



# The Conception of Formal Sign According to Sebastião Do Couto (1606)

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## Abstract

In this paper we intend to explain how Sebastião do Couto is aware of the importance of the formal sign as a privileged vehicle of analogy, thus putting himself against those who deny it, namely nominalism, by underlining that the epistemological process is based on formal signs, which were left by Creator in creation, so that man can know and love Him, founding a sustaining dialogue of being. Basing the process of human knowledge on formal signs, Sebastião do Couto provides the essential philosophical raw material for the theological support of the defense of the possibility of dialogue between Creator and creature, reaffirming man as *imago Dei*.

**Keywords:** Formal sign; Analogia entis; Coimbra Jesuit Course; Species; Epistemological process; Creator; Creation

## Preamble Note

We present in this work the classification proposed by Sebastião do Couto concerning the status and nature of the so-called formal signs.<sup>1</sup> He is not the only author studying this matter in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in Portugal. The Dominican João Poinset<sup>2</sup> also addresses the matter. The interest in probing

these significant contents is in a way innovative, since until then the main approach to the study of signs was the Saint Augustine's proposal, where the sign is defined as that which manifests to the senses something different from itself, giving rise to its knowledge, which is shown to the senses, representing, in addition to itself, something to the spirit. This definition, although correct, will prove to be insufficient, giving rise to broader perspectives of classification, according to some interpretive challenges prevailing in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Our analysis is exclusively oriented towards the approach of Sebastião do Couto, taking into account the objectives and role played by the Society of Jesus.

1 *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis e Societate Iesu, In universam Dialecticam Aristotelis Stagiritae, (Conimbricae, D. G. Loureiro, 1606). Vide Mário Santiago de Carvalho, Curso Aristotélico Jesuíta Conimbricense, (Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda, 20 18). We quote Couto from Os Sinais, De Signis. Edição bilingue latimportuguês, fixação do texto latino, introdução, tradução e notas de Amândio Coxito, (Porto: Ed. Afrontamento, Imago Mundi: Filosofia em Texto e Tradução: 5, 2013), 268p.*

2 João Poinset, *Cursus philosophicus thomisticus, (Coloniae, sumptibus Constantini Münich, 1653). Vide John Deely: «Neglected Figures in the History of Semiotic Inquiry: Jonh Poinset» in A. Eschbach et J. Trabant, (ed, History of Semiotics, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, J. Benjamim, 1983), pp. 115-126; --- «John Poinset», in Th. Sebeok, (ed, Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics, Berlin-New-York, Mouton de Gruyter, v. II, 1994), pp.736-739; ---,*

Descartes & Poinset :the crossroad of signs and ideas, (Scranton University of Cranton Press, 2008) ;--- «Postfazione» dans J. Poinset, *Trattato sui segni,*( Milano, Bompiani, 2010), pp. 1350-1432. Também, Hélène Leblanc: «Intention et signe dans le Tractatus de signis de Jean Poinset», *Methodos Savoirs et textes* 14 | 2014, <https://doi.org/10.4000/methodos.3705>, (in 09/02/2022); ---Théories Sémiotiques à l'Âge Classique. *Translatio Signorum,*( Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin: Paris, 2021)

## The Emphasis on the Classification of the Formal Sign by Sebastião Do Couto

Sign is the efficient cause of the knowledge of something other than itself, once it is apprehended by the senses. This definition applies to the so-called instrumental signs, traditionally considered as proper signs, since they provide the knowledge of something, after having been the object of cognitive powers, requiring a code where significant and meaning collaborate in the production of this knowledge, or that which is shown to the senses, representing, in addition to itself, something to the spirit.<sup>3</sup> According to Sebastião do Couto this is a restricted meaning of sign, contrasting to the large meaning produced by the use of philosophers, where sign is everything that represents something to the cognitive power.<sup>4</sup>

