with all other earthly and heavenly beings in the same hymn of praise of God’s glory, and in the enjoyment of God’s sabbath pleasure over creation, as he saw that it was good. Even without human beings, the heavens declare the glory of God. This *theocentric* biblical world picture gives the human being, with his special position in the cosmos, the chance to understand himself as a member of the community of creation. So if Christian theology wants to find the wisdom in dealing with creation which accords with belief in creation, it must free that belief from the modern anthropocentric view of the world” (Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 31).

⁴⁴ Cf. Gesché, *Le cosmos*, 163ff.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 83–117.

Here can be found a cosmological-theological basis of the Christian sacramental economy, which makes use of created elements as efficacious signs of salvific grace.⁴⁶ Likewise, a complement is offered to the dynamic anthropology of the Christian transformation of temporal structures, to the extent that one now sees how what is transformed and sanctified is not only man but also the created world, which is included in the redemptive work of Christ. An analogous complement can be glimpsed from the moral perspective, for now the proper autonomy of conscience is in harmony with the recognition of an order intrinsic to creation that imposes certain moral demands that conscience must respect, because it has not produced them but rather has perceived them as the work of God.

Another aspect that the cosmological key manifests, one that could be understood in an ambiguous way, is a certain independence of the notion of creation with respect to the history of salvation. On the one hand, there is no doubt that a positive aspect of this is to allow inter-religious dialogue to be fruitful to the extent that it bases itself on a common ground: the conviction that God has made all things, a conviction that is present in many religious traditions, as evidence of the aspect of truth that the notion of creation has, as it is accessible to the light of natural human reason. This aspect suggests a renewed appreciation of the creation's role as the so-called "court of the gentiles" which, after Barth, has tended to disappear in theology.⁴⁷

On the other hand there must be noted the risk of radicalizing the cosmological perspective, something present in the doctrines that propose a religious attitude of man based exclusively on his sense of reverence before creation. Such doctrines tend to dilute what is specifically Christian within a universalist framework, one not far from a pantheism that confuses God with the world. Precisely what is lost here is the intrinsic ordination of the creation to the covenant within God's plan, the realism of the fact that God has created in order to enter into the history of men, offering them in Christ a participation in his own life. It is certainly proper

⁴⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 197. Speaking about the goodness of creation, Ganoczy affirms that, put at the disposal of the new creation by the work of the Holy Spirit, the elements of the cosmic and the human worlds, as they are, can become signs (*Zeichen*) of salvation (cf. Ganoczy, *Schöpfungslehre*, 82).

⁴⁷ This point has been mentioned by Pope Benedict XVI, who in his Christmas address to the Roman Curia in 2009 suggested that the Church should open today a new Court of the gentiles in which we can speak about the question of God not only with people of different religions, but also with people who are without religion but for whom the question of God as the Unknown remains meaningful: cf. Benedict XVI, Address to the Members of Roman Curia, December 21, 2009.

to react against certain theological perspectives that had removed the person from the framework of nature so as to affirm that human life is simply history, and to do so by proposing a correct recovery of a contemplative attitude before the world. Nevertheless, this need not lead to the sacralization of nature that is present in certain extreme forms of ecologism, which try to recover a vague, mystic pantheism with Gnostic overtones—something that has had a certain influence in some of Catholic thought in the last few decades.⁴⁸ The doctrine of creation teaches that the cosmos deserves contemplative respect not because it is divine, but because it is the work of God and reflects his perfections.⁴⁹

These considerations suggest that it is worthwhile, within philosophy, to go deeper in the cosmological dimension of anthropology, in such a way that the emergence and peculiarity of the person in the world is shown. At the same time, it is necessary to make explicit the distinction and relation between cosmology and metaphysics, areas that at times give the impression of having been confused; the second has tended to be reduced to the first, as if the principal reference for the study of being and the first principles were the world rather than the person.

In any case, with this perspective another partial aspect of our relation has been illuminated: if before the covenant tended to be understood as the end of creation only for man, now it stands out that salvation belongs to the realm of the created world.

The Christological Key

The exposition of the two preceding perspectives brings to the foreground the persistence of a certain fragmentation in the way of understanding the relationship between creation and covenant. Within a process of maturation and theological reflection, this fragmentation has been overcome through a growing use of the Christological key that has been taken by certain authors as their principal point of reference, particularly in Italian theology (Colombo, Colzani, Gozzelino, Bordoni). These authors have highlighted the fact that in Christ both God's project regarding the creation and His project for salvation history simultaneously find their fulfillment.

⁴⁸ Cf. W. C. French, "Subject-centered and Creation-centered Paradigms in Recent Catholic Thought," *Journal of Religion* 70 (1990): 48–72.

⁴⁹ For these questions, cf. Morales, *Creation Theology*, 238–50, where the author, while criticizing some extreme forms of divinization of nature, says: "Christian faith has demythologized the world, and there is no going back" (at 246). Cf. also Marie George, "Ought We to Revere Non-rational Natural Beings?" *Nova et Vetera* 11, no. 3 (2012): 751–78, at 764; the author, reading St. Thomas, states: "Non-rational creatures . . . are not themselves objects of reverence, but rather are meant to lead us to revere God."

The biblical foundation of this perspective is enriched by making use of the New Testament, explicitly interpreting the Old Testament theme of creation-covenant in the light of the revelation of its fullness in Christ. Particular attention is given to those texts that speak of creation in Christ (1 Cor 8:6; Heb 1:2–3; Jn 1:3, 10; Col 1:15–20), texts that allow for an amplification of the mediating role of Christ in the work of creation.⁵⁰

In effect, a biblical argument has extended itself and gained a central importance, according to which, just as in the Old Testament creation is revealed with a view towards the covenant, in an analogous way in the New Testament, creation is contemplated from Christ and in view of Him. Within this perspective, the sought after, unified vision of man before God is truly made possible by the God-made-man, Christ, in whom the Creator has mysteriously united Himself to all of creation.

