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CREATION AND INTELLIGIBILITY IN THOMAS AQUINAS: A VANTAGE-POINT FOR RE-THINKING MODERN ANTHROPOLOGY

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Abstract

This article on “Creation and Intelligibility in Thomas Aquinas: A Vantage-point for Re-thinking Modern Anthropology” is based on the perception that modern anthropology has become too anthropocentric; to the extent that modern man claims to create God, and to hold supreme dominance over the universe. But the challenges and lessons of universal solidarity that emerge from coronavirus disease 2019 (covid-19 pandemic) have necessitated the call for a new anthropology. Hence *eco-spiritual anthropology or Integrative anthropology*¹ is one such proposed new study on man that takes cognizance of God as the Creator, and man as having a common home with the universe, including the environment.

Therefore, it is the belief of this article that any enquiry of such kind, through a historical and conceptual analysis of Aquinas’ notion of “Creation and Intelligibility” may serve as a vantage-point for re-thinking modern anthropocentrism. Aquinas’ creation from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) implies that God as the Pure Actuality (Actus Purus) and in His freedom is the generative source of all things in being, including human beings.

Keywords: Creation and intelligibility, modern anthropocentrism, eco-spiritual anthropology, God, and human beings.

Introduction

As modern anthropology has been swallowed by anthropocentrism²- a belief that humans are more important than anything else³ including God, an enquiry into the notion of Creation and Intelligibility in Thomas Aquinas, in my thinking, is necessary for re-thinking modern anthropology. For an enquiry on “creation and intelligibility” in Aquinas, is ipso facto, a study on the cause of being as being. There is no gainsaying that things are in being, but how did they come to be, becomes the problem? Equally, it is true that everything that is, insofar as it is, is intelligible; but if being is intelligible, it must have a sufficient reason for being. Just like saying that there is a world, but how did the world come to be, becomes the problem? Perhaps, the world is not without an ontological explanation, and therefore an existential issue that demands a philosophical enquiry.

The need for a philosophical enquiry of this nature is inevitable if we recall that peoples’ lives are constantly being fashioned by their view about reality. As it is, reality is capable of justifying itself, of explaining itself to the intellect; of answering the question, why? Though the ultimate solution to such questions is not yet known, reality provides for a knowable answer. Now the issue is that the proof of God’s existence in Thomas Aquinas establishes the existence of the moving cause; the uncaused efficient cause. But the matter is, taken for granted the existence of God, why is God a cause? For the existence of the world postulates its cause, but the existence of the cause does not necessarily demand the existence of the world. But given that there is a God, why should there be a world?

The solution to this problem in Aquinas involves a reflection on the nature of God Himself. God is the Being who is Pure Act, and in whom essence and existence are the same and

identical. Consequently, creation can be justified or explained from the very fact of the intelligibility of being and nature of the cause as envisaged by Thomas Aquinas. Therefore, through a historical and conceptual analysis of Aquinas notion of “creation and intelligibility”, this paper is disposed to forming a new anthropology that may be all encompassing, integral, and far less of anthropocentrism. To achieve this feat, this enquiry will be explored in four sub-headings: First, to situate the idea of Creation and Intelligibility in Aquinas in the context of history. The second aims at a synthetic examination of the idea of Creation - ‘ex nihilo’. The third is on a metaphysical enquiry of the nature of God as the generative source. The last point is evaluation and conclusion: an invitation for re-thinking modern anthropocentrism drawing from creation and intelligibility in Thomas Aquinas.

Reviewing the Greek Position: Essentialism and Eternity of the World

The first thing to check here is the problem of Creation; of how and why things that came into being, have been at the root of most philosophical enquiries. For as it is with all philosophical issues, opinions vary as to the solution of the problem. Consequently, it becomes necessary to situate this work in the context of history.

Generally, for the Greek philosophers, things simply are but what are they? What are they made of? In other words, what are the natures or essences of things? This, simply, is a philosophy of essence, otherwise known as essentialism; that is, a philosophy of being without existence. But to enable us understand the ancient Greeks better, the thoughts of Plato and Aristotle would be vividly considered here.

