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## **CREATION, THE CONCEPT OF GOD AND THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN IN CHRISTIANITY**

In 1993 the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton initiated a consultation on "Theology and Science." For a few years top scholars in cosmology, astrophysics, theoretical physics, chemistry, biology, environmental studies, in philosophy, religious studies and theology came together for a series of meetings. The **representatives of theology and religious studies** soon arrived at an answer why they were interested in this dialogue. The tensions between the Jewish and the Christian theologies of creation and their anthropologies on the one hand and the cosmologies and anthropologies of the modern sciences on the other challenged them to take part in this dialogue, if they wanted to mediate religious truth claims in present-day cultures. But what made the **natural scientists** go for this dialogue?

To the amazement of the scholars in theology, philosophy and religious studies, the natural scientists started out with a thorough discussion about the immense extensions of the universe in space and time. Does the universe have to be so fantastically wide and large to bring forth this small world with its creatures and its relatively short cultural history? The answer was, Yes, the universe had to be so immensely large to bring forth people like you and me. It had to bring forth systems of stars which in their turn had to disappear to produce the star dust from which the living beings of this world are made. One of the natural scientists used an image to demonstrate the improbability that the world and human beings could originate. Imagine that you are sentenced to death. You are blindfolded. Fifteen well-trained sharpshooters aim at you. The shots are fired - and you survive. Such is the improbability of the origination of this world and of humans. You can say, This is just chance. But you can also say, I should like to know why things happened that way.

The conviction of the natural scientists was: The world-religions with their canonical texts and their theological interpretations have to help us to gain insights into the intentions of creation. Likewise, the philosophical theories which want to secularize these canonical traditions and the theologies in accordance with identifiable responsible rules have to contribute to this task. That is why we are interested in a thorough disclosure of the religious

symbol systems, but not in generalistic and reductive speculations about the origin of the world. We want to get a view of the precise structure of the inner rationalities of religious experience and thought, ambitious and difficult as the understanding among the different disciplines may then turn out.

I had this context--that led to very fruitful interdisciplinary consultations and cooperations<sup>1</sup> -- before my mind's eye when I received the invitation to cooperate in your likewise ambitious project which asks: How can a discourse about their central subjects be started among the world religions, and how can we test whether a "speculative philosophy" inherent to them can be imputed which could function as a bridge theory among the religions? On the basis of the impressive discourse with the natural scientists who were seriously interested in theology and from experiences in the intercourse with complex philosophical theories and interdisciplinary contact theories<sup>2</sup> I immediately saw the danger of generalistic abstractions which do violence to or at least massively empty the specific contents of the canonical texts and the religious traditions. "Are you only interested in everything, or also in something definite?" This saying is attributed to Samuel Beckett. An endeavour like the planned one must by all means be highly sensitive to the danger that the specific is lost in the general. How can this danger be countered?

As much as the extremely wide-spanned subject-matter permits, I shall in my own contribution first turn to the canonical traditions with their most important texts on the subject. Thus "Creation," "The Nature of the Human" in the context of creation and "The Difference of Creator and Creature" with particular attention to the problem of sin will be dealt with. The three parts will be:

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1 See my report about the first series of consultations, "God's Eternity, God's Temporality, and Trinitarian Theology", in *Theology Today* 55, 1998, 317-328. The second series of consultations will be documented in John Polkinghorne / Michael Welker (eds.), *Science and the Ends of God: Theology and Science on Eschatology*, Trinity Press, 2000.

2 Cf. M. Welker, "Alfred North Whitehead: Relativistische Kosmologie," in J. Speck (ed.), *Grundprobleme der großen Philosophen, Gegenwart I*, 3rd. ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1985, 269-312; idem, "Hegel and Whitehead: Why Develop a Universal Theory?", in G.R. Lucas (ed.), *Hegel and Whitehead: Contemporary Perspectives on Systematic Philosophy*, Albany: Suny, 1986, 121-132; Werner Krawietz / Michael Welker (eds.), *Kritik der Theorie sozialer Systeme. Auseinandersetzungen mit Luhmanns Hauptwerk*, stw 996, 2nd. ed., Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998; M. Welker, "'We Live Deeper Than We Think': Schleiermacher's Genial Earliest Ethics," *Theology Today* 56, 1999 (forthcoming).