In this way, Christ is the key to the unified divine plan of creation and of salvation. This allows for a unified vision of man before God, as well as the integration of the created world within this relation. For this reason, as Bordoni has explicitly demonstrated, the Christological key unites and fulfills the two previous ones, overcoming the irreconcilable extremes of anthropocentrism and cosmocentrism by their inclusion within a Christocentrism. In the divine plan, man and the world receive the fullness of truth and meaning only in Christ.⁵¹

Therefore, according to the Christological perspective, Revelation not only speaks of creation for the covenant, or of a creation that is the place of the covenant, but it takes a step further in the comprehension of this relation, conceiving of the *creation itself as a covenant in Christ*.⁵² This seeks

⁵⁰ A good synthesis, with abundant bibliography, can be found in L. Scheffczyk, *Schöpfung und Vorsehung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1963), 13–23; also in F. Mussner, “Schöpfung in Christus,” in *Mysterium Salutis*, vol. II, 455–61.

⁵¹ Cf. M. Bordoni, “L’orizzonte cristocentrico della creazione in relazione alla questione della sua visione antropocentrica,” in *La creazione. Oltre l’antropocentrismo?* ed. P. Giannoni (Padua: Il Messaggero, 1993), 367–98, here 367–68. A summary of the theological consequences of this contribution can be found in the last words of the article, where Bordoni maintains that, if there is no possibility of a world without humankind, there is likewise no possibility of humankind without the world. But there is no possible humankind without the eternal Son of God, and there is no historically *de facto* creation of man without the eternal Son of God incarnated (cf. *ibid.*, 398).

⁵² This is the theological position that Colombo defends and that is, in his view, committed to emphasize the most comprehensive aspect of Revelation, that is, to consider creation as “covenant with God in Jesus Christ” (cf. Colombo, “Creazione II,” 204). In an analogous way, Bordoni’s definition of creation, from the christocentric point of view, includes a reference to the covenant: cf. Bordoni, “L’orizzonte cristocentrico della creazione,” 395.

to make theologically explicit the original reference of creation to Christ in whom all things acquire their subsistence. Christ confers on the creation its fullest meaning as covenant offered by God.⁵³ Thus there is shown the radical priority of the category of covenant, in which there is integrated, as a part of it, the idea of creation.

Based on this unified vision there has been offered a solution to the problem of the supernatural according to this Christological key: the “Christic existential” proposed by Gozzelino, which has the advantage of conserving both the gratuity, since it follows upon the creaturely (this is what the term “existential” indicates, as distinct from “essential,”) as well as the constitutional reference of all of creation to Christ (indicated by the term “Christic,” as distinct from Christian, which is reserved for those who have explicitly taken unto themselves what is Christic).⁵⁴ Thereby another step is taken forward in overcoming the extrinsicism of grace and the consequent dual anthropology existing on two levels.⁵⁵ Such deficiencies are overcome not from beginning from man in the concrete, but rather more radically from the One who is the *universale concretum*, Christ,⁵⁶ who being perfect man, is the only one who can reveal to man the truth about himself.⁵⁷

⁵³ Colombo maintains that the first theological datum about creation is this: Jesus Christ is the Revelation of the meaning of creation because He reveals that creation is the act of God for communicating *ad extra* the Trinitarian existence, and more precisely for generating *ad extra* the sons of God (cf. Colombo, “Creazione II,” 201). Further on, he says that Revelation specifies particularly that the world that actually exists, exists for the covenant with God in Jesus Christ, namely, it exists for actualizing the possibility of an *ad extra* communication of the condition of the Son within the Trinity (cf. *ibidem*, 202).

⁵⁴ Cf. Gozzelino, *Il mistero dell'uomo in Cristo*, 62ff. There Gozzelino affirms that he picks up this expression from J. Alfaro, *Hacia una teología del progreso humano* (Barcelona: Herder, 1969), 81ff.

⁵⁵ The critical reference is always modern theology, with its—in Colombo’s view—tendency to overlap covenant theology with creation theology and thereby to give existence and consistence to creation independently from the covenant. Colombo considers it necessary to overcome this mainly negative approach and to arrive at a positive one that consists in identifying creation theology with covenant theology (cf. Colombo, “Creazione II,” 204).

⁵⁶ The application of the category *universale concretum* to Christ has its origin in some renaissance and modern authors; in the twentieth century it has been developed especially by Hans Urs von Balthasar to make a Catholic theology of history: cf. *A Theology of History* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963) (orig. 1950). On the origin and meaning of this topic, from the point of view of Revelation, see a synthesis in S. Pié-Ninot, *La Teología Fundamental* (Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 2001), 274–81.

⁵⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

Therefore within these considerations it is possible to perceive how the Christological key better resolves the problems that the anthropological perspective attempts to settle, correcting at the same time the risks that it could lead to; that is to say, the immanentization of the mystery that would be supposed by starting from and centering on man who receives the Revelation, instead of starting from and centering on the mystery as it is revealed in Christ.

Within this context, it should be pointed out that the authors who develop this key often have as their source of inspiration the thought of figures such as de Lubac and, above all, von Balthasar. In his dialogue with Barth, von Balthasar emphasized the Christological dimension of analogy⁵⁸ in his efforts to show a respect for the realism and the primacy of the revealed mystery in Christ to the extent that it involves—including it without dissolving it—the *analogia entis*, as an affirmation of the equally important, relative consistency of creation.⁵⁹ One has, then, a Catholic Christocentrism that dialogues with and, at the same time, tries to correct the risks of a “Christomonism” that is more proper to a Protestant form of thinking, of which Barth is a clear advocate.⁶⁰

While agreeing upon the importance of the truth of the creation in light of Christ, certain authors have pointed out the limits of certain ways of presenting the Christocentrism of the creation.⁶¹ An excessive preoccupa-

⁵⁸ Cf. von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, especially 247–70. This point was mentioned for the first time in *A Theology of History*, 74n5, developed to a further extent in his trilogy, particularly the *Theodrama*, and has become one of his great theological contributions. A synthesis of this question can be seen in R. F. Luciani Rivero, *El misterio de la diferencia. Un estudio tipológico de la analogía como estructura originaria de la realidad en Tomás de Aquino, Erich Przywara y Hans Urs von Balthasar y su uso en teología trinitaria* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2002), 492–506 and 545–52. Cf. also R. Díaz, *Los nombres de Dios, de Jesucristo y de la Iglesia. El recurso a la metáfora y a la analogía* (Valencia: Edicep, 2009).