The Demiurge of Plato

Plato is traditionally thought to have been born in 428

B.C.E., and to have died in 348 B.C.E in Athens.⁴ It is to Plato that the British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead famously said that “the history of philosophy is but a series of footnotes to him.”⁵ Plato’s account of the origin of the world is the main theme of his dialogue known as the **TIMAEUS**. For Plato, there are two worlds- the world of forms or ideas, and the visible world of changeable things. The real world is that of the forms which is equally eternal, necessary and unchangeable. The only world that needs to be accounted for, then, is the visible world of change and imperfection.⁶ This world of change, Plato believes is fashioned after the ideas, but the ideas alone cannot account for their existence. Hence, Plato introduced the idea of the *Demiurge*; a kind of craftsman who imposes order and purpose into the chaotic elements of the world of forms.⁷

Consequently, in Plato’s account of the doctrine of creation ‘*ex nihilo*’ is entirely out of the question because the *Demiurge* does not bring new things into existence but rather imposes form upon eternally pre-existent matter and brings the world out of chaos. The forms are the models at which the *Demiurge* looks to introduce order in the universe.

So the world is generated because it is something that becomes and due to its nobility, it is fashioned after a model. It is in this sense, a mere image of the model, hence only a probable account can be given about it. In the Plato’s sense, only the theory of the forms can be understood, because we cannot really talk of understanding the world but rather the forms which it embodies can be grasped. This is the essentialism embedded in Plato’s account of the origin of the world.

Now everything that becomes or is created must of necessity be created by some cause, for without a cause nothing can be created.⁸

Thus, since our world is that which is always becoming and never is, it necessarily follows that it was created in the Plato's sense. Platonic, in the sense that the existence of material out of which it was made was assumed. Therefore, strictly speaking it cannot be said to be created.

The *Demiurge* fashioned the world after the image of the gods and since the gods were eternal, Plato intended the world to be so. But this everlasting attribute is somehow impossible to be bestowed in its fullness upon a creature. Therefore, the *Demiurge* resolved to have a moving image of eternity.

.. he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity; and the image we call time.⁹

Time came into being with the emergence of the world; until then the universe was made in the likeness of the eternal gods. Thus far, the creator delegated his power to the gods to complete the minute details of creation to be guiltless of future evil. Although it is not clear how the gods originated, Plato urges to abide by tradition which held that the gods were equally created by the *Demiurge*. Evidently in Plato, the world ultimately is the product of the *Demiurge*. With this summation then, it becomes pertinent to see for whom Aristotle accounted for the creation of the world.

The Self- Thinking Thought of Aristotle

Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was born in Stagira, at the time in Macedonia. He was one of the world's greatest thinkers, whose profound influence on western philosophy and philosophical terminology continues till this day.¹⁰ However, following the line of our discourse; while Plato was uncovering the highest principles of intelligibility of the visible world, Aristotle was more on the problem of being; substance. The world of Aristotle is that of change, generation and corruption

immersed in motion due to the love for the pure actuality of a Self-Thinking Thought: the Prime Unmoved Mover.

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle is concerned with discovering the first principles of things (*arche*). The true essence of a thing consists in its function rather than in the matter of which it is made ... Aristotle was primarily interested in discovering how things are as they are, rather than why they exist as they do.¹¹

Strictly speaking, Aristotle had no notion of a created universe, but in his explanation of motion, he was led to the notion of the Unmoved Mover. His argument is that there is something which is the cause of motion, not necessarily an efficient cause or a creator of motion but rather “that which as first of all things moves all things”.¹² This is not a first mover because it is something actual in itself and that which is actual is prior to that which is potential. It is the unmovable substance which is quite radically distinct from the physical substances. But this would simply mean nothing other than the forms of Plato, unless it is a principle which can cause change and initiate movement outside itself.

“There must, then, be such a principle whose very essence is actuality”.¹³ The Unmoved Mover then is actual and makes motion intelligible. It is the eternal principle of motion since there is no potentiality in it. The world of things was always in process since motion implies an eternal activity. The world of Aristotle is, then, eternal though constantly in motion. It is eternal because that which moves it is also eternal. For Aristotle states:

... Since that which moves and is moved is intermediate, there is something which move without being moved, being eternal, substance and actuality. And the object of desire and the object of thought

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move in this way; they move without being moved.¹⁴

Now, the object of desire and the object of thought are necessarily the Unmoved Mover because it moves without being moved. It follows that the principle on which the world of nature depends is thought, because thinking is the starting point.

