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THE ADDRESSEE OF DIVINE SUSTENANCE, RESCUE, SALVATION AND ELEVATION: TOWARD A NON-REDUCTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN PERSONHOOD

One of the most pressing problems in any interdisciplinary discourse about the human person is the awareness that reductionistic forms of thought are extremely hard to avoid. A theological contribution to this discourse shares this difficulty. It is confronted by the "mentalist" reduction and the "physicalist" reduction which divide the humanities and the sciences.¹ Beyond this, the disciplines on both sides offer further reductions in dealing with the human being. The self-consciousness or the soul in the humanities, the brain or the genes in the sciences - these are but a few of the many candidates proposed and promoted by different disciplines in order to offer a reliable or even final point of reference, a reliable reality and a framework to host and to structure the whole anthropological discourse. How can anthropological studies which emerge from different academic areas of attaining knowledge open themselves in such a way that key symbols, concepts and rationalities used in one field can be successfully and illuminatingly applied in other areas?

The highly increased sensitivities to the dangers of reductionism in the dialogue between the natural sciences and the humanities (including religious studies and theology) have also led to a growing dissatisfaction with the classical starting points of anthropological research and discourse within the social, cultural, psychological, philosophical and theological studies. Classical starting points in anthropology like "the human being" as a self-referential subject, as a partner in I-thou-constellations, as the unique member and co-shaper of a moral and sociable community² have become questioned. They became questioned in the search for a framework which would allow for an interdisciplinary understanding of the "koinonial" and

1 Theology is, of course, also challenged by the attempts to overcome this reductionistic dualism. Cf. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Harper: San Francisco 1988 and the contributions of Malcolm Jeeves, Nancey Murphy and Warren S. Brown in: Warren S. Brown et al, *Whatever Happened to the Soul? Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature*, Fortress: Minneapolis 1998.

2 For this concept of Schleiermacher's cf. M. Welker, "We Live Deeper Than We Think": The Genius of Schleiermacher's Earliest Ethics, *Theology Today* 56, 1999, 169-179.

embodied human being.³ There is a growing consensus in the academy and beyond that philosophical, theological and other anthropologies which only work within a post-Cartesian and post-transcendental approach are hardly able to provide such a framework.⁴ This seems to hold also true for a wide-spread model in theology, namely the model of a dialogical encounter between God and "the human." There are simply too many anthropological insights and burning questions in the social and cultural studies and in the natural sciences that can not be hosted by these models.

In this situation the statement is easily agreed upon that the human being and human affairs are "multi-dimensional" in character and that we need a "multi-level approach" in interdisciplinary anthropology. The question, however, remains in what form and related to what topics an anthropological framework could be developed that would be able to host such a multi-dimensional approach.

Relating Microanthropology and Macroanthropology in General Religious and Christian Theological Perspectives

In order to gain a clear general perspective on the problem, it seems helpful to refer to a differentiation introduced by economic theory. The economists differentiate between microeconomics and macroeconomics.⁵ Microeconomics deals "primarily with the individual parts of an economy, such as individual households, firms and industries. Each of these units represents a separate market, and the behavior of these units involving specific goods and services needs to be analysed and understood." "Macroeconomics, on the other hand, deals with the sum of these parts ... " "Macroeconomic models are simplified descriptions of the relationship between some collections of macroeconomic variables, ... used ... to chart the likely course of the aggregate economy."⁶ It is, of course, important to avoid the association of "macro and micro" with "more and less important," and it is equally necessary to see that both approaches are indispensable for a circumspect analysis. In an analogous way it seems advisable to differentiate and to relate microanthropological and macroanthropological

3 Cf. the contribution of Alan J. Torrance to this volume.

4 Cf. Diogenes Allen's contribution to this book.

5 The idea to differentiate between micro- and macro-constellations in theology and anthropology arose in a conversation with my Princeton colleague Choon-Leong Seow.

6 Frank N. Magill (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Economics*, Vol. 2, London and Chicago 1997, 973 and 895.

approaches in inner- and interdisciplinary research and discourse on the human person.

