

Creation and the Image of God:

Their Understanding in Christian Tradition and the Biblical Grounds

Michael Welker

I am grateful to you for your cordial invitation to speak in this circle on this weighty topic. I am especially grateful to you for the honor of presenting the Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Lecture. I am aware that the possibility of such an encounter fifty years after the Holocaust is due solely to God's goodness and mercy as well as human magnanimity and generosity.

In your letter of invitation you had asked me to speak on the topic "The Understanding of Creation in Christian Tradition." Yet I did not wish in any way to offer you merely an encyclopedic survey of various conceptions of creation in the past and present. I will indeed begin--after some methodological reflections--with a look back at well-worn conceptions of creation and the image of God in Christian theology of the past and present. But I would like to focus on showing the areas where we are engaged in interdisciplinary collaborative research--particularly in Germany and North America--in order to gain a clearer understanding of creation and the image of God. I will thus be talking about revisions in the understanding of creation and in conceptions of the image of God on the basis of biblical traditions. I will show that these revisions are also important for gaining a clear theological and religious relation to questions of pluralism and of morality. I gather from the Statement of the Commission on Theology of the International Council of Christians and Jews (Heppenheim/Mainz 1993) and from the topic of this conference that a clear relation to pluralism and to questions of moral action is important to you. I would therefore like to make clear the vitality and the illuminating power of the biblical traditions with regard to questions that are very contemporary. I will do this in critical engagement with conceptions of creation and of the image of God that have been generated by systematic theologies and dogmatics.

## 1. Methodological Prolegomena: Pluralistic Theories and Biblical Theology

Before I turn to the specific contents of creation and the image of God, I would like to make a few remarks concerning my method of proceeding. I was originally what one calls a "philosophical theologian." I wrote doctoral dissertations in theology on autonomy and in

philosophy on Hegel. I then turned to the English mathematician, physicist and philosophy Alfred North Whitehead, a scholar who first taught mathematics and physics in Cambridge and London, and then beginning in the 20's taught philosophy at Harvard. Through my engagement with Whitehead and with thinkers whom he influenced--most of whom also taught at Harvard--I became connected to theories that awoke me from my "dogmatic slumber." As I mentioned, Whitehead was originally a mathematician and natural scientist. He posed himself the question of how we illuminate our world, our reality, with theories and forms of thought that are not capable of entering into conversation with each other. We have insights in the natural sciences, we have poetic insights, we have religious insights, we have common sense insights into our world and our reality. All these insights make claims to truth, to be true illuminations of reality. Yet they have great difficulty in making themselves comprehensible to each other. Whitehead's conclusion was that we will only find a way out of this situation if we develop a theory that not only detects relative commonalities between these various approaches, but also takes their differences seriously.

This insight gave rise to a new school of thought. In our century a universal theory must prove its worth by reconstructing and making comprehensible the differences of our established forms of knowledge, our "differentiated forms of knowledge." And it must reconstruct and make them comprehensible in such a way as to show their commonalities in the midst of their unobscured differences. We call such theories "relativistic theories." One could also call them "pluralistic theories." Some people also speak here of "postmodern forms of thought." It is with these pluralistic forms of thought that I turned anew to the biblical traditions. In doing so I have run counter to the classical Christian attempts that sought to find in the biblical traditions--or to introduce into them--a single theme or a single form of thought. In this manner I have discovered biblical theology anew, and have come to understand why Jewish colleagues have sharply criticized conventional Christian biblical theology.

Several years ago Jon Levenson, Jewish colleague and Professor of Hebrew Bible Studies at Harvard, published a programmatic essay with the title "Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology." In this essay he not only criticized the latent or explicit Antisemitism found in many works of significant Protestant exegetes of the past. He also rejected every form of biblical theology that hypothesizes or attempts to demonstrate that one particular form of thought is the form and systematic structure of the biblical traditions. He criticizes all biblical theologies that attempt to highlight a single theme--for example, reconciliation, covenant, reign of God, God's holiness, image of God, etc.--as the content of the biblical

traditions. Levenson observes: "The effort to construct a systematic, harmonious theological statement out of the unsystematic and polydox materials in the Hebrew Bible fits Christianity better than Judaism because systematic theology in general is more prominent and more at home in the church than in the bet midrash (study house) and the synagogue." Levenson comes to the conclusion that "the search for the one great idea that pervades and unifies the Hebrew Bible is unlikely to interest Jews." I can only agree with Levenson in this justified criticism of a way of thinking that, operating with overdrawn generalizations, loses the particular in the general.