... thinking in itself deals with that which is best in itself, and that which is thinking in the fullest sense with that which is best in the fullest sense. And thought thinks on itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and the object of thought are the same. For that which is capable of receiving the object of thought, that is, the essence, is thought.¹⁵

This needless obscurity is meant to show that the Unmoved Mover is a Self-Thinking-Thought. It cannot but think itself since it must think the best. The best is that which is simple and exists actually, but that which exists in actuality is the eternal principle of motion. It is the eternal Unmoved substance of Aristotle. It is pure Act, a self-Thinking -Thought, and the cause of motion in the world of nature; but it is wholly innocent of its existence or its act of being.

The Self-Thinking-Thought of Aristotle could not give the world its existence because it is only a substantial act, that is, self-contained; and other things are necessarily attracted to it as an object of thought and desire. But, then, in such a world, what truly is, is the form by which the existent is a substance. This is not strange because for Aristotle, being is the same thing as substance; and he uses the same word 'ousia' to delineate form, reality, nature and essence when taken in different senses.

The danger, here, is that the form could be made the proper object of metaphysical speculation. If this is done, there arises a metaphysics of essence wherein the actually given world, while it remains the substantial world of Aristotle, can safely be dealt with as if it were the ideal world of Plato.¹⁶ In this lies the essentialism of Plato and Aristotle because they are talking of being without existence. Their main concern is the essence of things. For Plato and Aristotle, the first question that can be asked about anything is: what is it, and not whether it is?

So as we have mentioned earlier, essentialism is a metaphysics of being without existence. On that ground, Plato and Aristotle can be classified as essentialists while maintaining their eternity of the world. But their worlds are still not created because a pre-existing material is presupposed.

The Question Of Creation

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was born at the castle of Rocca Secca near Naples. The problem for him at the time was to demonstrate that the world was created, and not just created, but created from nothing. It must be demonstrated that the act of creation is not a mere efficient causality but a prototype of efficient causality by which the entire being as being is caused. Specifically the causal relationship between the effect and the cause is '*secundum esse*'. This means that the effect depends entirely on the cause for its act of being and for its continual existence. But it has to be decided whether this creative activity is free or not.

Creation Out of Nothing- "Creatio Ex Nihilo"

Although Augustine's distinctive doctrine was that God created all things ex nihilo, out of nothing, Aquinas strongly maintained that God created the world from nothing. By this Aquinas meant that the entire being of created things came from their creative cause; nothing existed prior to creation.

There is in fact no pre-existing material out of which the world was created but all things came into being through the creative act. Being as being is the most universal effect; so it must come from the most universal, supreme, first efficient cause, which is God. Hubler and Soskice write:

Augustine gave *creatio ex nihilo* its first careful philosophical consideration in the Christian tradition.... He argued that as something capable of being formed into good things, matter itself was good and a creature of good God. But the major philosophical consideration of *creatio ex nihilo* came from Aquinas, who taught that *creatio ex nihilo* meant that nothing was presupposed to God's creative act, not matter, forms, natures, essences, ideas, laws of nature or a hierarchy of being. The creature depended entirely on God's creative act.¹⁷

Aquinas' creation "*ex nihilo*" actually means bringing into existence of being as being from no pre-existing material. It is the emanation of all being from the universal cause of being, which is God. This is made possible through the existential act, that is, the coming into being of all being through the universal causal activity of God that is designated by the name creation. It is not about the coming into being of particular beings but the emanation of the whole universal being from the first principle and no being is pre-supposed to this emanation.¹⁸

It might be argued that 'from nothing, nothing comes'. But Aquinas was of the opinion that the preposition "from" (ex), does not designate the material cause, but order.¹⁹ Like when one says that 'from morning comes mid-day'. Besides, this preposition 'ex' could be understood in two senses. It can either include the negation conveyed when we say that word, "nothing" or can be included in it. In the first sense the order is affirmed by stating the relationship between what is now and

its previous non-being; while in the second sense the order is denied when we mean that it is not made from anything.