In Christian theology, the biblical canon, the large-scale history of Christianity, multi-loci dogmatics and ecumenical constellations confront scholarly thinking with macroanthropological challenges. They offer multicontextual, multisystemic, multiform descriptions of human beings and human affairs. In order to gain topical concentration, routes of growth in certainty and consensus and progressive academic selection and decision-making, we have to cultivate monocontextual, monosystemic and moniform microanthropological approaches in the midst of these macroanthropological constellations.⁷ Despite the necessary reductions involved in this attempt, it is crucial to control the inherent reductionism and to seek a general microanthropological approach which is able to host macroanthropological constellations.

But which religious and which theological framework could concretely host macroanthropological constellations and offer structures to differentiate and to relate several microanthropologies in illuminating ways? My proposal is to start with a large-scale cosmological framework, all too easily ignored in anthropological studies, and with the general religious questions raised by it.

John Polkinghorne has sketched such a large-scale framework under the title "Windows onto Reality: Light and Darkness"⁸: He writes, "The window of fundamental physical science discloses a universe whose rational transparency makes science possible and whose rational beauty rewards the scientific enquirer with a profound sense of wonder. In short, the cosmos is shot through with signs of mind and it is an attractive, though not inevitable, thought that it is indeed the mind of the creator that is partially disclosed in this way."⁹ Yet the stunning cosmic order, cosmic fruitfulness, the dawning of consciousness and the emergence of religious awareness, which Polkinghorne names as illuminating windows onto reality, are not the full picture. The cosmological framework also offers what he calls "moral and physical evil", thus questioning a divine mind behind and involved in it. Finally, it also points to an

7 It is crucial to note that the differentiation might seem to be a relative one, but in fact is not. In a large framework we will, for example, call biological anthropology or a transcendental theology microanthropological approaches. If we look closer at these approaches we will in both cases find their decomposition into various more specific microanthropological projects of research and discourse. But this does not make the multiplicity of microanthropological variants of a microanthropological approach a macroanthropological constellation.

8 John Polkinghorne / Michael Welker, *Faith in the Living God: A Dialogue*, SPCK and Eerdmans: London / Grand Rapids 2001, 19-23.

9 Polkinghorne, *Faith in the Living God*, 19.

ultimate cosmic "futility": "Science tells us, most reliably, that the universe is going to die, through either collapse or decay, over a timespan of tens of billions of years, just as surely as we are going to die over a timespan of tens of years. Both realizations put in question what could be the ultimate purpose of the creator of a world of such transience."¹⁰ This seems to support the conviction that the universe is of an ultimate "pointlessness".¹¹

In a religious perspective, however, this picture asks for high expectations toward a being that would be worth being named "divine" or "God". The creation and sustenance of our universe alone is not sufficient to recognize, trust and honour such a being. The sustaining power has to be complemented by a rescuing and saving power, whereby the saving power can not just bring creation back to the level of sustenance alone. Only an ennobling and elevating power can respond to the challenge of cosmic futility.

This differentiated perspective gained from a religiously reflected general cosmological perspective can be complemented by a specifically Christian theological approach. This approach is based on large-scale observations in the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament and New Testament traditions, on reflections on the differentiated identity of God in general and on a study of a growing consensus in the Christian ecumene on basic issues in Holy Communion in particular.¹² Several decades of the ecumenical conversations of the churches on the world level concerning the Eucharist/Holy Communion have led to a consensus on the three-dimensional working of the triune God in the Supper. Many documents of ecumenical understanding highlight the differentiation and connection of God's creative sustaining, rescuing and saving and finally ennobling and elevating working on the creatures. This is expressed by the differentiation and relation between thanksgiving to the Creator (eucharist), the remembrance of Christ (memorial, anamnesis), and the invocation of the Holy Spirit (epiklesis).

The thanksgiving to the Creator is, first, related to the gifts of creation, bread and wine. The fact that these gifts are in the midst of the assembled community already indicates a powerful presence of divine sustenance and care. Both, the course of nature and human culture had to cooperate fruitfully in order to bring forth bread and wine. The peaceful assemblance of the

10 Polkinghorne, *Faith in the Living God*, 23.

11 Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes*, A. Deutsch 1977, 149.