Of course, in theology and the enterprise of knowledge we can not avoid working with orienting perspectives and ideas, and with corresponding abstractions. A tension thus exists between the working presuppositions. On the one hand, we can not avoid working with abstractions. On the other hand, the interest in what is general must not push the particular to the sidelines. Alfred North Whitehead made this tension basic to his philosophical program. "Seek simplicity and distrust it!" was one of his mottos. In his book Science and the Modern World, Whitehead writes that we can not think without abstractions. All our thinking is dominated by abstractions--if not consciously, then at least unconsciously. Many scholars call these abstractions, insofar as they are hidden and latent, "paradigms." Others characterize them as "implicit axioms." Whatever we call these orienting abstractions, it is extremely important to attempt to clarify them and to examine them carefully. Whitehead notes that it is not only in the realm of scholarly and scientific knowledge and of philosophies that we work with more or less conscious abstractions. Abstractions also always underlie our moral systems, our religious character, indeed our common sense. As a rule we are not at all conscious of these abstractions. Whitehead sees it as the task of philosophy to uncover, to examine, and as need be to revise these often hidden orienting abstractions of our thought, these foundational figures of thought, these positions of consciousness, these fundamental attitudes. He warns that a civilization that can not criticize and as need be change its accustomed abstractions is, after a limited time of progress, condemned to sterility. I agree with Whitehead on this point, and I have cautiously applied his approach to my work with biblical traditions, on the one hand, and with our systematic-theological forms of thought, on the other hand.

In what follows I would like to show you that we in the Christian traditions have lived and worked with problematic abstractions with regard to "the creation" and "the image of God." In the predominant, widespread religious and theological way of thinking we have in any case articulated "creation" and "image of God" in abstractions that do not correspond to the rich

insights of the biblical traditions. We need a critique, a revision, a change of these orienting abstractions, if we do not want our religious life to sink further and further below the level of the biblical traditions, as well as below the level of common sense. At least this is true for those Christian traditions and Christian theologies that have gained dominant influence. But let us now move on from methodological prolegomena to the content.

## 2. What is "Creation"?

If we survey lexicon articles in German and in English and ask how they understand "creation," we find over and over again the assurance that the doctrine of creation makes clear and confirms that the relation between God and world is a relation of the world's dependence on God, that everything that exists is dependent on God, and that God is not dependent on anything other than Godself. According to the convictions presented in these lexicon articles, the difference between God and creatures, and the total dependence of creatures on God, are the central concern of reflection on creation. Creation in the sense of that which is created (Latin creatura) is the world, nature, or the totality that is dependent on God. With regard to the scope of creation--nature alone or the totality--the authors do not always agree. Creation is in any case reality or a large realm of reality, insofar as reality is regarded as having been brought forth or produced, and as dependent. The fact of having been brought forth and of being dependent is decisive, independently of whether the creation of the world is attributed to a God, several gods, or other supernatural powers from beyond this world. Along the same line, creation as God's act or activity (Latin creatio) is the act of producing, or the activity of producing and of dominantly controlling. Creation as creatura is reality that has been produced and that, because it has been produced, is dependent. Creation as creatio is the act of original production and of ultimate control. A very simple model of dominance and control underlies this conception of creation. Creation as creatio is a first and last production by a transcendent reality. Creation as creatura is immanent reality in absolute dependence on transcendent reality.

This simple model of power has been solidified and passed on by the Christian doctrine of creation. In his widely disseminated Textbook of the History of Christian Dogma, the great Protestant theologian of the nineteenth century Ferdinand Christian Baur clearly stated that the doctrine of creation must retain "the essential moment of the world's dependence on God," but that the more precise form of this dependence "is no longer a matter of Christian interest."

Let us remember this dominant understanding of creation in Christian traditions, and turn now to the classical biblical creation texts of Genesis 2, and especially of Genesis 1. Rather than immediately importing into these texts the governing abstractions described above, let us read statements from Genesis 1 line by line with heightened attentiveness.

First we have the superscription, as the exegetes say:

1 In the beginning God created heaven and earth.

2 The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, and God's Spirit hovered over the water.

Next follows the presentation of the process of "creation":

3 God said, "Let there be light." And there was light.

4 God saw that the light was good. God separated the light from the darkness,

5 and God called the light "day," and the darkness God called "night." There was evening and there was morning: first day.

