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Michael Welker¹

Theology and Science: Theological Impulses for the Dialogue

Abstract

The author tries to establish a dialogue between theology and the natural sciences on topics of eschatology and when speaking about a reality of “spiritual” gifts, “spiritual” food, and, most provocatively, of the “spiritual body” of the resurrected. There would be no substantial hope for our lives if there was not a continuity between our bodily existence on earth – undeniably also shaped by the flesh – and our spiritual body, shaped by the powers of faith, love and hope. Those who live in Christ as members of his body are transformed into his likeness and are preserved towards the eternal life of God.

Keywords

Resurrection, eschatology, dialogue, Creation

The Reality of the Resurrection. Can Theology and the Natural Sciences Engage in a Meaningful Discussion of Eschatological Themes?

Can we imagine and can we penetrate the reality which classical theology had in mind when it spoke of “spiritual” gifts, “spiritual” food, and, most provocatively, of the “spiritual body” of the resurrected (1Cor 15:44)? Moreover, can we convince non-theological mind-sets that these concepts do not only make sense in the orbit of religion, but that they have illuminating power beyond this realm because they are firmly rooted in a reality and not just confined to one complex mode of religious discourse? In my view, this question has to be answered in the affirmative in order to

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make the dialogue between theology and the natural sciences on topics of eschatology possible. In order to prepare for this dialogue a few sophisticated preliminary steps are required.

We *first* have to differentiate between “old style” and “new style” metaphysics as two possible frameworks for the approach.

Second, we have to discern an understanding of “creation” in the light of “old style” metaphysics on the one hand and in the light of biblical creation accounts on the other.

Third, on this basis the conviction can set in that the notion of a creator grasped as a mere sustainer of the universe is spiritually not satisfying and salvific.

This will, *fourth*, prepare us for an understanding of the role of the resurrection in divine creativity in general and will provide an understanding of the nature and the importance of the “spiritual body” of Jesus Christ in particular.

Fifth, we will try to comprehend the transformative power of this spiritual body and the involvement of human beings and other creatures in it.

Finally, on this basis we want to engage non-theological academic thinkers by asking them whether the sustaining, rescuing and ennobling interaction between God, creation and spiritual information has analogies in their realms of experience and whether such interaction can challenge reductionistic concepts of matter.

I. Differentiating Between “Old Style” and “New Style” Metaphysics

My proposal to differentiate between “old style” and “new style” metaphysics does not imply that “old style” metaphysics is outdated and should simply be replaced by “new style” metaphysics. “New style” metaphysics is a constructive reaction to the lament that after Kant metaphysics as the production of ultimate and closing thoughts about the totality of reality is no longer possible. Indeed, philosophy has to face the dilemma that in late modern societies – and also in their academic and religious settings – a plurality of forms of life and rationalities has established itself which can no longer be convincingly ordered in “a hierarchy of the more or less valuable.”² In this situation “old style” metaphysics can be used as

² Cf. for many voices Jürgen Habermas, *Metaphysik nach Kant*, in Konrad Cramer et al (eds.), *Theorie der Subjektivität*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt 1987, 434.

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a means to question the current epistemic setting at least in the academy in the West. Recently, Richard Swinburne has presented us with an impressive example of this approach, combining 18th century Anglican natural theology with 20th century probabilistic logic.³ In a more modest and empirically argumentative way, “new style” metaphysics responds to the same challenge by reducing the metaphysical claim to the exemplary exploration of two areas of discovery and research (instead of covering “the totality”).

It was Alfred North Whitehead who in a most helpful way differentiated between old and new style metaphysics (without using these terms, however). On the one hand, he states in terms of “old style” metaphysics: “By ‘metaphysics’ I mean the science which seeks to discover the general ideas which are indispensably relevant to the analysis of everything that happens.”⁴ On the other hand, in the mode of “new style” metaphysics, Whitehead does not speak of “the”, but of “a” metaphysics and of a “metaphysical description” which “takes its origin from one select field of interest. It receives its confirmation by establishing itself as adequate and as exemplified in other fields of interest.”⁵ Whitehead makes it clear that “a metaphysics” can emerge from different homelands: mathematics, a science, religion, common sense. As soon as a solid bridge theory can be established between at least two areas of interest by indicating that basic ideas, concepts and intellectual operations can work in both areas, we are in the process of a “metaphysical description” and on the way to “a metaphysics” – which I call “new style” metaphysics.

It is the “bottom-up” approach over against “top-down” thinking that is characteristic of “new style” metaphysics. Such a metaphysics tries to cultivate common sense, to challenge it and to move it to higher levels of insight by confronting it with specific “fields of interest” which require specific modes of thinking in order to be adequately explored. The differences between common sense thought and the thinking required to access at least one of these fields of interest provide the impulses to develop a “new style” metaphysics. This holds also true for the differences between

³ Most of the arguments he offered can be found in: Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 1996.

⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (1926), Meridian: New York 1960, 82.

⁵ Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*, 86f.

the cognitive explorations of at least two of these fields of interest (for instance, of science and theology).