The same can be said about the so-called natural and conventional signs, embedded in specific cultural codes that enable communication between the interpreter and the world around, whether this is a material or a spiritual world, and between the different recipients with special relevance to linguistic signs. Thus, the future semiotic science<sup>5</sup> will be extremely concerned with the process in which several interpreters intervene, interacting either in one system of linguistic meaning or in others. It is not by chance that in the field of arts, namely the performing arts, the study of the sign has multiplied, e.g., the theatrical semiosis where the confluence of linguistic and non-linguistic signs, relying on diversified semiotic codes (luminous, gestural, sonorous, symbolic in general) challenges the interpreter. Therefore, what will be the reason for the importance attributed by Sebastião do Couto to the so-called formal signs, emphasizing their significant relevance and seeking to make unquestionable the statement that they are also signs themselves and not a similar reality? In the formal sign, in contrast to those mentioned above, the process of semiosis focuses on the epistemological process itself as such on the relationship between cognitive power and the object of knowledge, involving the entire process of knowing, from sensory apprehension until thought objects. Effectively, a sign is everything that manifests something to the cognitive power,

whether this something presupposes a prior knowledge of the object signified, as happens with instrumental signs, or whether it presents itself as a novelty. It is obvious that if we look at semiosis from the point of view of the instrumental sign, or even natural/conventional, this does not exempt us from noting that a double semiosis always occurs, since the epistemological process inherent to the formal sign coexists with the interpretive process, present in the decoding of the instrumental sign.<sup>6</sup>

Even when the odor pre-announces the ox, or the dark clouds, the rain, the cognitive process that leads the interpreter to see the clouds and to smell the odor, presupposes an abundant exchange of operations involving multiple formal signs, namely sensitive species, intelligible species and memory, among other mental contents that lead to the recognition of these external signs as already known.

They are properly considered signs in a broad sense of sign,<sup>7</sup> as they include what is perceived, dispensing with the intervention of other semiotic codes; also, because knowledge begins with sensory apprehension and the sign is that by which we are impelled to know a thing. In this sense, sign is everything that is apprehended producing knowledge, as is the case, for example, of sensitive species. In this sense, we will have to consider both sensitive and intelligible contents. A sign is that which is in place of a thing giving rise to its knowledge, and a great number of spiritual things are of this kind, as happens, according to St. Thomas Aquinas with angelic knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Formal signs are images and

6 Sebastião do Couto proceeds to the division of the different types of signs in q.2, a.1, of this same work, whose analysis we will dispense with in this step. It names, in addition to formal and instrumental, namely: reminiscent, inappropriate, natural and conventional. It also talks about practical and speculative signs and whether the causes should be properly called signs or not.

7 Couto, Sebastião do, op.cit.c.1, q.1,a.1. Aduertitur primum bifariam accipi signum. Primum est bifariam « signum» accipi, uidelicet aut presse et Secundum primaeuam institutionem, aut fuso uocabuli significatu et Secundum philosophorum consuetudinem. Priori modo signum ea tantum comprehendit quae sub sensus cadunt, cum enim omnis nostra cognitio exordium capiat a sensu et signum sit quo in alicuius rei cognitionem pertrahimur, effectum est inde ut homines ea primo signa appellarint quae sensus mouent. Posteriori modo complectitur notio signi tam sensibiliza quam spiritualia.

8 Thomae de Aquino S, Opera Omnia Corpus Thomiscum, (recognovit et instruxit Enrique Alarcón automato electronic, Pompaelone ad Universitatis Studiorum Navarraensis aedes a MM A.D. Opera Maiora, 2013, <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/wintropt.html>, (in 24/4/ 2022), «Summa Theologiae» (whether angels, by their nature, can know God), s.t.I, q.56, a.3. Respondeo dicendum quod angeli aliquam cognitionem de Deo habere possunt per sua naturalia. Ad cuius evidentiam, considerandum est quod aliquid tripliciter cognoscitur. Uno modo, per praesentiam suae essentiae in cognoscente, sicut si lux videatur in oculo: et sic dictum est quod angelus intelligit seipsum. Alio modo, per praesentiam, suae similitudinis in potentia cognoscitiva: sicut lapis videtur ab oculo per hoc quod similitudo eius resultat in oculo. Tertio modo, per hoc quod similitudo rei cognitae non

3 Augustinus Hipponensis, De doctrina christiana, (in CCSL, 32, ed.I. Martin, Brepols, Turnhout, 1962), l.2, c.1.; De dialectica, trad. B.D.Jackson, ed. J. Pin borg, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht and Boston, 1975, c. 5.