The implication is that any notion of material cause is denied, while the fact that “ex” implies after, is maintained. It is a mere precedence. But this does not imply that once there was nothing and then afterwards there was something. It means that nothing is prior to reality by nature because since creatures received their reality from another there is nothing in them before being. Commenting on this point, Gilson states that:

... to create is to produce effects in the very act by which they are. In other words, it is to cause in them that in virtue of which they can be said to be, or to be beings. ... to be produced from nothingness, therefore, means to be produced completely, totally, integrally, starting from strictly nothing else than the creative efficacy of God.²⁰

Obviously then, apart from the act of creation, no created thing was in being. This at least makes the notion of a production of being as being from nothing intelligible.

The crux of the matter lies in the misunderstanding of the reality of creation ‘ex nihilo’; so further analysis is needed for a better ontological clarification. Creation is sometimes expressed in terms of making. Thus, in making something, there is an agent which makes, and something which receives the act. Making in this context is the giving of existence to a non-being, since nothingness is the same as non-being as we mentioned earlier. But it might be argued that if there is something which receives existence and which is equally different from the agent, then the agent makes existence out of some pre-existing subject. No matter what this pre-existing subject is called it is conceived as waiting for the conferment

of existence from the cause.

Now there is a contradiction inherent in this line of argument. If the position is granted then creation 'ex nihilo' is unintelligible and intrinsically impossible. "But existence is that which actuates the whole being of whatever is. Consequently, to give existence is simultaneously to produce that which receives it."²¹ This, in fact, proves the intelligibility of the reality of the act of creation. Prior to that act, there was no pre-existing material ready to receive existence. Only the source of that existence or the source of all being exists since it is *PURE ACT*.

God exists only prior to creation. He does not act upon any existing material since no such primary matter exists. Only God exists originally, and whatever comes to be, derives its existence from Him.²²

Prime matter could not have existed before creation because it is not something; that is, a reality existing on its own account. Prime matter is purely potential and in no way an actual principle. In itself, it has no actuality, so it cannot be said to have existed. However, it came to be in and with those things created since it is a constitutive principle. Moreover, if the end result of creation is indeed being in act then it participated in being; for being is analogically common to that which is, potentially and to that, which is actually.²³ Therefore, if prime matter is only part of what is created, then, strictly speaking, it is co-created, because by definition, it has no being.

This emphasis on the 'conferring of existence', or the act of being should not be misunderstood. Creation is not the existence of the thing but precisely the thing which exists. The act of creation culminates in the thing and its existence. So what is referred to here is being as being and not 'this' or

‘that’ particular being; since creation is the emanation of all being from the universal Being. Consequently, creation is the production of a ‘particular thing’.

According to Aquinas:²⁴ “Creation is the production of a thing in its entire substance, nothing presupposed.” To be created, therefore, belongs properly to subsisting being. As such the act of creation terminates in a subsisting being; for being belongs to that which has an act of being, that is, to what subsists in its own mode of being. This is so because properly speaking, created things are subsisting beings, but not self-subsistent because their act of being is caused. So in giving the act of being (*esse*), God gives that which actuates being as being. To create ‘*ex nihilo*’ then, is to make a thing in its totality.

The all important point to note is that creation is not any kind of change; not even a substantial change. For Aquinas creation is not change except according to our mode of understanding, because change is a kind of transformation or generation from something pre-existing.²⁵ Creation, rather, is the production of being, that is, the production of the whole substance of a thing. To be created is really to be a being, since to be created is to be caused to be. So creation is both the production of a thing absolutely from nothing and at the same time, the production of a thing in its entire substance- a production of being as being, absolutely and simply, because the act of being makes a thing to be.

The difficulties arise from confusing the mode of signification and the thing signified. While creation can be considered as change due to our way of understanding, it is not really change, but a coming into being, in its totality, of something which has no reality prior to its being caused. The problem is that we are so familiar with accidental and substantial change as a source of origination, that we find it hard to apprehend that nothing is presupposed in the act of creation.

But the distinguishing factor between creation ‘ex nihilo’ and substantial change, is that nothing whatsoever is presupposed in the act of creation because it is an effect of an infinite power. While in substantial change things are produced from pre-existing matter. This distinction is essential to the proper understanding of the problem Aquinas tried to solve. Whatever is produced in creation is from nothing because there is nothing on which the creative act was exercised. It is a total production of a previous non-existent. But in substantial change, a pre-existing material is presupposed. However, in creation, ‘nothing’ is not the material cause; it is rather a non-being. It is simply that the production of the universe is not out of anything.