1. "Creation" and the critique of the abstract religious figure of dependence of the human from God;
2. The image of God and the mandate of dominion;
3. Sin as a problem in the doctrine of creation and the consequences for the concept of God.

In the last part of my contribution I shall in an exemplary way highlight the dangers of the religious and theological self-emptying and self-banalization in cultures at the end of modernity. To do so, I will present the subject of "Creation" mirrored in a topical curriculum of the pedagogy of religion and thus introduce a very concrete perspective on "creation, the concept of God and the nature of the human" in present-day Christianity. By contrasting the perspectives of classical canonicity and contemporary pedagogy of religion I shall draw attention to the high responsibility which endeavours like yours have to accept, if they want to exercise their influence in cultural ecology in creative and not in destructive ways.

### **1. "Creation" and the critique of the abstract religious figure of dependence**

Again and again "creation" has been reduced to an origin of the world, to a beginning of the universe or to the big bang.<sup>3</sup> The biblical traditions of the Old and the New Testaments transcend this reduction by understanding creation not only as the **origin of the world**, but also as the **keeping** of the human and the world, as their creative preservation and their liberation from powers hostile to creation. They actually transcend this reduction already in the texts which seem to be concentrated only on the so-called **origin** of the world. In the following, I will center on these texts which both Christians and Jews regard as the decisive basis for orientation in the theology of creation. I shall lay out some of their simplest cosmological, anthropological and theological insights.

Classical bourgeois theism and religious existentialism have reduced the idea of creation to a figure of absolute dependence, of utter dependence. This dependence was either interpreted in a metaphysical-cosmological manner or by way of the anthropology of the individual. However, compared with this, the Priestly creation account Genesis 1 which as the most important classical text among the creation texts of the Bible was to support this figure presents a different picture.

The creation account differentiates between two systems of time by speaking **twice** of the separation of light and darkness and the separation of day and night.<sup>4</sup> First there are the seven days of creation which are **not** ordered by the heavenly bodies - by the sun, the moon and the stars -, but by a different light and a different darkness. These seven days are God's days, God's time which, as the biblical traditions know, are of a different extension than the time of the world and of human beings ("For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night", Ps. 90:4 and 2. Peter 3:8). To be sure, the Priestly creation account does not yet have our present-day cosmological knowledge at its disposal. But by differentiating light and darkness of God's days and light and darkness below the created sky it rejects the reproach of a naive world view.

The detailed arrangement of the days of creation demonstrates a very sensitive view of the evolution of the universe in which first cosmic, then biological and finally cultural processes are connected with each other. At the end there is the sabbath as a condition of the possibility for religious communication between God and human being. Thus in creation different domains of power<sup>5</sup> - cosmological, biological, cultural and religious ones - are brought into complex interconnections.

The bringing about of a differentiated creation is connected with a differentiated participation of the various creatures in God's creative activity.<sup>6</sup> In graded ways the creatures are given participation in God's separating, bringing about and ruling. The creation account uses the same verbs for God's activity and for the activity of the creatures without questioning the divine sovereignty in any place.<sup>7</sup> It is only in graded ways that the creatures participate in

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3 Cf. M. Welker, "Creation: Big Bang or the Work of Seven Days?", in *Theology Today* 52, 1995, 173ff.

4 Cf. Odil Hannes Steck, *Der Schöpfungsbericht der Priesterschrift: Studien zur literarkritischen und überlieferungsgeschichtlichen Problematik von Genesis 1,1-2,4a*, 2nd. ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1981, 112-113 and 161ff.

5 By domain of power I understand an interconnection of entities and events that imposes its forms on all other entities and events that get in touch with it or enter it or on which it imposes itself.

6 Christoph Schwöbel is right in saying that along with the interdependence of the domains of power the moment of "relation" has to be paid attention to in the theology of creation. In former publications I emphasized this aspect only weakly or too little in order to counter widespread illusory ideas of freedom and harmony with regard to the creaturely cooperation.