⁵⁹ By virtue of the *analogia entis* of Catholic theology, understood in a concrete, that is, Christological way, von Balthasar defends an arrangement between the absolute *prius* of grace’s order compared to nature and the relative *prius* of creation’s order compared to grace. The simplicity of this double consideration, according to him, overcomes Barth’s formula about the interior and exterior basis: cf. von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 234 and 288. As you can see, here arises the necessity of maintaining, together with the Christocentrism, what we will later call here the ontological key.

⁶⁰ For this point see also Scheffczyk, “Schöpfung II,” in *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, vol. II, 508; idem, *Schöpfung als Heilsöffnung. Schöpfungslehre*, 37–38.

⁶¹ I have in mind here Auer’s criticism of Colombo at the end of his handbook, referred to here with a certain personal re-wording: cf. Auer, *Die Welt—Gottes Schöpfung*, 582–84. For further explanations on this subject cf. S. Sanz, “La creazione in Cristo nella teologia dogmatica contemporanea: una proposta di

tion with underlining the unified character of the divine plan can end up losing sight of the radical nature of the newness that the Incarnation has, which, with a strong biblical basis, could authentically be called a *new creation* in Christ. If one focuses solely on the role of Christ in the first creation, one risks presenting the redemptive Incarnation as (in a certain way) a necessary and automatic continuation of the divine plan, and also underestimating the freedom of God's action. Paradoxically, starting from an historic-salvific perspective, one can end up denying the radical newness that the Incarnation supposes in the history of salvation.⁶²

Here one clearly sees the impoverishment that is brought about by trying to begin in theology with only a narrative consideration of the divine plan in the *historia salutis*, and consequently of the mystery of Christ. It does not cease to be paradoxical that, beginning from the truth of the creation in Christ, some have proposed to set aside the exposition of the doctrine of creation in favor of the narration of the history of Jesus Christ. Thus one would first affirm the Christological meaning of creation and only afterwards one would explain in what consists the mystery of creation. In reality, the first thing that "creation in Christ" suggests is to reflect on the creation as the action of God and afterwards on who Christ is—that is, He to whom is attributed divinity through His insertion in the creative act of the Trinity—in His mysterious reality as God-man. The suggestion of St. Athanasius is illustrative in this respect, who, when having to expound the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, commented, "It is fitting that we first speak of the creation of the world and of God its creator, in such a way that it might be adequately understood that the renovation of the world has been brought about by the Word who created it at the beginning. In effect, no contradiction will be seen if the Father has achieved the salvation of the universe in Him through whom it was created."⁶³

sintesi," in *Creazione e salvezza nella Bibbia*, ed. M. A. Tabet and M.V. Fabbri (Rome: EDUSC, 2009), 503–15.

⁶² In this line there is a nuance to Gozzelino's idea in a recent handbook in the Spanish language area: cf. Sayés, *Teología de la Creación*, 92–95; this author maintains that we should speak of a "Christic existential," but explaining it without denying either the authentic autonomy of created being or the gratuity of the Incarnation. This gratuity would remain vague, according to Sayés, if one maintains with Gozzelino that there is an inchoative presence of Incarnation in creation, which would lead to putting in man as creature a demand for the Christic existential. This would be the same as affirming that creation can be understood only from Christ.

⁶³ Saint Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi*, no. 1 (PG 25,38C). In this sense, I think that Auer highlights a true dimension of the problem when he affirms that, in order to understand rightly Christ's cooperation in creation, we have to clarify first the meaning of the revealed mystery about "Creation out of nothing" in its genuine positional value (cf. Auer, *Die Welt—Gottes Schöpfung*, 584).

From a broader point of view, one can say that there is circularity between the actions and the ways of being that those actions manifest. In order to be understood, narration—which rightly appeals to the unity of meaning—has to be combined with a reflection upon “what persons and things are.” This permits one to capture with precision the dynamism and the newness of being in history. There is thus opened a perspective that could be called “Christological realism,”⁶⁴ about which we will elaborate further later on.

The Eschatological Key

If up until now the central motivation of the interpretative keys presented so far has been to set forth a unified perspective and continuity between creation and covenant, we must note the presence of a different motivation in those authors—especially Moltmann and Pannenberg—who have attempted to provide for a better understanding of eschatology as the definitive completion of the covenant in the new creation.

The introduction of the eschatological key within an understanding of the binomial creation-covenant, tends to accent a dimension of discontinuity with respect to history, making explicit the nexus between protology and eschatology, between creation and consummation. It finds a clear biblical basis both in the rediscovery of the Sabbath of the creation theme in Genesis,⁶⁵ and in the question of the new creation, present in both Testaments.⁶⁶

Within this line of thinking there is a desire to resolve a problem detected within the history-salvation perspective that accompanies the ways of presenting the anthropological and Christological perspectives: the tendency to reduce the notion of creation to a fact of the past. By conceiving of the creation only in its character as the beginning of the history of salvation, one falls short and reduces the diverse biblical mean-

⁶⁴ The expression is not mine, but I take it from P. O’Callaghan, “Il realismo e la teologia della creazione,” *Per la Filosofia* 34 (1995): 110. I think that Colombo would share this sensibility when he affirms, at the end of his study on the supernatural, that the *proprium* of Christian faith is to see mankind and the world as “created in Christ,” and this insight has suggested highlighting, as a qualifying feature, its ‘supernaturality’: cf. Colombo, *Del Soprannaturale* (Milan: Glossa, 1996), 360.

⁶⁵ Cf. Moltmann, “The Sabbath: The Feast of Creation,” in *God in Creation*, 276–96, where he presents the sabbath as the day toward which the work of creation is oriented and in which it is fulfilled. In this way the sabbath constitutes a prefiguring of the coming eschatological kingdom.

⁶⁶ Limiting the references to some dictionary voices, I indicate particularly: H. Reinelt, “Schöpfung I. Biblisch,” in *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, vol. II, 499–500; and Barbaglio, “Creazione I. Messaggio biblico,” in *Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia*, 196–98.

ings of the notion of creation to only one of them (*creatio prima*) while *creatio continua* and *nova creatio* are either left on a second level of consideration or ignored all together.