4 Couto, Sebastião De signis, c.1, q.1, a.1. Aduertitur primum est bifariam «signum» accipi, uidelicet aut presse et Secundum philosophorum consuetudinem. Priori modo signum ea tantum comprehendit quae sub sensus cadunt, cum enim omnis nostra cognitio exordium capiat a sensu et signum sit quo in alicuius rei cognitionem pertrahimur, effectum est inde ut homines ea primo signa appellarint quae sensus mouent. Posteriori modo complectitur notio signi tam sensibiliza quam spiritualia.

5 John Locke uses the term semiotics for the first time in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1689).

resemblances of things, which, being formed in the depths of potency, lead to the knowledge of the object. Instrumental signs originate the knowledge of something different from itself, previously known to the recipient.<sup>9</sup>

Sensible and intelligible species, concepts and phantasms are formal signs, since they establish potency in the first act. Species are in place of the object they represent, giving rise to their knowledge. Species united to potency are the efficient cause of knowledge, since the thing cannot unite itself to potency, which is usually external or absent. Much less will it be able to unite itself with internal and spiritual potency. It represents it, therefore, through an image in which the object is reflected and where it seems to be seen by potency as in a mirror. The image does not presuppose the same nature as the thing, since the species has a minimal, immaterial being, it is a form without matter. The cognitive process bases its structure on the relationship of similarity. The intelligible species are formal signs because they are not only the efficient cause of knowledge of the object, but also because they are in its place, representing it, they are the formal cause of its knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

It concludes, based on Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas

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accipitur immediate ab ipsa re cognita, sed a re alia in qua resultat: sicut cum videmus hominem in speculo. Primae igitur cognitioni assimilatur divina cognitio, qua per essentiam suam videtur. Et haec cognitio Dei non potest adesse creaturae, alicui per sua naturalia, ut supra dictum est. Tertiae autem cognitioni assimilatur cognitio qua nos cognoscimus Deum in via per similitudinem eius in creaturis resultantem: secundum illud Rom. 1,20: Invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta, conspiciuntur. Unde et dicimur Deum videre in speculo. Cognitio autem qua angelus per sua naturalia cognoscit Deum, media est inter has duas; et similatur illi cognitioni qua videtur res per speciem ab ea acceptam. Quia enim imago Dei est in ipsa natura angeli impressa per suam essentiam, angelus Deum cognoscit, in quantum est similitudo Dei. Non tamen ipsam essentiam Dei videt: quia nulla similitudo creata est sufficiens ad repraesentandam divinam essentiam. Unde magis ista cognitio tenet se cum speculari: quia et ipsa natura angelica est quoddam speculum divinam similitudinem repraesentans.

9 Couto, Sebastião, op.cit, c.1. q.2, a.1. Definitur signum «formale» et «instrumentale». Probatur bonam esse diuisionem in signa formalia et instrumentalia. Hanc quoque diuisionem idoneam esse ita probabis cum Aegidio in 1, distinctio 3, quaestio 2 principalis, articulus 3. Omne id quo mediante aliud cognoscimus aut necesse est a nobis prius cognosci aut non. Si debet cognosci, est instrumentale signum; sin minus, formale.