12 Cf. Michael Welker, *What Happens in Holy Communion?*, translated by John Hoffmeyer, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids and SPCK: London 2000, esp. chapter 12.

community, the willingness to communicate, the readiness to share and to express symbolic table-fellowship, the ability to relate to a religious tradition and to a canonic memory, all this and much more is ample reason to thank God the creator for his creative work.

The remembrance of Christ, centered on the "night of betrayal" and on the cross opens a very different dimension. It reveals the good creation in jeopardy and under self-jeopardizing powers and dynamics. In the name of religion, in the name of politics, under the Jewish and the Roman laws, with the support of public moral opinion Jesus is put to death. Jews and gentiles, friends and foes cooperate. Even his disciples betray, deny and flee him. It is against these powers, which the Bible calls "sin", that God's rescuing and saving might stands. The remembrance of Christ reveals this situation, the abyss of the cross. It also reveals God's will to overcome the agony of the world.

It is crucial to explore carefully how this rescuing and saving work is done in the resurrection.¹³ Neither the merely resuscitated Jesus of the fundamentalists nor the magnificently triumphant Jesus of the Isenheim altar can be given witness to by the biblical traditions. In the midst of tensions between palpable encounters and appearances, theophanies and doubt, the witnesses "see" the risen Christ "not with the eyes only".¹⁴ They "see" him in his speaking to them, in the breaking of the bread, in the greeting of peace, in his opening to them the scriptures, in his sending them and in other signs. They "see" him in actual and symbolic actions which become ritual forms of the liturgy and life of the church.¹⁵ Not a resuscitated Jesus, but the whole Jesus Christ and his life in its fullness become present in the resurrection. For a naturalistic and scientific way of thinking, it is not easy to make sense of this presence of the whole fullness of a person and a life "in the Spirit and in faith."¹⁶

Over against the agonizing pro and contra of a physical reanimation, the risen Christ becomes present in a way that retains the multidimensionality of his person and influence as well as the multidimensionality of access to his person and influence. "The powers of love, the powers of

13 Cf. Ted Peters / Robert Russell / Michael Welker (eds), *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2002.

14 Cf. Sarah Coakley, "The Resurrection and the 'Spiritual Senses': On Wittgenstein, Epistemology and the Risen Christ," in: *Powers and Submission: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

15 Cf. Francis Schuessler Fiorenza, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Roman Catholic Fundamental Theology," in S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, and G. O'Collins (eds), *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 213-48, 238ff.

16 See J. Polkinghorne / M. Welker (eds), *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Theology and Science on Eschatology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000).

forgiveness, the powers of healing, the powers of special attention to children, to the weak, to the rejected, to the sick, to the suffering are communicated with the presence of the risen Christ. Important struggles with the so-called 'principalities and powers'--for example, with political and religious powers in the search for justice and in the search for truth--also take shape in the presence of the risen Christ. The person and life of Jesus Christ thus make available a multiplicity of powers for transformation and renewal."¹⁷

This eschatological presence of the risen Christ and the mediation of his powers to his witnesses is not the final aspect of God's working on the creation and on human beings. It is in the power of the Holy Spirit that God does not only mediate the radiance of Christ to his witnesses but also draws these witnesses into the divine and eternal life. The Holy Spirit ennobles and elevates the witnesses of Christ who become "members of the body of Christ", the "temple of the living God" and a "new creation". The multifarious eschatological symbols of the biblical traditions describe this elevating transformation of human lives by the living God. Is this just "pie in the sky" or does this offer orientation in an interdisciplinary discourse on anthropological issues?