6 Then God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the water and let it separate water from water."

7 So God made the dome and separated the water under the dome from the water above the dome. So it was,

8 and God called the dome "heaven." There was evening and there was morning: second day.

9 Then God said, "Let the water below the heavens be gathered together in one place, so that what is dry will appear." And it was so.

10 God called what was dry "land," and the waters that were gathered together God called "sea." God saw that it was good.

11 Then God said, "Let the land put forth tender green shoots, all types of plants yielding seed, and all types of trees bearing fruit with the seed in it." And it was so.

12 The land brought forth tender green shoots, all types of plants yielding seed, and all types of trees bearing fruit with the seed in it. God saw that it was good.

13 There was evening and there was morning: third day.

14 Then God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of heaven to separate day and night. Let them be for signs, and let them serve to distinguish seasons and days and years;

15 let there be lights in the dome of heaven to give light upon the earth." And it was so.

16 God made the two great lights--the greater light that rules over the day and the lesser light that rules over the night--and the stars.

17 God set the lights in the dome of heaven to give light upon the earth,

18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good.

19 There was evening and there was morning: fourth day.

20 Then God said, "Let the water swarm with living beings, and let birds fly over the land across the dome of heaven."

21 God created all types of great sea animals and other living beings with which the water swarms, and all types of winged bird. God saw that it was good.

22 God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply and populate the water in the sea, and let the birds multiply on the land."

23 There was evening and there was morning: fifth day.

24 Then God said, "Let the land bring forth all types of living beings, of cattle and crawling animal and of animals of the field." And it was so.

25 God made all types of animals of the field, all types of cattle and all types of animal crawling on the ground. God saw that it was good.

To start with one is struck by the fact that this text is replete with emphasis on, and articulation of, God's reaction, God's reactive experience and action with regard to what is created.

The creation account in Genesis 1 highlights God's evaluative perception seven times. "And God saw that what had been created was good." God's action of naming is mentioned three times. Twice God intervenes to separate that which has already been created. The older creation account, Genesis 2, also speaks of God's reacting, of God's tying Godself to external events and actions, of God's interested observing, even of a certain learning on God's part. This older creation account also emphasizes that cultivated vegetation--an important goal of the process of creation--is made dependent on the collaboration of the rain sent by God and of human activity. The assigning of names to all cattle, to the birds of the heavens and to all animals of the fields is explicitly reserved for the human being not yet differentiated into man and woman: Adam, the earth being. The text emphasizes the validity of this culture-creating activity of the human being: "And whatever the human being called every living creature, that was its name." Finally, God's action in response to the recognized distress of Adam's loneliness and helplessness is characterized by learning and reaction. God's reaction to this distress is described in detail as God differentiates the human being into man and woman.

To sum up: God saw, God evaluated, God named, God separated, God let names be given, God reacted to the distressing loneliness and helplessness of Adam, not yet differentiated into man and woman. According to the classical creation texts, all these activities and

"reactivities" are part of the complex process known as "creation." If we take the texts seriously, there is no way that the process of creation can be described merely as a process of bringing forth, causing or producing. In creating, God not only acts, but reacts, responding to that which has been created. In creating, God confronts the independence, novelty, and even the need for completion of that which has been created. Only a misguided abstraction can drop this fundamental feature from the picture. Reaction, perception, evaluation, naming, separating intervention, and the act of making space for the human being's own activity--according to Genesis 1 and 2, all this belongs to "creation."

The models of production and dependency that belong to Christian theology's concepts of creation block out or at least obscure not only the reactivity of God as creator, but also the creature's own activity. Biblical accounts of creation, especially the creation account in Genesis 1, describe creation as being itself active in manifold ways, including the activities of producing and causing. Creation's own activity of producing does not first arise as the result of creation itself having been completed. Instead creaturely activity is embedded in the process of creation, and plays an essential part in that process. The Priestly creation account describes the whole of creation, not merely human beings and not beginning with human beings, as itself active and productive, as separating, ruling and establishing rhythms. Here we encounter a rich description of the separating, ruling, producing and unfolding activity of that which is creaturely. It is not only God who separates, but creatures, too--namely, the dome of heaven, the gathering waters and the heavenly bodies--perform separating functions. It is not only God who rules, but that which is creaturely, too--namely, the heavenly bodies--rule by establishing rhythms, differentiating, and providing measure and order. It is not only God who brings forth or produces, but that which is creaturely, too, brings forth that which is creaturely. The earth brings forth every kind of animal and plants in abundance. That which is creaturely develops and produces itself, as is explicitly noted with regard to plants, animals and human beings.