This reductionism is consistent with the centrality that has been given to the category *historia salutis* in the effort to understand Christianity. Moltmann and Pannenberg, in the context of the paradigm shift that has taken place in Protestant theology—a shift from the history of salvation to eschatology⁶⁷—emphasize that what is truly definitive within Christianity is the eschatological fulfillment that will take place with the arrival of the future Kingdom of glory.⁶⁸

This is a new outlook on the relation between creation and covenant; for the first time, the perspective is inverted by considering the *covenant as a (new) creation*. If up until now the emphasis has been placed on an understanding of creation that starts from the idea of the covenant, now the idea begins to gain momentum according to which the covenant is understood on the basis of the idea of creation. By showing that the covenant, in so far as it is historical, cannot be the ultimate foundation, since history is subject to what transcends it and gives it its ultimate meaning, one affirms that the covenant receives its true completion in the consummation of creation.⁶⁹ Glory is introduced with the same motivation as the foundation of nature and of grace.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ For a description of that phenomenon, cf. Ratzinger, “Salvation History, Metaphysics and Eschatology,” in *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 171–90.

⁶⁸ Some words from Pannenberg can be useful to clarify this way of thinking: “Instead of separating God’s covenant history from creation, the sending of the Son, from the incarnation to the resurrection, ascension, and glorious return, is to be seen as the fulfillment of God’s creative work. But this, of course, demands a view of creation that does not limit it to the world’s beginning” (Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* II, 144).

⁶⁹ “Creation in the beginning is therefore certainly open for salvation history; but salvation history, for its part, exists for the sake of new creation. Consequently even creation in the beginning already points beyond salvation history towards its own perfected completion in the kingdom of glory. In this respect history is not the framework of creation; creation is the framework of history. This sets a limit to the “historization of the world”. Creation is more than merely a stage for God’s history with men and women. The goal of this history is the consummation of creation in its glorification” (Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 56).

⁷⁰ Moltmann proposes to complete the old theological principle “*gratia perficit naturam*” according to a threefold articulation of the same principle: “*gratia non perficit, sed praeparat naturam ad gloriam aeternam*”; or otherwise, “*gratia non est perfectio naturae, sed praeparatio messianica mundi ad regnum Dei*” (ibid., 8). Although we cannot go further on this point, it is worth noticing that in these formulations there is a different understanding of the concept of nature than in the Catholic tradition. On this complex topic see Ratzinger, “*Gratia praesupponit naturam*.” Erwägungen

There is no doubt that an outlook such as this favors the elevation of the present horizon to that of the hereafter—that it allows for a vision of the problematic nature of human existence through a lens of Christian hope, which is a guarantee of the future. But, at the same time, it is clear that this interpretative key has greater difficulties in demonstrating the connection between earthly and future realities, between moral action in this world and salvation.⁷¹

In itself, the passage from the historic-salvific paradigm to the eschatological—one that could be described as “historic-evolutionary”—presents the unarguable merit of trying to overcome the extremes to which both anthropocentrism and historicism tend, by turning towards a certain ontology. Creation, through being projected towards its final consummation, much further than its beginnings in history, is thereby conceived of as an anticipation, a grammar whose rules are set forth for an eschatological verification.⁷² Here there is a certain dependence on idealist metaphysics to the extent that these authors tend to equate history with metaphysics, echoing Hegel, for whom history is a necessary process of realizing the Absolute.

In this way, by holding that the fullness is given only at the end, the definitiveness of Revelation’s Christocentrism is emptied of its content. This is the most significant limitation of an excessive focus on eschatology, a limit that has rightly been noted.⁷³ In a coherent presentation of the Christian mystery, it may not be lost from view that with Christ the fullness of time has arrived, that we are *already* children of God, even though it has *not yet* been manifested what we will become (cf. 1 Jn 3:2).⁷⁴

über Sinn und Grenze eines scholastischen Axioms,” in *Dogma und Verkündigung* (Munich: Erich Wewel, 1973), 161–81; von Bathasar, “The Concept of Nature in Catholic Theology,” in *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 217–47.

⁷¹ It can be useful to remember the intra-catholic controversy between “eschatologists” and “incarnationists” regarding how to understand the theology of history and its relationship to earthly realities; for a brief synthesis see A. Nichols, *Catholic Thought Since the Enlightenment: A Survey* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), 146–48 with bibliography (220); for further analysis, see Colombo, “Escatologismo ed incarnazionismo,” *La Scuola Cattolica* 87 (1959): 344–76 and 401–24.

⁷² Therefore Moltmann speaks about creation as open, and about God as the condition of possibility of the future, in such a way that “in the messianic light of the gospel, the human being’s likeness to God appears as a historical process with an eschatological termination; it is not a static condition” (Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 227).

⁷³ Cf. Brambilla, “Teologie della creazione,” 629. This risk is especially present in Protestant theology, whereas Catholic handbooks normally highlight that the connection between protology and eschatology receives its definitive sense from Christology; cf., for example, Ladaria, *Antropologia teológica*, 28.

⁷⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 48.

In any case, the analysis of the eschatological key has opened a perspective that cannot be avoided. We are certainly aware of the fact that Christocentrism is capable of offering a response to eschatology, since in Christ one has the fullness of the primary creation and of the new creation. Nevertheless, one can detect in the authors of the Christological key the identification of the theology of creation with the theology of the covenant, even to the point of defining the creation as a covenant in Christ. By making explicit the role of Christ in the primary creation, there was a tendency to present the redemptive Incarnation as being in continuity with that creation, within the unified framework of the history of salvation. Now, the eschatological perspective shows that there is an unequivocal aspect of discontinuity that comes about through the irruption of a new creation within history in such a way that it is now the covenant that must be understood in light of creation. How can one maintain, without losing the unity of the divine design and the absolute centrality of Christ, the balance between continuity and discontinuity, between the orientation of the creation to the covenant and the novelty of being that this introduces into the history of salvation, to the point of being able to call itself a new creation? The analysis of the last interpretative key can provide interesting elements for a response to this question.