7 Cf. here and in the following M. Welker, *Creation and Reality*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999, chapter 1; Karl L'ning / Erich Zenger, *Als Anfang schuf Gott. Biblische Schöpfungstheologien*, Patmos: Düsseldorf, 1997,

God's creativity. Some separate, others bring forth, still others rule. But God coordinates all these activities. Furthermore it is important to see that the creation account expressly emphasizes not only God's activity, but also God's reactivity. In manifold ways God engages in what is already created in reactive, in reactively experiencing and even in learning manners. Seven times the Priestly creation account emphasizes God's evaluative perception ("And God saw that it was good"). Three times it emphasizes God's activity of naming. Twice God intervenes in what is already created in order to separate.

The classical creation accounts thus do not presuppose a simple hierarchization and an absolute dependence of all creatures. Rather they emphasize the connectedness and the cooperation of creator and the creaturely. They show that God in his creativity establishes a multi-hierarchical, interdependent order of cosmic, biological, cultural and religious connections. The human being is included in this complex order as the image of God, as *imago dei*, and privileged over against the other creatures. To be precise, the couple, man and woman, are termed *imago dei*, and their destination to be the *imago dei* is connected with the mandate to spread and to become numerous as well as with the mandate of dominion.

## 2. The *imago dei* and the mandate of dominion

Even at the end of the sixties almost all the encyclopedias and text books presented the so-called information: "Water and air are endless resources." In Germany those who worried about ecological questions were widely regarded as "green boobies," and many academically acclaimed theologies and philosophies proclaimed: The human being is destined to be the "**subject**" of nature, and nature is the material that the human being come of age has to somewhere, somehow use responsibly.<sup>8</sup> In the last twenty years the cultural and religious sensitivity and with it the way of thinking in the theology of creation have radically changed.

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17ff; Hans-Peter Müller, "Schöpfung, Zivilisation und Befreiung," in idem, *Glauben, Denken, Hoffen. Alttestamentliche Botschaften in Auseinandersetzungen unserer Zeit*, Lit: Münster, 1998, 3ff.

8 Cf. the critical discussion--with Gogarten as an example--in Christian Link, *Schöpfung. Schöpfungstheologie angesichts der Herausforderungen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Handbuch Systematischer Theologie 7/2), Gütersloh: Mohn, 1991, 335ff and more often.

Shrill attacks on the notorious mandate of dominion in the Priestly creation account from the side of political journalism<sup>9</sup> went along this shift.

We find the mandate of dominion in Gen. 1:26-29.

*(26) 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." (27) So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (28) And 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." (29) 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."*

The verbs RDH and KBS--to trample under and to subjugate--are unequivocal in the tendency notwithstanding any imaginable nuances that Jewish and Christian exegetes have intensively discussed in the last decades. They are expressions from the language of conquerors and slave-owners, and a long exegetical discussion has not been able to relativize this fact.<sup>10</sup> To be sure, beyond this there have been numerous attempts to relativize this result with reference to Genesis 2, the older creation account, in which it says in verse 15, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." Tilling and keeping (ABD and SMR) over against trampling under and subjugating! This playing off of the texts against each other certainly obstructed their seriousness with regard to the theology of creation. It failed to recognize that the older creation account refers to the position of the human being towards vegetation, but that the younger creation account is also and even primarily concerned with the world of animals. Here a **conflict** in the theology of creation begins to show to which

9 Cf. Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis, in *Science* 155, 1967.

10 Cf. M. Welker, "Creation, the Image of God, and the Mandate of Dominion," in idem, *Creation and Reality*, chapter 5 (see note 7); N. Lohfink, "Macht euch die Erde untertan," in *Orientierung* 38, 1974, 137ff; K. Koch, "Gestaltet die Erde," in H.-G. Geyer et al. (eds.), *Wenn nicht jetzt, wann dann?* (FS H.-J. Kraus), Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1983, 23ff; E. Zenger, *Gottes Bogen in den Wolken. Untersuchungen zu Komposition und Theologie der priesterschriftlichen Urgeschichte* (SBS 112), Stuttgart, 2nd. ed. 1987, 90ff; B. Janowski, "Herrschaft über die Tiere. Gen 1,26-28 und die Semantik von RDH," in G. Braulik et al. (eds.), *Gesellschaftlicher Wandel und biblische Theologie* (FS N. Lohfink), Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1993, 183ff.