The biblical creation accounts draw parallels between this differentiated activity on the part of creatures themselves and God's creative activity. God separates, creatures separate, God makes, creatures bring forth, God ordains, creatures rule. The creative activities of the creatures do not thereby cease to be creaturely activity. Only with the appropriate gradations do creatures participate in God's creativity, in God's creative action. A number of creatures separate, a number of creatures bring forth, a number of creatures rule. But God alone engages in all these activities of creation.

However, to make of this a one-sided model of production and control does not do justice to the richness of the biblical creation texts. Conversely, a concept of creation focused only on interactive relations between creatures fail to do justice to the insights of the biblical texts. In the process of creation God produces associations of interdependent relations between diverse creatures and creaturely realms. God creates by bringing diverse creaturely realms into fruitful, life-promoting associations of interdependent relations. That which is creaturely is drawn into and bound up into a process of creation, is given a part in that process of creation, by developing and relativizing itself, and thereby fruitfully bringing itself into these associations of relations of interdependence. Without this context of creation, in which the creature stands and to which it contributes, the creature has no enduring existence.

We encounter here a network of power relations. This network includes both natural and cultural creaturely realms. The heavenly bodies are not merely natural entities. No, they give rhythm to time, they even specify the times of festivals. The human mandate of dominion also has culture-creating characteristics, as does the centering of creation on the Sabbath. To understand creation merely naturalistically, without including the cultural dimension, does not attain the level of the classical creation texts. When we recognize these reciprocal relations of dominion between creaturely realms in the context of the process of creation, we will have to give up overly simple models of the relation between creator and "the creature." Creation is not merely a one-to-one relation. We will also have to call into question overly simple conceptions of "transcendence" and "immanence." Besides God's transcendence and superiority to the world, we must take note of relations of transcendence among creatures: for example, the relation between heaven and earth; the relation of the sun, moon and stars to our life; the relation of human beings to the non-human environment. We must distinguish these relations of transcendence among creatures from God's relation to creatures. On the basis of the biblical traditions the understanding of creation becomes more complicated and more demanding than in the key abstract conceptions that we have cited. But it also becomes truer to the matter in question, more lively, and more fruitful for understanding.

In a consultation between theologians and natural scientists in Princeton we are making an effort to find new bases for conversation by giving up the old orientations taken from an abstract theism, and by listening anew, on the one hand, to insights into reality generated by the natural sciences, and on the other hand, to the wealth of the biblical traditions. I have been very happy to see that famous theoretical physicists and cosmologists explicitly began the conversation with the observation: "We are not interested in knowing only a God of the corners, a God of the beginning and of the end. We are not interested in a God who has



merely flipped the great 'on switch.' We want more specific insights into God's creative action." These more specific insights are offered by the biblical traditions. The old fear of going too far in confusing God and creatures, God and world must not lead us to retreat into the old abstractions of the model of production and dependence. We must distinguish God from creatures, while at the same time recognizing that God does not create without creatures, and that with the appropriate gradations the creatures are bound up into God's action. This is true in a very particular way for human beings as the image of God, and for the mandate of dominion that is given to them.

### 3. Image of God and Mandate of Dominion, Imago Dei and Dominium terrae

With regard to the image of God as well we must struggle with false abstractions, which we must--and can--correct on the basis of biblical traditions. Are the biblical traditions indeed based on the ideology that defines the human being as the "maître et possesseur de la nature," as Descartes said--an ideology that has landed us in the problems of the modern destruction of nature? If we read Genesis 1.26,28,29a, the text seems to support precisely this view.

Then God said: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." . . . God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food."

Human beings are to have dominion, to fill the earth, to subdue it, and to rule over the animals. Every plant and every tree are given to them for food. The two verbs used in this text, RDH (trample under, subjugate) and KBS (subjugate), do indeed belong in the context of violent subjugation and domination. They are otherwise applied to slaves or to a conquered land (cf. Westermann, Genesis 1-11, 161, 147ff., 158-59 and passim). How is this specification of human beings compatible with their being ordained to be the image of God? What light do these human beings reflect back upon the God whose likeness human beings are ordained to be?