The Ontological Key

This name is one which I take explicitly from Lafont,⁷⁵ who, together with other authors writing from a perspective that includes philosophical speculation, has attempted to propose an ontology capable of uniting in an analogical way both the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of grace (covenant), showing that this is possible by way of a certain renovation of a metaphysics of being and participation.

The biblical basis with which this new way of viewing our question is presented is varied. On the one hand, there is a certain independence of the notion of creation (Westermann) that allows for speculative considerations within the Bible itself, such as that which occurs in the Wisdom books. Thus von Rad's correction on the interpretation of faith in the creation within the Old Testament, to which we alluded previously, assumes renewed significance. It is very interesting to note biblical studies intent on showing that the very name with which God the Savior names Himself and by which He wants to be called—YHWH (Ex 3:14)—

⁷⁵ Concretely, he holds that a proper theological interpretation of the facts that come from the history of salvation and particularly from the Paschal mystery, imply the use of the *ontological key* (cf. Lafont, *Dieu, le temps et l'être*, 324).

includes the idea of the Creator.⁷⁶ Such studies suggest that, in general terms, contemporary exegesis seems to have resolved the standoff that for a good part of the twentieth century had determined the understanding of the relationship between metaphysics and biblical revelation. Childs's invitation to deal with the ontic dimension that lies beneath the biblical question seems to go in the same direction.⁷⁷

In this sense, the perspective of the biblical argument that is based on the sequence "Savior-Creator," receives an interesting addition. Although it is true that the first to be experienced was the encounter with God as liberator, this does not imply that his character of Creator is secondary, since what is specific to Israel's faith is precisely the union of the two aspects, which is the result of what could be classified in a certain sense as—to borrow the expression of *Fides et Ratio* (§83)—a step from *phenomenon* to *foundation*. Thus, placing the story of creation as the first word of God in the Bible cannot but have a precise theological motivation.⁷⁸

The problem that this perspective clearly marks out and tries to resolve is the eclipse of the doctrine of creation; in certain sectors of contemporary theology, that doctrine has been absorbed into the doctrine of salvation. The desire to solve this problem is found in those authors who, while sharing and developing the anthropological, Christological, and eschatological points of view, strive to maintain that such perspectives need not lead to a loss of the consistency and substantiality that created

⁷⁶ Cf. W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (London: Athlone Press, 1968; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990); F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 60–75. Following this idea, a Spanish exegete has suggested a careful correction of the current and sometimes manipulated opinion that the people of Israel attained God the Creator after their experience of God the liberator. According to Muñoz León, there is no question that the liberating experience is the center of Israel's profession of faith, but this same profession of faith includes at least implicitly the idea of God the Creator, and perhaps explicitly, if, as he supposes, the divine name YHWH includes in its etymology the meaning of source of being; cf. D. Muñoz León, "El universo creado y la encarnación redentora de Cristo," *Scripta Theologica* 25 (1993): 810n5.

⁷⁷ Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 110. In this effort to rediscover the harmony between the metaphysical and biblical perspectives, as well as to renew Trinitarian theology and the development of a Trinitarian ontology, it will be very useful to read the suggestions offered by M. Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

⁷⁸ We find this complement, from a biblical point of view, in Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 222; idem, *Biblical Theology*, 110. From a theological standpoint we refer to O'Callaghan, "Il realismo e la teologia della creazione," 105.

reality has.⁷⁹ For it is precisely such consistency that makes it possible to speak of a dynamic of temporal structure's proper autonomy and sanctification, as well as of the universal moral demands based on a respect for the natural order created by God, demands that constitute a fitting starting point for dialogue with nonbelievers.⁸⁰

While recognizing the important achievements of the application of the history of salvation perspective to theology, and more specifically to the understanding of creation, some authors have noted that this application has at times been realized at the cost of speculative theological reflection, which includes as an indispensable support, the "metaphysical moment." Even while sharing the reaction to an earlier theology that, with rationalist tendencies, tended to separate creation and salvation, these authors agree to propose a reconciliation between metaphysics and the history of salvation, being fully aware of the problematic nature of a theology that is without philosophical support.⁸¹

It ought to be pointed out as well that this proposal is also found within evangelical circles, specifically within Calvinism. Within the context of an effort to recuperate the original thought of Calvin, Gisel agrees upon the necessity of elaborating an ontology of creation that would be capable of understanding creation's specific structure, since "to forget this solely to benefit the Redemption (here, the covenant, Christ, and Scripture) means falsifying the understanding of salvation precisely in its central element."⁸²

According to what has been said earlier, the interpretative keys that are most centered upon the *historia salutis* often focus on the relation between covenant and creation in historical terms: the creation as the first step of the covenant. The creation has as well a dimension of metaphysical permanence

⁷⁹ The autonomy of created reality and its ordering towards Christ are elements that must be well understood and that constitute the basis of creation theology (cf. Ladaría, *Antropología teológica*, 51).

⁸⁰ In my view, this is the motivation at the root of the International Theological Commission's document *The Search for a Universal Ethic: A New Look at the Natural Law* (2009), which reflects a new interest in the concept of human nature, and particularly in the ethical framework, vis-a-vis natural law. See the "Symposium" on this document in *Nova et Vetera* 9.3 (2011): 657–841.

⁸¹ Besides Lafont, other authors explicate this point, even from different perspectives: Kern, "Zur theologischen Auslegung des Schöpfungsglaubens," in *Mysterium Salutis*, vol. II, 514; Auer, *Die Welt—Gottes Schöpfung*, 95; Gozzelino, *Il mistero dell'uomo in Cristo*, 72. 81–85; Scheffczyk, *Schöpfung als Heileröffnung. Schöpfungslehre*, 10; Bordoni, *L'orizzonte cristocentrico della creazione*, 375.

⁸² Gisel, *La Création*, 229–30. It is also useful to recall his assertion that to write a book on creation means to acknowledge oneself in search of an *ontology*: see *ibid.*, 7.

(participation in being, the original relation to God), that deserves to be theologically developed, since it constitutes the basis of the metaphysical repercussions that are contained within the doctrines of the covenant and of grace.