10 Couto, Sebastião, op.cit. q.2, a.3, sec.1. Species intelligibiles sunt signa formalia. Ex doctrina huius discursus orta Est occasio dubitandi na species et conceptus sint signa formalia, quia illae uidentur se habere ex parte causae efficientis, quemadmodum intellectus, et ita non habere rationem signi. Hi ex parte obiecti proindeque deflectere ad signa instrumentalia. Nihilominus in communi sententia persistendum. Atque ad eam partem primi argumenti quae agit de specibus, respondendum est, ut iam caepimus, species eatenusrsse signa, quatenus constituuntpotentiam in actu primo sufficientem ad cognoscendum, idque non modo ut causae efficientes sed etiam ut formales praebendo speciem cognition loco obiecti quod representante et sat esse ut dicantur» signa formalia».

Aquinas, Ferrara and Sacred Scripture,<sup>11</sup> that intelligible species are formal signs, although they may not be translated into images properly speaking according to a part of the doctrine. The same can be said about concepts, since they have the nature of the sign. They are images, likenesses or figures. Species and concepts have the same nature.

In the above-mentioned classification (formal sign), Sebastião do Couto's effort to prove that sensible, intelligible species and concepts are true signs, not only in an inappropriate sense, as they were sometimes named by tradition. Effectively proves that they are images and likenesses of the things they represent and endowed with significant power. Species and concepts have the same nature and are images, resemblances, figures, as mentioned. And through these signs we can access the world and God. In fact, this doctrine penetrates the entire Coimbra Jesuit Course, which defends the possibility of knowledge through analogy. See the example taken from the Proemium of the Commentary on Aristotle's Treatise on the Soul: "In fact, the science of the soul communicates admirably with First Philosophy, since, by a certain analogy and similarity, we reach by our intellect the intelligible and free substances of matter, and the human mind, surpassing itself, is brought back to the divine nature, whence it came; whatever perfection there is in it comes from God, source of all perfections, even better known once all imperfection is removed. Finally, this meditation on the soul benefits all parts of Philosophy, because the soul participates in reason and prudence (as Trismegistus affirms in the Asclepius), as a horizon of eternity and time, of the intelligible, of the nexus of corporeal nature and the limits. Or, as others have called it, the sum of the whole world: for the intermediate nature represents the extremes, the superior as an image, the inferior as an exemplar; it happens that the doctrine of the soul is like a compendium of the science of human and divine things, preparing us for a whole other knowledge of the truth."<sup>12</sup> The same doctrine also runs

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11 Couto, Sebastião, op.cit, q.2, a.3, sec. 1, Veniamus eniamus ad hoc ipsum caput in quo uersamur, ubi passiones, id est conceptus aperte nuncupat «rerum similitudines». Est autem eadem ratio ut fatentur auersarii specierum atque conceptuum. Diuus Augustinus 8 De Trinitate, caput 8; Finxi, inquit, «in animo meo imaginem Alexandriae aqtque intuens in ipsam, id est, imaginem et quasi picturam eius», etc. Idem habet libro 14, caput 17. Diuus Thomas 1 pars, quaestio 12, articulus 9, species uocat modo «similitudines», modo «imagines». Consonat capit 53, 1 Contra Gentes cum Ferrariensis ibi. Et ita loquuntur omnes scholastici. Sed quid plura? Prima Ioannis, capite 3, dicitur: «Similes ei erimus (id est Deo) quia uidebimus eum sicut 3est.» Quod de expressa Dei imagine intelligunt communiter Patres.

12 Ad primam uero Philosophiam mirifice confert, quatenus ab intellectu nostro ad substantias intelligibiles, et a materia absolutas per analogiam quamdam similitudinemque prouehimur, et humana mens se supra se conuertens, a se ipsa ad diuinam naturam, a qua profecta est, reuocatur, et quicquid ipsa perfectionis habet, in Deo omnium perfectionum fonte inuenit, meliori tamen nota, omnique imperfectione sublata. Denique communi ratione, ad omnem Philosophiae partem opportuna est haec de animo meditatio; quia cum animus rationis consilii que particeps (ut Trismegistus