The fact really is that creatures or finite beings would be non-beings if they were left to themselves. They would not be if they were not to be caused by the causal efficacy of God. So there is no contradiction or absurdity in saying that the world is created from non-being or nothing. The world received its being from God as its efficient cause. In doing so, God called into existence a reality external to Himself. But He also maintains it in being because the subordination in this case in ‘secundum esse’. So the world had no existence apart from that conferred on it by the creative act.

We cannot deny the fact that the notion of a causality which produces the whole substantial reality of a thing, is far removed from our daily experience. But in this lies the genius of Thomas Aquinas; to make intelligible that which is seemingly unintelligible.

So the next point is, granted that creation was an act of God; was God compelled to create; is creation a free act? It is necessary to examine this point since some hold the opinion that God was necessitated to act.

Creation As A Free Act Of God

Aquinas was confronted with the problem whether

God was free to create the world or not? However, creation signifies that act by which God freely produced a reality other than Himself; a universe which had no existence of any form before this act.²⁶ In bringing into being a reality external to Himself, God was entirely free to act. He was not compelled in anyway whatsoever. The act of creation was done freely and out of pure love by God.

To substantiate this claim, to create, in reality, is the proper action of God alone. As Aquinas puts it, the more universal effects must be reduced to the more universal and prior causes. Since being itself is the most universal effect, it must be the proper effect of the first and most universal cause, which is God.²⁷ So if creation is the proper act of God alone, and we must realize that it is an agent's power to act or not to act, then God's act of creation is free.

Properly speaking, God is absolutely free. It is in Him to create or not to create. So His effects cannot but be freely willed since He is the cause of things by His intellect and will.²⁸ As He created, He did so freely. This fact is even more evident when we consider that God has no need of creatures because He is absolutely perfect and the act of creation adds nothing to His perfection; therefore it is a free act.

Aquinas observes that "... it appears that it is an act of much greater power to make a thing from nothing, than from its contrary."²⁹ The power in question here must be viewed in two ways. On one hand, the power of the matter must be weighed from the substance of the thing made. On the other hand, it must be considered from the mode of its being made. The substance created is an entirely new substance in its totality. It had no prior existence but only came into being through the power of the maker. If it is an entirely new substance, then, the power that made it must be an infinite power. For example, Aquinas rightly say that a greater heat heats not only more, but faster. For "to create a finite effect does not show

an infinite power; but to create it from nothing does show an infinite power, which appears from what has been said".³⁰

If power is required to bring something from potency to act then a greater and an infinite power is required to produce something from no presupposed potency. This is ultimately true because there is no proportion between non-being and being. Consequently such an infinite power must necessarily be free to exercise its power without constraint.

It follows also that since such a free infinite power is required in the act of creation, no creature of any magnitude can create. This is because creation which is the production of the very substance of a thing, is reduced to power.

Now the proper effect of God creating is what is presupposed to all other effects, and that is absolute being. Hence nothing else can act dispositively and instrumentally to this effect, since creation is not from anything presupposed which can be disposed by the action of the instrumental agent. Therefore it is impossible for any creature to create, either by its own power, or instrumentally - that is, ministerially.³¹

Moreover, Aquinas argues that it is absurd to suppose that a body can create because nobody acts except by touching or moving. In doing this, that body definitely requires some pre-existing thing which can be touched or moved. But as we can see this is entirely contrary to the very doctrine of creation. Even on the basis of finite beings participating in God's own being and perfection, such participation is ontologically unnecessary to God. Thus this is why God is free to create or not.

Therefore, God is so ultimately free to create because creation is His proper action. Hence, the act of being of any finite being is the proper effect of God arising from a free act.

God, being so entirely free to create, can be maintained that this is the best possible world; since He has made the world as He wants it to be. Any limitation found in that arrangement, is due to the proper nature of creatures. Aquinas then attempts to find why God is the cause of the world including man, and nothing else.