As some authors have pointed out,⁸³ a development of this kind encounters a solid foundation in the proposal of Cornelio Fabro (1911–95) for genuinely rediscovering the Thomistic notion of *actus essendi*, which permits one to conceive of creation in terms of the participation of being.⁸⁴ This metaphysical vision, which explicitly presents itself as overcoming the essentialism and extrinsicism that preceded it, is a good point of departure for the development of what has been called a “theology of supernatural participation,”⁸⁵ which can provide a new and fruitful contribution to the understanding of our subject.

Concretely, it is good to highlight an aspect of the Thomistic understanding of creation that has been pointed out from this perspective: that the creation is not simply a historical fact, but rather for St. Thomas,⁸⁶ it is “the metaphysical situation continuously in act of the creature upon which is founded the being and the action of all created causality.”⁸⁷ It seems to me that this is a point of decisive importance in my reflection, because it permits a resolution of a question that has arisen in the analysis of the preceding perspectives. With frequency it has been repeated that the creation is the first stage of the history of salvation, the initial salvific act of God. But yet, if it is considered only under this aspect, it seems that creation is being reduced to a simple fact of history. It would then be interesting as a preparation for what is theologically relevant, that is, the covenant of God with men in the history of salvation, but not as something that affects present reality. For this reason it ought not to surprise us that a movement arose

⁸³ Cf., among others, *ibid.*, 164ff.; Lafont, *Dieu, le temps et l'être*, 314.

⁸⁴ C. Fabro, *Partecipazione e causalità secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1960).

⁸⁵ F. Ocariz, *Hijos de Dios en Cristo. Introducción a una teología de la participación sobrenatural* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 1972); this author has developed this position in subsequently published articles, now collected in *Naturaleza, gracia y gloria* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2000).

⁸⁶ Cf., for example, Aquinas's exposition in *ST I*, qq. 44–45.

⁸⁷ Fabro, *Partecipazione e causalità*, 461. Following this idea, Ocariz maintains that, when creation is considered as a simple *fact* (*factum*), being a creature implies only an *esse ab alio* (relation of origin), without a manifestation of that *being-a-creature* in the inner structure of being: in this way, “essence” and “existence” would be nothing more than two *states* of the same content (simple possibility and reality). With this approach, the way from one *state* to the other (from possibility to reality) is made through a *jump*: the merely *extrinsic* causality of creation (cf. Ocariz, *Hijos de Dios en Cristo*, 50).

within Protestant theology that accentuated, not the history of salvation, but eschatology, of which creation is anticipation.⁸⁸ And from here some authors (Moltmann and Pannenberg) have criticized the priority of the historical covenant, suggesting that the covenant must be subordinated to the eschatological fullness of the Kingdom.

This tension is given a new perspective in the light of the theology of supernatural participation, which conceives of creaturely being not primarily as the fact of having a temporal beginning, but rather as a precise metaphysical position: *to be without being Being*.⁸⁹ Creation is not reduced in this way to a fact of the past, but remains a present reality, that has received already a new metaphysical position (filial adoption as re-creation), which supposes the entrance of eschatology into history and will have its fulfillment in the fullness of the glory of the Kingdom.⁹⁰

In this way it is not only creation that possesses a metaphysical dimension, but also the covenant; in so far as it is a divine initiative to make men participate in God's own life, it is susceptible to a treatment of this kind via the notion of supernatural participation. The notion of participation, as the expression of the ontological aspect of the content of the creation and the covenant, permits one to perceive the double relation of continuity and discontinuity between both. Continuity exists because both indicate precisely a participation in the transcendental order of being; discontinuity is found in the fact that the polarity *ad extra—ad intra* must necessarily be maintained if one wants to respect the grandeur of the mystery of our being created in order to be deified.

This development of the ontological key permits a formulation of the reciprocal bond between creation and covenant, sustaining at the same time an understanding of the creation as covenant and of the covenant as creation; that is to say, in its most radical meaning, creation means covenant in Christ, while the covenant can be understood as a (new) creation in Christ. In virtue of the analogy, both ideas are reciprocally illuminated,

⁸⁸ For a comparison between this notion of anticipation (typical of Pannenberg's ontology) and the Thomistic notion of participation, see Sanz, *El futuro creador del Dios trinitario*, 199–212.

⁸⁹ As Ocariz points out, for Saint Thomas being-creature implies neither exclusively nor primarily to have a beginning, but, precisely founded in the idea of participation, it implies *being* without being the *Being*, and from this, as a constituent element of created being, arises the real distinction between *essentia* and *esse* (*actus essendi*): cf. Ocariz, *Hijos de Dios en Cristo*, 51.

⁹⁰ It is useful to point out that not only the idea of creation as relation but also the affirmation that the most appropriate way of speaking about creation is to consider it *ut relatio*, are present originally in Saint Thomas; cf. for example *ST I*, q. 45, a. 3; *Summa contra Gentiles* lib. II, cap. 18.

without losing what is specific to each one and conserving the covenant in its primacy that it logically deserves as the fullness of being.

There is thus maintained a marvelous unity in the divine plan of love, without the tension that is proper to it being hidden. The tension consists in the fact that what is *ad extra* from God has been elevated to participate in the life of the Trinity *ad intra*. Within this perspective, whose objective is none other than to better understand our being in Christ, the distinction between the natural and the supernatural is maintained without any risk of juxtaposing the two planes of existence. If the creation is rightly considered as the gift of being, it is clear that it effects what is most intimate in the creature. At the same time, the covenant understood as a new creation, far from constituting something external and added on, presupposes a new participation that is called supernatural, precisely with regard to what is new about it, in so far as it is an elevation of created nature to a new metaphysical situation—the participation in the divine nature as such, which is the gift of grace. Nevertheless, what is primary is not nature's elevation, because it is only the manifestation on a formal level of the primary and original elevation of the act of personal being to a participation in the unique Filiation of the Son who, being the Incarnate Word, is the model and summit of our supernatural elevation.⁹¹ Now if Filiation is Subsistent Relation, it can then be participated in by elevating the relation to God proper to the act of personal created being (*esse ad Deum*), to being, *in addition*, relation to the Father in the Son through the Spirit (*esse ad Patrem in Filio per Spiritum Sanctum*).