through the consideration throughout the course that species are formal signs. See also in the same comment, by way of example: “The arguments of the opponents do not cause difficulties. To the first, it must be answered that although species exist by nature, so that the potencies engraved in them may represent the notions of things, the species themselves must not also be formed in the potencies or be known by themselves, since they are not instrumental signs, but formal. It is not necessary that the thing that arrives at knowledge by its formal sign is apprehended according to itself, although this must be admitted in those that, as instrumental signs, transmit to us the knowledge of something else; so, we have explained it elsewhere. The corroboration of the argument also lacks force. The statue, in effect, is an instrumental and not a formal sign of Caesar. Capreolos, in the cited point, answers that it is not necessary for us to know that by which, but in which we perceive something; and we know not in the species, but by the species, the things that are presented to us. This is the solution of St. Thomas, Quodlibet 10, article 1, question 3.”<sup>13</sup>

### Analógia Entis and Natural Theology

The cognitive process is founded, according to Sebastião do Couto, on signs. These are the true agent dynamism, efficient cause, which allows the link between man and his surroundings. These signs are the formal signs, since the cognitive power cannot directly unite itself with the object of the senses. The formal signs are intermediaries, they manifest the thing through the image, the resemblance, through analogy. It is important here to recall St. Thomas Aquinas' passage on resemblance and analogy.<sup>14</sup>

in Asclepio ait) sit ueluti *Ὀπίζων* aeternitatis et temporis, atque intelligibilis corporeaeque naturae nexus, ac confinium: uel, uti alii dixerunt, totius mundi summa: siquidem natura media extremas repraesentat, superiorem ut imago; inferiorem ut exemplar: fit ut animi doctrina ueluti quoddam rerum diuinarum et humanarum scientiae compendium existat, nosque ad omnem aliam ueritatis notionem praeparet. (D. A. Proemium, p3.)

13 Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu, op. cit., 2, q.1, a.2, p.143, Neque aduersariorum argumenta negotium faciunt. Ad primum enim respondendum est, licet species dentur a natura, ut potentiae iis consignatae rerum notiones effingant, non debere proinde species ipsas potentiis obici, aut per se cognosci, cum non sint signa instrumentalia sed formalia. Nec oportet id, per quod res, ut per suum formale signum, innotescit, secundum se apprehendi; quauis id concedendum sit in iis, quae nos tanquam signa instrumentalia in alterius rei notitiam ducunt, ut alibi diximus. Argumenti etiam corroboratio uim non habet; Statua enim Caesaris instrumentale signum est, non formale. Capreolus loco citato respondet non oportere. cognosci a nobis id, quo; sed in quo aliquid percipimus; nos uero non in specie, sed specie res obiectas cognoscere. (DA,2, q.1, a.2, p143)

14 Thomae de Aquino S, op. cit. I, q.4, a.3. Sed contra est quod dicitur Gen. I, faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram; et I Ioann. III, cum apparuerit, similes ei erimus, I, q. 4 a. 3 co. Respondeo dicendum quod, cum similitudo attendatur secundum convenientiam vel communicationem in forma, multiplex est similitudo, secundum multos modos communicandi in forma. Quaedam enim dicuntur similia, quae communicant in eadem forma secundum eandem rationem, et secundum

Regarding the different types of similarity, and with regard to equivocity, he says that all things that proceed from God resemble Him as beings as the first and absolute principle of all being. In any case, the fact that the creature is similar to God does not mean that God is similar to the creature, since we say that the image is similar to man and not the other way around. There still remains a gap, since the image manifests, despite the distance.<sup>15,16</sup>