Genesis 1, the text with the mandate of dominion, reacts in a precise manner. Human beings and animals are attributed a common sphere of life and a common realm for the acquisition of food. This, however, makes conflicts foreseeable. The mandate of dominion is the answer to exactly these conflicts.<sup>11</sup>

Human beings are unequivocally privileged over against the animals. The so-called language of conquerors and slave-owners soberly expresses this privilege. To be sure, the human beings' ordination to be the *imago dei*, the image of God, balances and even corrects this position of conquerors and slave-owners. In the *imago dei* the royal ideologies of the Ancient Near East come to bear which engage the human beings to practise righteousness and mercy, righteousness and the protection of the weak. In this **tension**--and in this tension only--does the mandate of dominion gain a clear orientation.

- On the one hand no human must be starved in favour of an animal. The human beings are clearly privileged.
- On the other hand human beings are to represent the image of God for plants and animals. As such they are to practise righteousness and mercy.

A complex ethos is founded here that can still today give orientation to our environmental actions. To be sure, the **tensions** in this ethos and, beyond this, the catastrophic **failure** of humankind in the face of the divine good order need to be considered as well.

The exit, indeed the fall of human beings from the good orders of creation is illustrated from various perspectives in the stories of the so-called Fall, of Cain's fratricide of Abel, in the story of the Flood and Noah's rescue and of the building of the tower of Babel. A theology of creation that abstracts from this knowledge of the fall of human beings becomes inadequate and reductionistic. The fact which the biblical traditions call "sin", namely that the human beings emphatically and systematically separate themselves from God's good intentions with the world, must continually remain present in the theology of creation. Along with the perception of the "good powers" and the good order of creation the power of sin which does not only make human beings become guilty, but which also drives them into misery and despair belongs to the number of subjects that the theology of creation has to deal with. For

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11 Siehe dazu G. Liedke, *Im Bauch des Fisches. Ökologische Theologie*, Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1979, 132.

the sake of theological objectivity the power of sin needs to be present in the discourse, but it also needs to be there to prevent the reduction of religion to mere morals, that moral communication replaces the religious communication.

### **3. Sin as a problem in the theology of creation and the consequences for the concept of God**

The term "sin" belongs to the numerous religious and theological concepts that have become unintelligible. Our culture speaks of "sin" in connection with parking offences or violations of diet regulations or a too great intake of sweets and alcohol. Sigrid Brandt has drawn attention to the fact that the colloquial rhetoric of "sin" still shows a sensitivity, "If a diet is really only once interrupted by the forbidden enjoyment of a glass of wine, then this action is not yet marked by the word 'sin.' Rather it is granted that one time is no time. However, if the delinquents surprise themselves by noticing that to a larger or even increasing degree they make the exception the rule, they reveal this perception by saying, 'Today I sin again.' Yet this charming self-accusation is more than mere coquetry. It gives expression to the subtle feeling for the hidden danger that the enjoyment of the glass of wine, even if not as such, represents in connection with the diet. The word sin that is easily said does not denote a mistake that can quickly be compensated and ignored, or a transgression that happened once and thus is irrelevant. It rather denotes and reveals the fact that a certain behaviour and a certain action within the frame of a--mostly unconsciously established--pattern of behaviour or action leads to or can lead to immense, uncontrollable, even irreversible damage in the closer and wider connection of life. The term 'sin' thus stands for the principal risk or the acute danger which is connected with the action and behaviour characterized by this term."<sup>12</sup>

**The religious traditions grasp systematic forms of individual moral and cultural misguidance by the term "sin."** Misguidances like the ones given, and at least recognized in retrospect, in facism, racism and in ecological brutalism are also to be sensed by religious communication in other contexts. Even the moral and the legal communication between human beings can get under perspectives and norms that are detrimental to life and