This is perhaps the idea of greatest speculative potential that comes out of the development of the ontological key according to the rediscovery of the Thomistic notion of the act of being. This standpoint permits one to affirm that an extrinsicist view of grace has its roots in an insufficient metaphysical consideration of created reality that sees grace according to the binomial “essence–existence” in such a way that the latter is extrinsic to the former, since it comes about as the result of an external causality. The argumentation that seeks to begin with historical man as he really exists and that considers nature or essence as something abstract—perhaps due to a confusion between the concept of nature and the hypothesis of “pure nature”—does not in our judgment escape the hazards of this reduction.⁹² The making of grace extrinsic is due, then, to a previous extrinsicism of

⁹¹ It is convenient to indicate—although we cannot explore the topic at this time—that here lies the question, extensively argued by Ocariz, of the distinction and articulation between filial adoption as elevation of the person and grace as elevation of nature.

⁹² See Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 329–343, 424–26, and 429–47.

creation, and only by overcoming this latter can the former be effectively overcome as well. Put another way, if grace is conceived of as something extra or added on to nature, it is because creation is also considered in this same manner, that is to say, as something that “puts” an essence into existence, the addition of something (existence) to an essence. In effect, certain authors who decry a vision of grace as something additional, profess—perhaps unknowingly—an essentialism that reduces the perfection of the act of being to pure “existential factuality” and do not sufficiently take into account the full extent of the real distinction between essence and the act of being.⁹³ In this way it is possible to pass to the other extreme of a certain immanentism, which ends up considering grace as the development of what is already present within nature, which is the tendency that characterizes Rahner’s thought.⁹⁴

If, with St. Thomas, one understands creation from the standpoint of being, he will then also understand grace from this standpoint, as affecting creation in its most intimate dimension. Here grace is not extrinsic to the creature, but rather intensifies his act of being in such a way that in a certain sense it can be considered, by way of analogy, a new creation *ex nihilo*, since the creature remains freely constituted in its new being.⁹⁵

Although it has been possible to point out only a few possible lines of investigation, it seems to me that this speculation develops an intuition that is theologically correct, in a direction that I have qualified as Christological realism.⁹⁶

⁹³ Among others, Muschalek seems to move in this direction when he considers the creative act as the free position of the “non-divine” (“*der freien Setzung des Nicht-göttlichen*”: *Mysterium Salutis*, vol. II, 557). Colombo reduces the act of being to the fact of existence when he affirms that Revelation presents creation “as a fact” (“*come fatto, cioè come attualità*”: Colombo, “Creazione II,” 204). I discuss all these questions in Sanz, “Metafísica de la creación y teología. La racionalidad de la idea cristiana de creación a la luz de Santo Tomás de Aquino,” in *Colección Cuadernos de Filosofía. Excerpta e dissertationibus in Philosophia*, vol. XVII (Pamplona: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 2007), 9–105, esp. 45–70.

⁹⁴ Cf. C. Cardona, “Rilievi critici a due fondamentazioni metafisiche per una costruzione teologica,” *Divus Thomas* 75 (1972): 149–76, especially 162ff.; for a more extensive criticism from a philosophical point of view, see C. Fabro, *La svolta antropologica di Karl Rahner* (Milan: Rusconi, 1974).

⁹⁵ “Etiam gratia dicitur creati, ex eo quod homines secundum ipsam creantur, idest in novo esse constituuntur, ex nihilo, idest non ex meritis; secundum illud Ad Ephes. 2,9: ‘Creati in Christo Iesu in operibus bonis’” (ST I–II, q. 110, a. 2, ad 3).

⁹⁶ From the point of view of the theology of Revelation, this means conceiving the divine plan of creation and redemption in Christ in such a unity that one maintains at the same time the necessary Christocentric perspective and the no less important distinction between the natural and the supernatural: cf. Ocariz, “La

Final Considerations

In our synthesis of the principle interpretative keys that have been offered within contemporary theology in order to find a more convincing relation between creation and covenant, it has been clear how certain perspectives presented themselves as the completion of what came before, at times insinuating the possibility of conflict. This was the case with the anthropological and cosmological keys; the Christological key seemed to conflict with these two; and finally the eschatological key seemed to clash with the Christological. At the same time we have called attention to the risk of carrying to the extreme each one of them if it was to be accepted to the exclusion of the others (i.e., anthropocentrism, cosmocentrism, cristomonism, and eschatological idealism).

This shows us once again the importance of maintaining all of the dimensions that a theological consideration of the creation-covenant relationship demands. If on the basis of the anthropological and Christological keys, creation was to be read in terms of the covenant (creation as covenant), the cosmological and eschatological keys would permit one to consider the covenant in light of the creation. In both cases there exists a clear biblical foundation.

Precisely for this reason, because it is necessary to maintain united the diverse facets of the revealed Mystery, we have seen afterwards how certain authors have judged it necessary and fitting to turn to the key of ontological realism, which, by way of the analogy of being and participation, can relax the tensions existing between the various keys to the extent that it permits us to follow the two directions of continuity and discontinuity, creation as covenant and covenant as creation.

So what shall we say about the choice between a creation dependent upon or independent of the covenant? It seems that in light of the anthropological and Christological keys, one ought to sustain the first option, while the cosmological and eschatological keys suggest the second. In such a predicament, it seems to me that only if the ontological key is made explicit can the choice be resolved and mutual reciprocity sustained—the continuity and discontinuity that make it possible to see the primacy of the covenant and the relative autonomy of creation, which does not dissolve into covenant.

