

# Walter Burley on divine Ideas

by Chiara Paladini\*

*Abstract:* This paper focuses on the theory of divine ideas of Walter Burley (1275-1347). The medieval common theory of divine ideas, developed by Augustine, was intended to provide an answer to the question of the order and intelligibility of the world. The world is rationally organized since God created it according to the models existing eternally in his mind. Augustine's theory, however, left open problems such as reconciling the principle of God's unity with the plurality of ideas, the way in which ideas can or cannot be said to be eternal, their ontological status. Medieval authors discussed such questions until at least the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. By resorting to the semantic tool of connotation, Burley explains both in what way 'idea' can signify the divine essence as much as the creatures (thereby reconciling the principle of God's unity with the multiplicity of ideas), and in what sense we can say that God has thought them from eternity, without slipping into a necessitarian view that undermines the principle of divine freedom. Moreover, by envisaging the *objective* mode of being as the only mode of being of ideas, he explains in what way they truly differ from one another on the basis of their different conceptual contents.

*Keywords:* Walter Burley, Exemplar causality, Divine ideas, Connotation, divine Knowledge, Objective being

## Introduction

In the Middle Ages, in accordance with the Augustinian legacy, the world was perceived as ordered and intelligible, because God had created it according to a few formal principles, the divine ideas, which were at the same time ontological and epistemological *rationes*, and determined the internal structure of all beings. Augustine's theory, illustrated in *De diversis quaestionibus* 83 Q. 46, can be summarized as follows: the immutable models,

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