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12 Sigrid Brandt, "Sünde. Ein Definitionsversuch," in Sigrid Brandt et al. (eds.), *Sünde. Ein unverstündlich gewordenes Thema*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997, 14f.

destructive. In the name of law and morals and even in the name of religion destructive and even devastating ways of behaviour and forms of life can be established and spread. The so-called story of the "Fall" (Genesis 3) grasps this blindness when it maintains on the one hand that the fallen human being knows "good and evil," that is what is beneficial to life and what is detrimental to life, and when on the other hand it emphasizes--as can only be perceived in the Hebrew original--that the human has now become an *echad*, a solitary one of us. The Hebrew original texts here emphasizes the isolation of the human. However, Luther had translated, "Adam has become like one of us and knows what is good and evil." Hegel and the representatives of the so-called left-Hegelianism who as a rule were very familiar with the biblical traditions took Gen. 3:22a as a proof of the autonomy of the human being and as a paradox: The Fall is at the same time the turning point and the elevation of the human to equality with God.<sup>13</sup> With this figure, Hegel can no longer grasp the systematic distortion which comes along with sin. Moreover, the difference between creator and creature becomes blurred on this basis. They are pronounced to be two free communication partners who are only differentiated from each other by an abstractly set grade of power. The intense efforts of the canonical traditions to know, and bear witness to, God's divinity, and to do so in the perception of the overcoming of systemic distortions to which the human beings succumb under the power of sin are lost from view or fall below the level of the religious capability of perception.

The religious communication in the classical main-line churches in the Western industrialized nations has also to a large degree lost the sensitivity for the world of forms that the theology of creation and the theology of sin provide. Even the confessions of sin in the liturgies of the services have reduced sin to mere guilt and have thus also hastened the self-secularization of religion or the transformation of religious into moral communication.

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13 There is no other word of Scripture that the mature Hegel cited as frequently as Gen. 3:22a. (Cf. for instance *Religionsphilosophie*, PhB 60, 31; PhB 63, 123; *Geschichte der Philosophie I*, Theorie Werkausgabe (ThWS 18), Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970, 128, cf. 314; (ThWS 19), 499; *Berliner Schriften* (ThWS 11), 239; see also the third addition to § 24 of the *Enzyklopädie* in the Jubiläumsausgabe.) The indirect references to Gen. 3:22, and to Genesis 3 in general, are innumerable. Hegel explicated the programme and fundamental ideas of his philosophy with regard to Gen. 3:22a. In one of those places, in the review of the writings left behind by Solger at the latter's death, Hegel emphasizes that **one** "moment" of creation contains "not only the source of evil, the act of eating from the tree of the **knowledge** of good and evil, and thereby of **falling away** from the image of God ... but also the principle of the return to that image" (*Berliner Schriften*, 205ff, 239).

The above reflections on the religious subjects enable us to state that the forms of decay in the theology of creation can be clearly determined:

- First, it is a decay that complex multi-hierarchical constellations of power are reduced to simple theistic or existential figures of the dependence of creatures from God.
- Secondly, it is a decay that the relations of conflict grasped in the theology of creation are blocked up and that the seriousness or the responsibility and dignity of the human being connected with these conflicting relations is lost.
- Thirdly, it is a decay that naive global ideas of progress or equally one-sided global caricatures of decay prevail.
- Finally, it is a decay that the religious communication is transformed into purely moral communication because there is a lack of understanding for the transmoral conditions of human actions and behaviour.

The culture-critical, even culture-transforming potentials of religion and of the canonical texts are thus lost. Exactly this loss is mirrored by an example that shows how "creation, the concept of God and the nature of the human" in Christianity are perceived in the classical main-line churches of the Western industrialized nations at the end of the second millenium.

#### **4. The danger of the religious and theological self-emptying and self-banalization in cultures at the end of modernity: "Creation" mirrored in a curriculum of religious pedagogy**

The theology of creation is concerned with complex relations of power (see part 1.) and with their creative steering (see part 2.). It is a matter of conflicts of power, of the misuse of power, of making someone powerless and of systematic and systemic self-jeopardizing (see part 3.).