As we have seen, the notion of participation applied both to creation and to the covenant allows us to understand the double relation present in the analysis of the biblical texts that many authors have made; that is

revelación en Cristo y la consumación escatológica de la historia y del cosmos” (1992), in *Naturaleza, gracia y gloria*, 349–50.

to say, creation can be seen as covenant at the same time that covenant can also be considered as (new) creation. This implies an analogical use of these concepts that at the same time reflects the analogical structure of reality itself. According to Christian Revelation, it is possible to say that creation, in its fullest and most radical meaning, means covenant, since the apex of the creative work of God is Christ's humanity in whom the covenant is definitively given to us. At the same time, this affirmation is not opposed to the consideration that there are other meanings of the word "creation," more basic ones, that do not directly allude to the ultimate meaning of covenant (for example, the dimension of the *creatio ex nihilo*). By itself this allows us to understand that Sacred Scripture on certain occasions speaks of creation considered in itself, while on others it manifests its radically salvific dimension. There is no conflict or contradiction here, nor is there between affirming that creation is a mystery of our faith and sustaining that this is a truth accessible to the natural understanding that the human person can achieve with his intelligence.

Creation and covenant come together, in our opinion, in a relationship that is both continuous and discontinuous. The continuity exists ultimately because of the fact that the plenitude of creation is the redemptive Incarnation of Jesus Christ, in view of which everything has been created according to the only divine plan. At the same time there is an undeniable discontinuity from the point of view of Revelation, to the extent that this nexus is not necessary but rather the fruit of a later manifestation of the Trinitarian love.⁹⁷ If the continuity is lost from sight it is easy to fall into the juxtaposition of orders. But if the discontinuity is lost from view, the character of something that "goes beyond," which is possessed by the marvelous gift of participation *ad intra* presupposed by our being made children of God in Christ, is lost as well.

We have thought it fitting to spend more time discussing the ontological key, since frequently—also for understandable historical reasons—

⁹⁷ This important question is clearly exposed by von Balthasar, "Creation and Trinity," *Communio* 15 (1988): 285–93. In fact, after the concentration on the anthropological and Christological dimensions in the theology of creation, the last years have seen a new interest in the Trinitarian dimension of creation, as some studies indicate: C. E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998); Ganoczy, *Der Dreieinige Schöpfer. Trinitätstheologie und Synergie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001). From a Thomistic point of view, cf. G. Emery, *La Trinité Créatrice* (Paris: Vrin, 1995); idem, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. F.A. Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). An overview with abundant bibliography can be seen in S. del Cura, "Creación 'ex nihilo' como creación 'ex amore': su arraigo y consistencia en el misterio trinitario de Dios," *Estudios Trinitarios* 39 (2004): 55–130, esp. 60–65.

it has tended to be undervalued in certain areas of contemporary theological reflection. We have seen how it has the ability to integrate the distinct dimensions of the revealed mystery, allowing for an organic inter-connection of the keys of interpretation.

If we now return our attention to the formula of Barth, we can affirm that, in effect, creation is the external foundation of the covenant; that is to say, it is the divine action *ad extra* of putting outside of Himself a participation of His being that is the condition or presupposition for being able to call it unto Himself; and the covenant is the internal foundation of creation, for, by virtue of the free and loving plan of God, it constitutes the moment in which the creature is elevated *ad intra* to participate in the fullness of Divine Being, in the inner-Trinitarian life of love—that is to say, in God who is a loving communion of Persons—through the creature’s insertion into the unique Filiation of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word. The covenant as participation in the life of God is realized primarily in the human creature in virtue of his spiritual nature that makes him *capax Dei*; and secondly, in an analogous way, in the material creation.

The ontological key offers a valuable help to the theologian at a critical moment in understanding the relation between creation and covenant. The double function of the presupposition that Barth shows in articulating this formula is sustained and consolidated, not by a dialectical theology that rejects metaphysical thinking, but rather by a theology based on the realism of creation and of salvation in Christ.⁹⁸

In a significant way, Benedict XVI assumes, on the one hand, Barth’s formula in his teaching: “The Covenant, communion between God and man, is inbuilt at the deepest level of creation. Yes, the Covenant is the inner ground of creation, just as creation is the external presupposition of the Covenant.” On the other hand, in the same homily, the Pope establishes that “to omit the creation would be to misunderstand the very history of God with men, to diminish it, to lose sight of its true order of greatness. . . . Our profession of faith begins with the words: ‘We believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth’. If we omit the beginning of the Credo, the whole history of salvation becomes too limited and too small.”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ As Gesteira points out, although there is no doubt about the influence of Barth in Catholic theology in questions like the Christological foundation of creation and history, it is, however, hard to accept his actualism and his tendency to escape from the question of being, to escape from ontology: M. Gesteira, “Karl Barth, un profeta del siglo XX,” Introduction to the Spanish translation, by A. Martínez de la Pera, of K. Barth, *Carta a los Romanos* (Madrid: BAC, 1998), 40.

⁹⁹ Benedict XVI, *Homily*, April 23, 2011. One could add here his reference to the insufficiency of speaking about God only as the “totally Other,” in a hidden allusion to Barth’s notion, in another significant homily. On the solemnity of Pentecost

As a consequence of what we have discussed thus far, it is possible to affirm that without a relatively autonomous theology of creation it would not be possible to develop a theology of the covenant in which it is understood as gift, nor an adequate Christology.¹⁰⁰ Or, to put it positively, the metaphysics of being and of participation derived from the truth of creation—which in a certain sense can be characterized as a filial metaphysics—provides to the *fides quaerens intellectum* a theologically balanced understanding of the mystery of the history of our salvation in Christ.

In conclusion, if within contemporary theology there has been an insistence—and rightly so—on considering creation as a covenant in Christ, it seems to me that, on the same basis, the complementary aspect must be insisted on as well, one that considers the covenant as a new creation in Christ. With this perspective one seeks to respect and at the same time understand, to the extent that it is possible, the immeasurable richness of the Trinity's design, which is originally and always—in spite of men's sins—a design of creation and covenant. N-V

of the same year, after recalling that Pentecost is also a feast of creation because, for us Christians, the world is the fruit of an act of love by God who has made all things and in which he rejoices because it is “good,” the Pope said: “Consequently God is not totally Other, unnameable and obscure. God reveals himself, he has a face. God is reason, God is will, God is love, God is beauty” (Benedict XVI, *Homily*, June 12, 2011).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. P. Eyt, “La ‘théologie du monde’ a-t-elle fait oublier la création?” *La Documentation Catholique* 1917 (1986): 472–78, here 474.