The theological discussion of recent years has repeatedly tried to relativize these offensive formulations by means of the statements of the older, so-called Yahwistic creation account of Genesis 2. There we read in verse 15: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till (ABD) it and keep (SMR) it." With the help of what I call the "Yes-but" see-saw, the following argument has been made. Yes we find in Gen. 1 the precarious talk of domination, subjugation and appropriation of the earth and of that which is creaturely. But Gen. 2 permits a correction of this view by making the cultivation, tilling and preserving of creation the mandate of human beings. In my book Creation and Reality, forthcoming from Fortress Press, I show that this "Yes-but" argumentation is foolish and empty. For what argues against reversing the incline of the "Yes-but" see-saw? Then it would look like this: Yes the older creation account says that human beings are ordained to tilling and preservation, but the younger--and thus further developed--creation account candidly admits that tilling and preservation is impossible without chopping and cutting and uprooting: that is, impossible without violent intervention.

This relativizing attempt to make excuses becomes still more problematic when we direct our attention to the fact that Genesis talks about the equality of man and woman: "God created humankind in the divine image; in the divine image God created them; male and female God created them" (Gen. 1.27). By contrast, Gen. 2 manifestly speaks of man's precedence in relation to woman: "I will make him a helper. . . . And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man." We seem to be confronted with the unhappy alternative of having to choose either a non-patriarchal partnership tied to ecological brutality, if we give preference to the Priestly creation account of Gen. 1, or a conception that is ecologically prudent but tied to patriarchal structures of domination, if we privilege the older, Yahwistic creation account. However, we do not want to engage in these machinations, anxiously running hither and yon in pursuit of abstractions, at a loss for anything better to do than to relativize each text by another. Instead we want once again to study closely a particular textual constellation--namely, Gen. 1.26-28--and to attune our observations to just how the text is worded.

To what does the image of God refer? Does it refer to God's likeness in the relation of man and woman? Gen. 1.27 supports this view: "So God created humankind in the divine image . . . male and female God created them."

Or does the image of God refer to the so-called mandate of dominion? Gen. 1.26 supports this view: "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness, so that they have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the

cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

Or does the image of God refer rather to the connection of both aspects, the connection of the relation of man and woman with the mandate of dominion? Gen. 1.28 would support this view: "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'"

To what does the image of God refer? A major Protestant tradition, culminating in the work of the important dogmatician Karl Barth, decided in favor of the first interpretation. This tradition emphasized partnership as the decisive aspect of the relation between man and woman. In this view, the image of God refers to the relation between God and human being in "the face to face existence of I and Thou." That is how Karl Barth put it (Kirchliche Dogmatik 3/1, 207). This face to face existence of I and Thou is constitutive of God and of created human beings. According to Karl Barth, if one disregards it, one has removed "the divine from God" as well as "the human from human beings" (ibid.). Other theologies, such as that of Jürgen Moltmann, also abstract from the mandate of dominion, although they are not as fixated on the I-Thou relation, but instead attempt to conceive the relation between God and creatures in the relation of one to many.

Conversely, the critics of an ecologically devastating ideology of the maître et possesseur de la nature abstract from the details of what the text says, both with regard to the relation between man and woman and with regard to God's mandate.

By contrast, recent feminist exegesis (e.g., Phyllis Bird) has in particular insisted on our seeing that we can not abstract from the biological couple of male and female, and from the command of biological reproduction: Be fruitful and multiply. The biological couple that is supposed to multiply and spread is destined to have dominion over the earth and the animals. We must not let Gen. 1.26 split apart, or let Gen. 1.27 and 1.28 go their separate ways. Both being fruitful and multiplying, on the one hand, and subduing the earth and having dominion over it, on the other hand, stand in close connection to each other. By comparison, models that lead us to see the image of God only as a social relation of one to many and of many to one, or as partnership, convey a certain abstract harmlessness. Human beings are not specified merely as dialogue partners, or as communicative beings open to a plurality of communicative relationships. According to Gen. 1, the image of God is men and women who exercise domination as they multiply and spread over this earth.

The initial impression this image makes on us is one of horror. How can we, on this basis, wrest any positive meaning from the so-called mandate of dominion? Is the connection between imago Dei and dominium terrae, between image of God and mandate of dominion, about nothing other than the sad and brutal truth of the human species having its way both biologically and culturally?

Jewish and Christian exegesis of the last fifteen years have given a clear answer to that question. The exegetes have made clear that the verbs used to express the mandate of dominion must not be trivialized. These verbs are reacting to the following problem: God assigns to human beings and to a part of the animal world a common region of life and a common realm of nourishment. Both human beings and animals are to take their nourishment from the plants that sprout on the surface of the whole earth. Human beings and animals have a common realm of life and nourishment. One can already envision problems, tensions, colliding interests. How should human beings behave when animals, in the latter's interests in nourishment, drive the former away from plants yielding seed? How should animals behave toward human beings, when human beings use the plants yielding seed for their own nourishment? It is at this point that the so-called mandate of dominion becomes important, indeed necessary.