Let us now with regard to our subject consider a topical programme of religious pedagogy for religious instruction that is answered for by a classical main-line church of the Western industrialized nations. It is the 1999 curriculum for the protestant religious instruction in schools in Baden-Württemberg, a federal state in Germany, where I live. I want to focus on the thematic complex, "Seeing the World as God's Creation." When we consider the guidelines set up by a commission for the instruction of the different grades at the various

types of schools, the above-mentioned forms of decay can clearly be seen. We are sorry to have to state that the "Christianity of the present-day" renders harmless and wreathes in mist the complex sources and traditions. It does so on the basis of reductionistic interpretations that aim at topicality.

a) Individualization and the attempt to surpass modern forms of thought

The biblical thoughts about the relations of power in creation are to a large degree centered on and thereby inadequately reduced to the feeling individual. They are detained there or driven into the mystical-diffuse. "To trace the mystery of creation: flowers, water, sun, breath, taste, joy." This is not an advertising spot for a cheap vacation in a last-minute offer, but the headline for the unit which is to introduce students at elementary schools to the theology of creation. Unfortunately this unit is not a failure in an otherwise appropriate curriculum, it is no exception. Throughout the illusion is generated that the theology of creation has to do with connections of relations which the single human being can take up, shape, reshape and break off according to his liking. The first conspicuous basic structure is a "balcony perspective." In this balcony perspective modern transcendental forms and forms of the theory of subjectivity are opposed.

That is: The curriculum is very much in favour of the body and the senses and uses strange collages of words to fight against the modern concentration on the reasonable subject and his/her broken relationship to sensuality and corporeality. For the fifth grade (HS 5.1) the programme is, "We are created by God. Senses, body, equivalent, unique, dignity." Students in grade 7 can look forward to the unit in their religious instruction, "Discover myself. Bodily changes, expectations - tensions, body and soul are vulnerable; everybody is responsible for himself/herself." What may be well meant as an a little forced endeavour to accompany students in puberty is a failure in the theology of creation. Since the well-meaning critics of modernity cannot draw on any material by the canonical classics, their programme runs into what is at once blurred and pompous and into the kitschy. Instead of opening up the human personality to the wide connections in the theology of creation, the students in the process of growing up are thrown back on themselves. The human personality with its conflicts, with the high human responsibility, with the great dignity given to it, but also with the anticipation of possible guilt and the factual experience of the need of being saved and renewed does not

come into view. Rather, one feels reminded of Hegel's polemic against the self-observation centered on the body and the corresponding self-consciousness which according to Hegel bring about "a personality that is only restricted to itself and its limited activity, brooding over itself, as unhappy as it is miserable."<sup>14</sup> The blindnesses of modern thought with regard to creation theology are not eliminated by typically post-modern attempts at a counter-balance.

b) The notorious reluctance to consider systemic differences

The fact that "creation" establishes a complex connection of realms of power (cosmic and biological processes, nature and culture, heaven and earth, the world of plants and animals and the world of humans etc.) is completely left out of consideration in the topical perspectives of Christianity on the spectrum of themes that we have chosen. Accordingly, the conflicts of power which the mandate of dominion addresses, and the subtle and creative steering by means of the tension between the *imago dei* and the *dominium terrae* are almost completely left out in the programmatic headlines of the units in the pedagogy of religion. "Human beings, animals and plants need each other ...," it says rather naively in the curriculum for grade two (GS 2.1). "Human beings, animals and plants need each other, death of an animal, plants are beautiful" - again the individual balcony perspective that renders things harmless is dominant. Correspondingly, it is suggested to students in grade six (6.1), "With one another in creation: Humans animals plants. Variety in nature, to contribute to the preservation of creation." The programme of the unit on creation is light years away from the problem in creation theology that life is "robbery" and therefore is in need of justification, and that this is the basis of religion, as Alfred North Whitehead once put it. Those will be loved who love the best, the streptococcus is the test.