Historical and Eschatological Dimensions in an Interdisciplinary Discourse on Anthropology

Under the heading "Emergence of Soulfulness" Warren Brown describes processes of personal relatedness in which "new capacities emerge from the interplay of many lower-level capacities", influencing behaviour and thus exerting "top-down (or whole-part) causal influences on the operation of lower level systems".¹⁸ Analogous processes occur in complex multi-person interactions and communications. The emergence of communal, cultural and canonical memory and analogous forms of shared experience and imagination are key examples of processes in which human persons do not only create common histories, life-worlds and normative expectations, but are also shaped by emergent spiritual realities in which their "souls" participate and interact.¹⁹ From common moods, trends and fashions over so-called "Zeitgeist" up to such a cultures and times spanning reality as the "body of Christ"

17 M. Welker, "Who is Jesus Christ for us Today?", *Harvard Theological Review* 95.2 2002, 129-146.

18 Neurobiological Embodiment of Spirituality and Soul, in this volume.

19 Cf. Joel Green's Contribution to this volume.

the souls are interrelated in various ways and qualities.

Multicontextual individual existences are integrated in larger historical and eschatological realities which emerge from their interplay but which also exert "top-down (or whole-part) causal influences" on the individual and communal lives.²⁰ As the phenomenon of a living cultural or canonical memory exhibits²¹, there is indeed an ongoing dynamic and "living" self-imposition of past realities that is not just a continuous invention and make-up of the remembering community. Symbolic realities such as "the reign of God", the resurrection and the "new creation by the Holy Spirit" offer us a considerable assistance in the difficult disclosure of both the continuity and the discontinuity of past worlds, this life and the life in the "world to come." How is the connection to be understood between the resurrection of Christ (as a past event), the participation of humans in this resurrection in faith and through the working of the Holy Spirit (a present event), and the resurrection on the "last day" (a future event) of which the Apostolic Creed speaks?

The symbol system of the reign of God in itself exhibits a very important eschatological complementarity, and it does so in a much clearer way than the symbol system of the resurrection. What does this eschatological complementarity mean? On the one hand the reign of God is pictured as an emergent reality in which--in multifarious experiences and acts of love, care and forgiveness--a new reality latently breaks through, endangered and clouded from all sides, visible only for the eyes of faith. On the other hand the reign of God comes fully only at the complete theophany at the end of time.²² The dual aspect of emergent reality and top-down causal influence by the ultimate constellation--even as an only anticipated reality--is crucial. The theophany at the "end of time" must not be located in just one specific temporal slot in world-history. It is the "last day" of all times, equally close or distant to all parts of history. In this respect the full theophany of the end of time is a (co-)present reality with all the times which necessarily can not be adequately expressed by any specific development in world-history.

20 Cf. also John Polkinghorne, *Eschatology: Some Questions and Some Insights from Science*, in: *The End of the World and the Ends of God*, 29-41.

21 Cf. M. Welker, *Resurrection and Eternal Life. The Canonic Memory of the Resurrected Christ, His Reality, and His Glory*, in: *The End of the World and the Ends of God*, 279-290.

22 Cf. John Polkinghorne, *Emergent and Teleological Process*, in: *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*; Michael Welker / Michael Wolter, *Die Unscheinbarkeit des Reiches Gottes*, *Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie XI*, hg. W. Härle / R. Preul, Elwert Verlag: Marburg 1999, 103-116.

The texture of emergence, accompanied by doubt and the unavoidable inability to clearly locate the reality of the general resurrection, corresponds on the level of historical time to the eschatological reality of the theophany of the end of time (cf. Luke 17:21.23; Mark 13:21; Matthew 24:23). In the New Testament traditions the eschatological complementarity of the emergent reality of the reign of God and of its full eschatological disclosure are expressed in the notion of the "coming reign" and its "nearness". These expressions reflect the necessary inability of specific historical settings to encompass the fullness of life, the fullness of reality. The symbol of the resurrection, as a symbol of the defeat of death and sin, is not easily compatible with the rationality of emergence. The gradual and partial transformation of the bodily existence can hardly be expressed in the language of the symbolism of the resurrection. It is difficult to think of resurrection "in the making." Resurrection and the theophany of the end of time seem to coincide.

It is the resurrection of the pre-easter Jesus Christ which opens a salvific perspective in this painful situation. His resurrection did take place in a certain spatio-temporal slot in history. And the reality of his resurrection is shaped by a specific bodily existence in space and time. The resurrection brings forth this bodily existence in its fullness. It becomes a reality in the mode of an engaging and transforming incorporated word or message: the gospel. It allows for a participation in this reality--that is, a reality of what the sciences would call a "transforming information". And this participation involves those who participate in it in "the life and world to come". Learning from the symbolism of the reign of God, we can clearly see that here again we focus on an emergent reality. For good reasons we have to acknowledge the necessary inability to clearly locate the reality, which historically corresponds to the eschatological reality.