God as the Generative Source in Aquinas

In the proof of the existence of God, Aquinas rightly pointed out that the fact that God exists is not self-evident, but can be demonstrated. So in his “*Quinque Viae*”, Aquinas actually proved God’s existence.³² As a Pure Act of Being, God is the generative source of all other realities outside Himself- a procession which is ‘*ad extra*’. It is of His essence to be. So in God, essence and existence are identical.³³ God is a self-subsistent Being (*Ipsum Esse*), and since every being is good, the source of their act of being is supremely Good and Self-diffusive. Perhaps, such reasons are why God created the world and conserved it in being. But this is entirely metaphysical, and must need a metaphysical explanation.

God as (Actus Purus)³⁴

Now the act of creation requires something that is supremely in act since it is the production of the whole substance of a thing without any pre-existing subject. It is the bestowing of the entire act of being, nothing assumed except the source of that act of being. Added to the fact that in the order of efficient causality, every efficient cause acts in as much as it is in being. Necessarily, its mode of action depends on its mode of actuality. While the finite efficient causes act on presupposed subject to produce a new substance like in substantial change, the first efficient cause, which is quite outside that order, produces its own effect from nothing due to its own mode of actuality.

So God is able to bring things into being from nothing, because He is Pure Act of Being and the uncaused efficient cause. This is so, because, to be, is to act and as a being is so it acts. Moreover no agent can give that which it does not possess in itself.

... God is the first principle, not material, but in the order of efficient cause, which must be most perfect. For just as matter, as such, is in potency, an agent, as such, is in act. Hence, the first active principle must be most actual, and therefore most perfect; for a thing is said to be perfect according as it is in act because we call that perfect which lacks nothing of the mode of its perfection.³⁵

The first principle of all things is purely in act. God is Pure Act without any potentiality. It follows then, that He is in Himself supremely knowable. He is Pure intelligibility, since everything is knowable according to how it is in being. But what is supremely knowable in itself, is not knowable to some other intellect; on account of the excess of the intelligible object above the intellect. However, the rational creature because of the first principle of its being, could reach as far as the first cause of things.³⁶

This is ultimately attainable because it belongs to every being, in as much as it is act, to desire to communicate its own perfection. In communicating its own perfection the being cause effects which are somehow similar to itself. It is, then, of the nature of the Pure Act to communicate itself to its effects. In fact, creation is a kind of ontological generosity in which the Pure Act freely willed to communicate itself to the universe by giving it; an act of being from nothing. This is because God who is purely active without passivity does not work to acquire an end, but intends solely to communicate

His perfection.³⁷ Indeed, it belongs to the nature of an act to communicate itself as far as possible.

Thus it is not inconceivable that ontological communication should be found in a pure state apart from all change or process, and therefore independent of any pre-existing subject.³⁸

The self-ontological communication of God as Pure Act makes creation 'ex nihilo' intrinsically possible. Since the act of being is the innermost thing in a being, it must necessarily be from a primary and absolute cause that has it in itself. So the existence of finite being has their adequate cause in the Pure Act of Being. Consequently, apart from God the finite beings are unintelligible in their own being because they only participate in the being of the Pure Act through a self-communication. Just as God has communicated existence to finite beings, He has as well communicated to them some causal efficacy; so that they can exert their own acts. This really means that the creatures received their existence through the operations of God 'ad extra'. It is not of their essence to be, while God is that Being, whose act it is to be. Consequently, in God essence and existence are identified, while in creatures, they are really distinct. Gilson writes:

... since creatures do not exist by themselves, they receive their existence from God. Their own being is not something that belongs to them 'per se'; it is given to them ... and, precisely because their being is a received being, they are distinct from the only 'per se' Being there is, namely God, their creator. Now, if creatures do not have their own existence to themselves, there must need be in each of them some sort of composition of what they are with the very

fact that they are. In short the distinction between creatures and their creator entails, in creatures themselves, a distinction between their existence and the essence of their being.³⁹