The mandate of dominion states unequivocally that human beings and animals belong to a hierarchy of power in which human beings hold primacy. To be sure, human beings and animals are neighbors and live together in a common sphere. But animals--analogously to slaves and to subjugated peoples--are living beings secondary and subordinate to humankind. We can not use as the justification for letting our neighbors starve the argument that we must first feed the animals in our own house. We can not let our children be endangered by wild animals. Human beings have primacy over animals. For this reason the language is completely unambiguous. In no case may an animal be given higher status than a human being.

But that is not all. There is also a community of interests. Just as the admittedly lesser rights of slaves are secured in the Old Testament bodies of law, and just as the subjugation of foreign peoples aims at taking them into service, but not at exterminating them, so the relation of human beings to animals is to be a relation of tolerance and of preservation, in human beings' own deepest interest. As Jewish and Christian exegetes have shown, the language of the mandate of dominion adopts royal ideologies of the Ancient Near East. On the one hand, human beings are to rule over animals as over slaves. On the other hand, human beings are to grant animals a relative level of rights, and to have mercy on them as weaker and subordinate

creatures. Righteousness and mercy characterize the action of the good king installed by God--the king who indeed represents God's image. The ordaining of humans to be the image of God, by its place in the mandate of dominion, obligates human beings to exercise dominion over the animals in a hierarchically ordered partnership. It obligates human beings to exercise dominion in a way that includes caretaking.

In this way the creation account in Gen. 1 becomes clear and comprehensible. That which the older creation in Gen. 2 brings to expression by talking about human beings tilling and preserving vegetation, the younger creation account in Gen. 1 describes by talking about the behavior of human beings toward the animal world. Dominion over the animals in the sense of the ordaining of humans to be God's image is a dominion that also includes righteousness and mercy. Thus in the Priestly creation account (Gen. 1) God also deems human beings worthy of maintaining creation. They are to exercise dominion by protecting creatures. At the same time, they are certainly to look out for their own interests and to spread over the earth. But the spread of human beings is inseparably tied to the maintenance of the community of solidarity with the animals. It is inseparable from the caretaking maintenance of the community of solidarity with all that is creaturely.

Today this insight and truth is becoming painfully clear to us. It is becoming clear to us that we have culpably neglected this balance between looking out for our own interests and protecting the interests of our fellow creatures. The human being created in God's image--and that means the human couple, men and women--are in their royal comportment to care for their fellow creatures in a fatherly and motherly way. In this motherly and fatherly behavior they are to realize a royal existence. This is the meaning of their being ordained to be the image of God. The human being created in the image of God is to cultivate and preserve the community of creation, and in a certain form--namely a form that bears responsibility for weaker creatures--to exercise dominion. The way in which human beings look out for and secure their own interests in relation to the animals is shaped and limited not only by the community of solidarity itself and the requirements of maintaining this community, but also by the commission to be the presentation of God's image. On the basis of the biblical traditions the fact that human beings have been ordained to be the image of God and to exercise dominion acquires clear contours. We must not let the two become separated. They are closely connected. They bring to expression a wisdom from which we can still learn today, which even today is a basis of orientation in our problematic cultural situations, which even today draws our attention to that which has been neglected, and which even today suggests a moral corrective and a control of our behavior.

I have attempted to follow the path laid out by your invitation and to talk about "The Understanding of Creation in Christian Tradition." I have not offered a lecture that would provide an encyclopedic overview. Instead I have attempted to show how recent exegetical and interdisciplinary theological work attempts, successfully, to correct conventional understandings of creation and the image of God on the basis of the biblical traditions. I hope that it has become clear in the process that this approach to the biblical traditions does not represent a return to long past, archaic, and culturally outdated positions, but instead represents a new turning to the source of an infinite wealth of insight. Perhaps it has also become clear that considerable possibilities for rapprochement between Jewish and Christian thought are to be found in this return and in this renewal of our systematic thought on a biblical-theological basis. In North America, where I have several times served as a visiting professor, we have repeatedly and gratefully perceived this reciprocal rapprochement. I hope that we in Europe and in Germany are also given a new future of shared questioning concerning God and God's will, and of a shared search for the knowledge of God. I understand this event to be one step on the path into this future.