All creation is a sign and manifests God allowing man to have the perception of the Creator. The mechanism of analogy opens the door to the possibility of natural theology. As man is the image, albeit imperfect, of God,<sup>17</sup> he has a natural ability to know Him within the limits of his imperfection. Thomas Aquinas maintains that as it is possible to know that God is One, but not that God is Triune,<sup>18</sup> which is only possible to be achieved by Revelation. The entis analogy contradicts the Scotist view of univocity, averse to the possibility of knowing God, except for some aspects of His will.<sup>19</sup>

eundem modum, et haec non solum dicuntur similia, sed aequalia in sua similitudine; sicut duo aequaliter alba, dicuntur similia in albedine. Et haec est perfectissima similitudo. Alio modo dicuntur similia, quae communicant in forma secundum eandem rationem, et non secundum eundem modum, sed secundum magis et minus; ut minus album dicitur simile magis albo. Et haec est similitudo imperfecta. Tertio modo dicuntur aliqua similia, quae communicant in eadem forma, sed non secundum eandem rationem; ut patet in agentibus non univocis. Cum enim omne agens agat sibi simile in quantum est agens, agit autem unumquodque secundum suam formam, necesse est quod in effectu sit similitudo formae agentis. Si ergo agens sit contentum in eadem specie cum suo effectu, erit similitudo inter faciens et factum in forma, secundum eandem rationem speciei; sicut homo generat hominem. Si autem agens non sit contentum in eadem specie, erit similitudo, sed non secundum eandem rationem speciei, sicut ea quae generantur ex virtute solis, accedunt quidem ad aliquam similitudinem solis, non tamen ut recipiant formam solis secundum similitudinem speciei, sed secundum similitudinem generis. Si igitur sit aliquod agens, quod non in genere contineatur, effectus eius adhuc magis accedent remote ad similitudinem formae agentis, non tamen ita quod participant similitudinem formae agentis secundum eandem rationem speciei aut generis, sed secundum aliqualem analogiam, sicut ipsum esse est commune omnibus. Et hoc modo illa quae sunt a Deo, assimilantur ei in quantum sunt entia, ut primo et universalis principio totius esse.

15 Thomae de Aquino S, op.cit. I, q. 4 a. 3 ad 4, Ad quartum dicendum quod, licet aliquo modo concedatur quod creatura sit similis Deo, nullo tamen modo concedendum est quod Deus sit similis creaturae, quia, ut dicit Dionysius cap. IX de Div. Nom., in his quae unius ordinis sunt, recipitur mutua similitudo, non autem in causa et causato, dicimus enim quod imago sit similis homini, et non e converso. Et similiter dici potest aliquo modo quod creatura sit similis Deo, non tamen quod Deus sit similis creaturae.

16 Henrici Denzinger, 806, (Quod emendavit, auxit, in linguam germanicum transtulit et adiuvante Helmuto Hoping edidit Petrus Hünermann Editio XL MMV Herder Freiburg - Basel - Wien): Estote perfecti” perfectione gratiae, “sicut Pater vester caelestis perfectus est” perfectione naturae, utraque videlicet suo modo: quia inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda.

17 Thomae de Aquino S, op.cit., I, q.93, a.1.

18 Thomae de Aquino S, op. cit., q.32, a.1.

19 Vide Ioannes Duns Scotus, Ordinatio, I, dist. 3, q.2, Opera omnia. Vol. 3.( Studio et cura Commissionis Scotisticae. Typis Plyglottis Vaticanis, Civitas Vaticana, 1954), Secundo dico quod non tantum in conceptu analogo