A structural blindness lies at the bottom of this inability to at all consider questions of weight in creation theology and anthropology. The forms and figures of thought which the contemporary perspectives on creation carry along or apply to their subjects obviously do not permit it to take up the matter of "difference." They do not permit to differentiate - between creative differences (e.g., in the interplay of the sexes, the age levels, of nature and culture),

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14 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, PhB114, Hamburg: Meiner, 1952, 168f.

- between differences that function as a frame for orientation (e.g., in the tension of the mandate of dominion and the destination of human beings to the *imago dei*),
- between differences that have to be borne in suffering (e.g., threatening cosmic and natural forces),
- and finally between differences that generate conflicts, that are destructive and demonic (the power of sin in its many forms).

The correlate of this structural blindness is a form of thought which I should like to term "moralism of sociability." It is the constantly active appeal to make friendly arrangements. To put it precisely: Humans, animals, plants need each other.

#### c) The moralism of sociability

Even in the units for the upper grades in which ethical conflicts should certainly be considered in the creation theological programme, the headlines show a bent way of thinking that simply does not principally expose itself to the conflicts of power and that therefore at best remains in the realm of a well-meaning blurred moralism. "To till and to preserve: How to deal with the goods of creation. The human shapes, dangerous interferences, images of the whole, mandate and responsibility" (8.1). By means of a modern ethos of the whole an unclearly exposed problem is powerlessly and helplessly reasoned after. And to be sure, even predictably, the imperially spreading couple "man and woman" is not, as in Gen. 3, the *imago dei*. Rather, the students in grade 10 learn, You are the image of God. "I Want a God Who Looks Just Like Me." Such titles of books that really exist but are thank God still the exception in the German market are by all means prepared by such a programme of the pedagogy of religion. Whitehead called this the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness." The post-modern openness to the body and to sensuality without intermission produces distorted images and wrong abstractions.

#### d) Self-secularization - latent and evident

Finally in the primary programmes for grades nine and ten the religious surface rhetoric is completely done without with, and that is only consistent. Gene technology, technology and economy enter the field, without any serious perspectives of creation theology on them. Seemingly thoughtful phrases like "human life needs more" and soft appeals such as "we are

not allowed to do what we are able to do" or "responsible relations are important for survival" mark and reveal the religious loss of orientation and the normative embarrassment. They are moral fine phrases which could come from a secularized moralism. A religious basic orientation cannot be gathered from this programme, let alone a theological one.

To be sure, the programmatic formulae do not speak the whole truth. But when--consistent in the absurd--they throughout squeeze themselves past genuinely theological themes and questions great concern is appropriate.<sup>15</sup> Beyond the observations about the curricula in the pedagogy of religion this concern is strengthened by popular encyclopaedias, debates in the media and other forms of expression of topically lived religiosity. Summarizing, the picture presented in the environment of the classical main-line churches in the Western industrialized nation is sobering, even sad. To a large degree, the subject of creation is either reduced to speculations about the beginning of the world or to the individual relations to plants, animals and human beings in one's closest proximity or to an ecologically concerned moralism. God's creative activity is reduced to a highly abstract relation of global dependence. As a rule, creation and nature are equalled. As to anthropology, a mixture is emphasized of the ideological strengthening of patriarchal conditions through the older creation account Genesis 2 (keyword: Eve, created from Adam's rib) and early egalitarian thought in the younger creation account Genesis 1 (both man and woman together are created to represent God's image). Finally a similarly "mixed message" is given with regard to the behaviour of human beings in the world: ecological brutality in the younger creation account Genesis 1 (keyword: the mandate of dominion) and ecological circumspection in the older creation account Genesis 2 (tilling and preserving).

A relatively trivial concept of dependence, the beginnings of an ethos of equality and a diffuse sensitivity for the environment on the positive side - an (albeit clearly broken) ideological consolidation of patriarchal structures and of ecological brutality on the negative side: this is what the surface observation shows with regard to the theme of creation in a religious culture characterized by self-secularization, self-banalization and the systematic emptying of contents in religious communication.

