

SOME THOUGHTS ON 'HEAVEN'

In the Church's proclamation of the principles of the Catholic faith with the support of the terms of sacred scripture she makes a distinction, which appears clearly in the Latin but is hidden in the English translation, between 'heaven' when the term refers to that place where God resides, if one may so speak (convertible with the Godhead itself), and when the term refers to that *thing* God created in the beginning, as witness the very first of *Genesis*. This 'heaven' we have argued elsewhere is identical with Aristotle's 'heavenly body' or *aether*, St Thomas's 'first altering body' - "through which all other (bodies) are sustained" - the immense sea, material but invisible, in which subsist sun, moon, stars, 'wandering stars' (i.e., the planets), shooting stars and comets.¹ This 'heaven' is convertible with the universe.

The distinction appears in the Latin through the differing uses of singular and plural number. When 'heaven' refers to that entity God created at the beginning of time the singular *caelum* is used. When 'heaven' refers to that place where God resides, *caelum* is used in the plural, generally in the ablative (*caelis*).

Now to this rule there are exceptions but these exceptions can, I think, be explained.

Curiously, one never finds in classical Latin the neuter plural of *caelum* in the nominative or accusative cases (*caela* in both). In ecclesiastical Latin—the Church's Latin—the noun is treated as if it is masculine (*caelus, caeli*). The noun appears episodically as a masculine plural, *caeli*, as in *Psalms* 18, 96 and 148, in *Ezechiel* ch. 1, cited below, and in the *Te Deum*. This usage (of a masculine plural in the accusative, *caelos*) has some classical authority: the Roman poet and philosopher, Lucretius (99 – 55 BC), is known to have used it.²

Let the reader study the following instances. The *Pater Noster* begins—

Pater Noster, Qui es *in caelis*...

It uses the plural for that place (?) where God resides. In contrast, the first line of *Genesis* uses the singular for His creation 'in the beginning'—

In principio creavit Deus *caelum* et terram...

The *Nicene Creed* begins—

Credo in unum Deum, Patrem Omnipotentem, factorem *caeli* et terrae...

God created the (singular) heaven, it asserts, supporting what is said in *Genesis*. When adverting to our belief in one Lord, Jesus Christ descending from heaven, it reflects the citation in the *Pater Noster* in its use of the plural—

Qui propter nos homines et... nostram salutem descendit *de caelis*, et incarnatus est...

¹ https://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/how-the-universe-operates.pdf pp. 53 et seq.

² *De Rerum Natura*, Bk. II, lines 1090 et seq. Lucretius asks rhetorically, quis regere immensi summam... quis pariter caelos omnis convertere...? "Who is strong enough to rule the sum of the immeasurable... to turn about all the heavens at one time...?"

But where the Creed refers to Christ's Ascension into heaven, it reverts to the singular —
et ascendit *in caelum*—

which is understandable. The apostles and disciples observed Our Lord ascend above the earth into the heaven that He had created. Certainly He passed from there into the heaven which is God's abode: the Church insists, indeed, that He had never left it!

Now, while this dichotomy seems to be a rule there are exceptions when the *created* heaven is adverted to by use of the plural. In *Psalm* 18: 2, for instance, we read—

caeli enarrant gloriam Dei, et opera manuum eius annunciat firmamentum—

Here the reference is to the created heaven expressed in the (masculine) plural. The context seems to justify it because 'the heaven' is extended to include the bodies with which the Creator peopled it – sun, moon, stars, 'wandering stars' (the planets), shooting stars and comets. These, the psalmist asserts, "proclaim the glory of God, and the firmament the works of His hands". 'The firmament' substitutes, I suggest, for the created heaven which is the setting for these bodies and, in support of my thesis, appears in the singular.

Psalm 96: 6 runs—

annuntiaverunt *caeli* iustitiam eius et viderunt omnes populi gloriam eius—

"The heavens (masculine plural) proclaim His justice and all peoples have seen His glory". Again, this seems to refer not so much to the invisible heavenly body but to its visible occupants.

Psalm 148: 3 - 4—

Laudate eum, sol et luna: laudate eum omnes stellae et lumen. Laudate eum *caeli caelorum*... et aquae omnes, quae super *caelos* sunt, laudent nomen Domini...

The expression *caeli caelorum* – literally 'the heavens of heavens' – again seems to signify the heavenly body by reference to its innumerable occupants. Later, in v. 13, the author reverts to the singular, which is consistent with the thesis here proposed—

Confessio eius super *caelum* et terram...

"His praise is above heaven and earth." And the first line of the same psalm—

Laudate Dominum de caelis—

"Praise the Lord from the heavens..." may be interpreted as referring to the heaven's visible elements.

In *Ezechiel* ch. 1: 1, the prophet's narrative runs—

et factum est... cum essem in captivorum iuxta fluvium Chobar aperti sunt *caeli* et vidi visiones Dei—

"[I]t happened... while I was among the captives beside the river Chobar, the heavens (masculine plural) were thrown open..." The heavenly body is invisible; it was its visible elements which were thrown open for the prophet to behold the visions of God.

The *Te Deum*, the Church's paean in praise of God, runs—

Te aeternum Patrem omnis terra veneratur. Tibi omnes Angeli, tibi *caeli* et universae potestates...

That is, “to Thee all the angels, to Thee the heavens and the powers of the universe...” This suggests advertence to the heavenly body’s visible elements, justifying the use of the plural. There follows:

Tibi Cherubim et Seraphim incessabili voce proclamant: Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt *caeli* et terra majestatis gloriae tuae—
“The heavens and the earth are full of Thy glory”. Again one might reasonably interpret the text as referring to the multitude of the occupants of the heavenly body.

Another thought: in the *Pater Noster*, the second reference to heaven involves the Latin singular—

Fiat voluntas tua sicut *in caelo* et in terra.
“(May) Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Now, if the thesis I propose is correct, the reference here is not, as might be thought, to the heaven where God dwells: it is to the heaven He has created, the universe with its infinite number of bodies circling eternally in splendour under the influence of that invisible, immutable, undetectable (though material) body, itself immobile, which serves as the fit instrument of the first mover of all creation, Almighty God.

Here is an even more interesting thought. The will is the appetite of intellect: in other words, there can be no departure from God’s Will by any creature except by one possessed, as is man, of intellect. Is this not evidence from Divine revelation that in all the universe there is only one being possessing the ability to depart from the Will of God? In other words, there is no intellectual material being in all the universe save man.

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