St. Thomas Aquinas starts from Aristotle's concept of analogy, although adapted to the reality of Creation. As Francisco León Florido rightly states: «Medieval Aristotelianism clearly distinguishes between an analogy of proportionality and an analogy of proportion, called by the commentators of Thomas "attribution", being precisely the latter denomination that will end up being adopted as the concept of the school. The difference between the two classes of analogy can be summed up, considerably simplifying, as follows: the proportionality analogy establishes a relationship between the attributes and substances to which they are inherent in a metaphorical plane of equality, such as "lucid" - the classic Aristotelian-Scholastic example is "sane" - it can be said of a star and a man, keeping in both cases the same proportion or metaphorical reference. In the attribution analogy, on the contrary, the attribute applies to substances according to different degrees of reality or intensity that do not maintain the same proportion in all cases. In this way, "lucid" will apply more intensely, or more properly, to a stele than to a man. When Thomas elaborates his doctrine of analogy, he takes up the Aristotelian sense, even if he refers to the requirements of a system in which the Creator stands above nature. To effect this transference, he adds to Aristotelian natural hylemorphism the doctrine of degrees inherited from Neoplatonism. It is precisely this fusion that foregrounds the attribution analogy, which completely replaces univocity, reduced to a supreme divine knowledge absolutely outside the field of human intelligence. The analogy will then be the univocity proper to man, a gift, no longer of nature, but of the Creator, who wants his creature to recognize him in what surrounds him" (our translation).<sup>20</sup> Sebastião do Couto is aware of the importance of the formal sign as a privileged vehicle of analogy, thus putting himself against those who deny it, namely nominalism, by underlining that the epistemological process is based on formal signs, which were left by the Creator in creation. so that it, namely its summit, man, can know and love Him, founding a sustaining dialogue of being. Participation in the creature resides in this process and not in any form of pantheism.

## Conclusion

Returning to the initial question regarding the reason for the role attributed by Sebastião do Couto to formal signs, granting them a hitherto unused status, we lean towards an

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conceptui creaturae concipitur Deus, scilicet qui omnino sit alius ab illo qui de creaytura dicitur, sed in conceptu aliquo univoco sibi et creaturae et ne fiat contentio der nomine univocationis, univocum conceptum dico quia ita est unus quod eius unitas sufficit ad contradictionem afirmando et negando ipsum de eodem; etiam pro medio syllogistico, ut extrema unita in medio sic uno sine fallacia aequivocationis concludantur inter se uniri.

<sup>20</sup> Francisco León Florido, *Aristóteles metafísico*, (1ª edición, Guillermo Escolar Editor, SL, Madrid, 2022).

enlightened answer for the final cause of Jesuit action, in accordance with the Ignatian spirituality, above all committed in the salvation of souls. Here, the study of philosophy is still a stepping stone for theology and the predominant aristotelian-thomist model, endowed with a renewed and current importance in view of the split in Christianity, the threats to the Pope and the Catholic Faith and the Tridentine determinations is reborn with new goals. Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas in the 16th century are read and applied in an updated way, adapted to the circumstances of the time. Given the role of the Society of Jesus in the Counter-Reformation, its genesis, founded on the fight against the reforming heresy, we cannot fail to observe the importance of this thesis by Sebastião do Couto, which reinforces the recurrent message in Christian doctrine, namely present in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, in Saint Augustine, in St. Thomas Aquinas, among others that integrate the tradition of the Catholic Faith, and which affirms that God reveals himself to creatures through signs, marks of His image imprinted in creation. Beginning with the beauty and harmony of the universe, up to the signs left in the human soul itself, God makes Himself known to man, inviting him to love Him. We cannot despise the effects that the Reformation had on the philosophical and theological environment of the sixteenth century. The principle of sola scriptura denied the possibility of knowing God through signs by rejecting the analogia entis. Also, the nominalist theses and the defense of univocity against analogy opened a philosophical path in order to allow reaching conclusions dangerously close to the reforming theses, that threatened the lapidary principles of the Catholic faith. Undoubtedly, by basing the process of human knowledge on formal signs, Sebastião do Couto provides the essential philosophical raw material for the theological support of the defense of the possibility of dialogue between Creator and creature, reaffirming man as imago Dei, favoring a renewed look about the world. This recognition extends to the study of natural philosophy, abundant in the Coimbra Jesuit Course, and so important in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in view of the scientific revolution that was already taking shape, although in its vestibule, and which would come to assert itself strongly in the following centuries. It was necessary to organize the way of looking at nature, without prejudice to the scientific approach that implies the study of its laws. In this view, proposed by Sebastião do Couto, creation is not overshadowed by nature and its mathematics, in the pagan way. Here, natural philosophy is practiced without losing sight that cosmos and man beyond nature are creatures; also, that discovering nature is discovering creation, building the way to reach God, source of all being, in order to learn to love Him in the wonders created.

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