Indubitably, God is the generative source of all things because He is Pure Act. In Him essence and existence are the same. Therefore He could give that which He has in Himself ‘per se’, since an agent acts according to how it is in being or act. Moreover, since the Pure Act of Being is God, He is equally self-diffusive, causing things to be and to act without depriving of their own being and operations. In this way, God is said to be present to the whole creation by His essence but not as part of the essence of the world.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Having *examined Creation and Intelligibility* in Aquinas; it has enabled us to consider the cause of being as being. That is, studying the emanation of all being from the universal cause of being, which has set the vantage for rethinking modern anthropology. For modern anthropology has become anthropocentric: which means, that man is been studied by moderns in the light of man. Put clearly, “man has become the supreme being... and therefore, there cannot be any scope wider than it. Apart from man’s claim of inventing God, and turning around to worship what he had created in modern anthropology’, there is a critique of the worldview of humanity - of all- encompassing belief system of human supremacy and dominance, that is setting society on the precipice of self induced destruction”.⁴¹

In rethinking the modern anthropocentrism, Igwe-Alufo, CM, proposes, what he calls *eco-spiritual anthropology or integrative anthropology*: some kind of integral ecology, as he states, “therefore, it follows that for anthropology to re-define its goal, purpose and objective in the world, there is need for

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the human person to re-examine its relationship with God; its relationship amongst peoples and nations, and its relationship with the environment. All these dimensions are important for a holistic living.”⁴²

Igwe-Alufo further clarifies that *ecospiritual anthropology* is an invitation for new anthropology that recognizes God as the Creator of man and the universe, as we see in the notion of Creation and Intelligibility in Aquinas. Like in Eco-spirituality, Virginia Jones holds that “eco-spirituality enables people to experience ‘the holy’ in the natural world and recognize their relationship as human beings to all creation. It brings together religion and environmental activism.”⁴³

However, in an effort to discuss the real notion of Creation and Intelligibility of God in Thomas Aquinas, a recognition of some philosophers in the past that grappled with the issue were briefly reviewed. Though, they missed their target. We see that the ancient Greek position led by Plato and Aristotle centred mainly on essentialism and on the eternity of the world. They concentrated their speculation on essence as if essences are both reality and its intelligibility. Of course, in the Greek essentialism, there is only a metaphysics of essence without reference to the cause of the existential act in actual being. So that, in the final analysis, the Greek position was incapacitated to raise the philosophical problem of creation, because it was a metaphysics of essence without ‘esse’, based on the pseudo-primacy of essence over existence. More so, the world was not created.

However, we maintain with Thomas Aquinas that the world is a freely created reality including man, which has God as the source of its existence and principle of its intelligibility. The world including man exists due to the free self-ontological communication of God as the Pure Act of Existence. This then throws away Ludwig Feuerbach’s naturalistic humanism that philosophically accentuate the modern anthropocentrism.

This is because Feuerbach sees religion as nothing more than man's objective consciousness of himself, and theology as an anthropology to understand itself. For he asserts:

“The divine being is nothing else than the human being... freed from the limits of the individual, that is, real physical man, made objective, that is, contemplated and revered as another a distinct being.”⁴⁴

The call for a new anthropology is overdue. Springing from the vantage point of “Creation and Intelligibility” in Thomas Aquinas is not revisionism. More so, coronavirus December 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic has beckoned us to open our imagination toward a new vision of humanity no longer obstructed by the worldview of human supremacy but that which is open to universal solidarity, which, of course, requires a new anthropology.

Endnotes

¹Evarestus Igwe-Alufo, CM, “Re-imagining Anthropology for an Integrative Priestly Formation in Covid-19 Era” in *SAGS SERIES* (Ondo-Nigeria: Don Bosco Publication, 2020), pp. 155-157.

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¹¹Rosalind Rawnsley, “Aristotle” in the *Great Thinkers A-Z*, p.27.

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¹⁴Aristotle, 1072a, 20.

¹⁵Aristotle, 1072b, 15A

¹⁶Cf. Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd Edition (Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952), pp. 74-75. Henceforth: *Being and Some Philosophers*, page/s.

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³³Cf. Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R., "Aristotle and Aquinas" in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, edited by Kretzmann and Stump (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.

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³⁴Thomas Aquinas, S.T. 1a, q.8-9, 25, art. 3.

³⁵Thomas Aquinas, S.T. 1a, q. 2.

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⁴³Olga Bonfiglio, “Celebrating Earth Day Through Eco-Spirituality” in the *Huffington Post* (April 21, 2012).

⁴⁴Ludwig Feuerbach, *the Essence of Christianity* (1855), in *Samtliche Werke* (New York: C. Blanchard, 1970), p. 14.