With a third set of symbol systems the New Testament traditions find ways to help us and give us orientation in this vexing situation. In the community with Christ, mediated by faith, by participation in the sacraments, and by the *imitatio Christi*, the believers at least move toward the resurrection and the life to come or even already participate in it (cf. John 11:25; Romans 6:5; Col. 2:12; Phil. 3:10f). Paul speaks of the rescuing Spirit by which God "who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you" (Romans 8:11). The Spirit is the divine power by which the fullness of the divine and eternal life--revealed in the life of Christ--permeates the human souls and bodies. The powers of love, justice, mercy and truth permeate the creation mediated through the body of Christ

and through the members of this body which are physically embodied human persons. In this process the human beings become part of "the Word," bearers and mediators of "the Gospel." They incorporate God's message for God's creation, and they gain part in the divine power and life which sustains, rescues and ennobles the creation.

On the basis of these observations the complex interplay of Divine sustenance, rescue and ennoblement can become understood. Multifarious relations between bodily existence, social, cultural and historical environments, the regularities which shape all created matter, institutional and symbolic forms of providing common forms of memory, "analogical imaginations", security of expectation and attuned action give us a deep sense of awe and wonder. We can also become aware of the fact that an element of rescue is involved in every breath of creaturely existence. More important, the complexity and guidance in this process raise a sense for the fact that God sustains creation for a great purpose, that human life is not just meant for a "bad infinity" of as many days as physically possible on this earth, that God elects the human beings as caretakers over creation and as witnesses to God's glory.

Although God's rescuing and saving power within the realm of divine sustenance should not be overlooked, the second dimension is much more dramatic in scope. The inability of much of modern theology to deal with the notion of sin, the strong concentration on only the co-suffering of God with God's people and with Christ in recent theologies of the cross and various other theological shortcomings and habits have darkened this aspect. A theology determined to deal with the rescuing and saving power of God in a Christological perspective would have to acknowledge and to carefully study the web of social, cultural, political and religious conflicts in which Jesus' proclamation of the coming reign of God becomes seminal. The revelation through the cross of the "principalities and powers" dominated by sin, the unspectacular countermeasures of God's guidance in the resurrection witnesses and the emergent coming of the reign must be unfolded. In general, the risk-laden transformation and revolution of normative constellations and powers is the topic in this field. It is central that sensitivities for the human self-endangerment and self-jeopardizing are developed by attention to the divine word and its liberation from many forms of tyranny and chaos, but also to its consolation and comfort in physical and spiritual suffering.²³

23 Cf. the articles of Glenn Weaver and Gareth Jones in this book.

Again, a careful investigation of the issues involved discloses the perichoretic overlap with the first and the third dimensions. The sustenance of religious, political, legal and moral forms of life requires their gradual transformation. To achieve this aim without losing normative security of expectations is one of the indispensable tasks of religion in general.²⁴

The third dimension, the focus on the elevation of the human by the divine, is probably the most difficult to explore. With regard to the overlap with the dimensions of sustenance and rescue, one could point to the aesthetic, scientific, moral and political capacities and ingenious achievements, from which so many profit and benefit, in which so many have a joyful and relief-bringing share. However, the main aspect of this dimension is, of course, the involvement in the divine life, by way of being a witness, a mirror of God's purpose and glory. Here the liturgy, the search for truth, faith seeking understanding, the teaching and the proclamation become central, but also life in discipleship and free and creative self-withdrawal in favor of co-creatures. In these three dimensions of sustenance, rescue and ennoblement God's life-furthering and life-enhancing creativity offers a complex and coherent framework for macro- and microanthropologies.

24 Cf. Jan Assmann, Bernd Janowski and Michael Welker, *Gerechtigkeit. Richten und Retten in der abendländischen Tradition und ihren altorientalischen Ursprüngen*, Fink: München 1998.