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<sup>15</sup> The unit 3.1 P offers the most bearable programmatic title, even if it veils the subject of sin and the realism of the theology of creation with expressions like "human beings need each other." Explicitly interspersed with biblical passages, this frame cannot be completely destroyed.

If over against this we orient ourselves on the classical creation accounts of the canonical traditions, we find that creation is concerned with cosmic, biological, cultural and religious potentials of power, with their creative interaction directed by God, but also with tormenting and fatal conflicts of interests and power, with human responsibility and dignity which cannot at all be sufficiently grasped and directed through an ethos of close proximity and a soft moralism of harmonious and sociable togetherness.

In my opinion, these observations and reflections lead to important consequences for the comprehensive programme of a "speculative philosophy of the world religions" and their grips on themes of creation theology. On the one hand it becomes clear that demanding potentials of orientation which can easily be overlooked have to be taken into consideration even in the concentration on those canonical texts that seem to equal creation with "instruction about the beginning of the world" or with the "origin of the world." Even these simple and elementary texts do not permit us to exclude the themes of evil and suffering, of the coactivity of the creatures in creation and the transformation of creation in the direction of the New Creation. At any rate, a mere speculation about the beginning has hardly anything in common with the theologies of creation in the Jewish and Christian religions.

Furthermore, a danger becomes obvious which any attempt to establish philosophy as a medium of the interreligious dialogue has to consider clearly. Currently we have to reckon with the fact that "creation, the concept of God and the nature of the human in Christianity" are subject to processes of self-secularization and self-banalization which the "speculative philosophy" could absolutely strengthen. The speculative philosophy should be sensitively aware of the fact that today, with regard to religions cultural-ecological processes of destruction threaten at least from two sides.

In the spirit of modernity there is still the threat of a destruction of the religious sensitivities and their cultural-critical and cultural-transformational potentials through a pressure to unification and homogenization, through the elimination of stocks of religious phenomena and themes into a supposedly superposed reality and rationality continuum. But the adaptation of religion to a specific rationality continuum and a specific moral market leads to its emptying and destruction. To be sure, the so-called post-modern attitudes of consciousness

have wanted to counteract this for years, but they get into a counter danger. Without a pronounced feeling for the particular rationalities of the religious traditions and for their moral potentials of direction they use and use up religious contents as a cultural stock for manipulation to produce effects of entertainment and to strengthen perplexities. To me the great challenge that the discourse of the world religions faces today seems to be the following: neither to entreat modern reductionism in this situation nor post-modern attempts at a counter-balance, but to ask for the own complexity of religious traditions and to develop a sound pluralism of religious interpretations of reality.

The great expectation towards a philosophy which is really willing to serve this dialogue of the religions is to achieve more than to provide a liberal reductionistic theory of integration which would practically only appeal to a minority of secularized intellectuals and would in fact in the long run only contribute to the cultural-ecological destruction of religiosity.<sup>16</sup> What this philosophy will look like is hard to say despite some pre-announcements. For cultures and societies that were pre-pluralistic and optimistic with regard to progress Hegel and Whitehead developed correspondingly ambitious models. If appearances are not deceptive, this conference is to enter an analogous development of theory for our time. We may await the result in tense expectation.

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16 Here we can learn from Hans Küng. Cf. M. Welker, "Hans Küngs 'Projekt Weltethos.' Gutgemeint - aber ein Fehlschlag," in *Evangelische Kommentare* 26, 1993, 354-356; Hans Küng, "Nicht gutgemeint - deshalb ein Fehlschlag," in *Evangelische Kommentare* 26, 1993, 486-489; and M. Welker, "Unfehlbarkeit und Exkommunikation? Zur sachlichen Prüfung von Küngs 'Projekt Weltethos'," in *Evangelische Kommentare* 26, 1993, 528f. Cf. further M. Welker, "Auf der theologischen Suche nach einem 'Weltethos' in einer Zeit kurzlebiger moralischer Märkte. Küng, Tracy und die Bedeutung der neuen Biblischen Theologie," in *Evangelische Theologie* 55, 1995, 438-456.