II. “Creation” According to “Old Style” Metaphysics and According to Classical Biblical Accounts

Most theological and philosophical thinking about “creation” has been dominated by the concepts of “bringing forth” and “utmost dependence.” Creation as *creatura* was nature, the cosmos or a vaguely conceived totality as brought forth and dependent on one or several transcendent power(s) or will(s) or personal entity(ies) mostly named God or gods. Creation as *creatio* was the activity or energy of bringing forth, keeping in dependence or even in “ultimate” dependence and at the same time sustaining nature, the cosmos, totality (sometimes with explicit reference to culture and history as well). Connected with this type of thinking were ideas and concepts of God such as “the all-determining reality” (Bultmann, Pannenberg), the “ground of being” (Tillich), the “ultimate point of reference” (G. Kaufman), the “whither of absolute dependence” (Schleiermacher), which were highly en vogue.⁶

In striking contrast, the classical biblical Priestly creation account Genesis 1 offers a much more subtle picture. Through the word of God chaotic matter is enabled not only to win forms and shapes, energy and life. The heavens, the stars, the earth, the waters and the humans are to actively participate in God’s creative energy and power. The same verbs used for the divine process of creating are also used for the co-creativity of what and who is created. Over against a wide-spread fear of a “synergistic” confusion of God and creature in the case of co-creativity it has to be recognized that the biblical creation account does not think in one-to-one structures (God and creation, God and world, God and the human being). The account describes one-to-many structures in which selected creatures gain a graded share in the creative activity. In various ways selected creatures participate in the formation of creation. The heavens part, the stars govern the times and festive days, the earth brings forth creatures, and the humans are assigned the task to rule over creation and thereby reflect the image of God.

⁶ Cf. M. Welker, *Creation and Reality*, Fortress: Philadelphia 1999, chapter 1.

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In this one-to-many relationship between God and “the world” no creature has the power to act in God’s stead, yet the power of the co-creative creatures is sizable. This power does not only enable humans as well as other creatures to exercise their creaturely freedom and act independently; it also makes creaturely self-endangerment and self-destruction possible. There are several indications in the creation account which support this realistic reading over against all metaphysical illusions of the “perfect-watchmaker” (illusions which as a rule have the theodicy question in the back-pack). The co-creative creatures remain creatures. Despite their powers they are no gods (as other ancient creation accounts would have it). Neither the heavens nor the sun, moon and stars nor the earth are divine powers. The slave-holder and conqueror language in the infamous “call to dominion” indicates that a constant conflict between humans and animals in their common area of nourishment has to be regulated. The creaturely and even co-creative existence, even if it is highly conducive to life and called “good” by God (Hebrew TOB, life-furthering) does not reach the level of divine glory. The difference between God’s glory and the creation judged by God to be “good” and “very good” is still maintained. Creation is not paradise. It is on its way towards the “New Creation”.

III. Creation Itself Points Beyond God as a Mere Sustainer of the Universe

It belongs to the rituals in the science-and-theology or science-and-religion discourses and their public radiations that some of the scientists involved connect their summarizing perspectives with religious awe and respect for the power and wisdom of a divine creator. The power of mathematics and rational thinking in illuminating hidden secrets of nature, observations of unquestionable beauty and astounding rhythmic orders, the fecundity of life and its potential to generate “higher forms” are named in order to support such views.⁷ Others, however, leave such discourses with the summary: “The more I looked at the universe, the more I found it pointless.” Or they think along the line of Whitehead’s words: “Life is robbery and requires justification.”

⁷ See John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker, *Faith in the Living God. A Dialogue*, Fortress: Philadelphia and SPCK: London 2001.

At this point we become aware of the fact that any “natural awareness of the Divine” is connected with pressing problems – as Calvin showed so powerfully at the beginning of his *Institutes*. No perspective on God as creator and sustainer of the world can overcome the ambivalence and ultimate inconsolability of a “natural” theology of creation. Calvin calls this natural “sense of Deity” – which he does see – “fleeting and vain”.⁸ If we do not overrule the realistic experience of creation with “old style” metaphysics, we have to acknowledge that a power which merely sustains the universe – impressive as it is – is ultimately not worth being called “divine.” And the instantiation, the “whither” of this power is not worth being called “God.” For instance, I simply would not find it in me to adore Richard Swinburne’s omnipotent substance, which he obviously is able to equate with a simple omniscient and perfectly free personhood.⁹ Confronted not only with the finitude of life, but also with the fact that life can only live at the expense of other life and that the co-creative power of the creatures is full of self-endangerment and destructive potentials, we have to ask for the saving and ennobling workings of the creative God in order to overcome the deep ambivalence just depicted.

“Saving and rescuing” creativity can in this case, as we easily see, not just mean repairs in the course of natural processes. To be sure, experiences of birth and healing, of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace mirror the depth of God’s creative care and guidance and lead to gratitude and joy, praise and glorification. But the haunting question remains whether God’s creativity can ultimately overcome the finitude and deep ambivalence of creaturely life itself. This question cannot be answered without addressing the difficult topics of eschatology, i.e., the resurrection and thus at least the dawn of new creation.

IV. Divine Creativity in the Resurrection and the Spiritual Body of Christ

The resurrected Jesus Christ is not the resuscitated pre-Easter Jesus of Nazareth. Although a few witnesses to the resurrection in Luke – and certainly all kinds of Christian fundamentalists and their agnostic critics

⁸ *Institutio*, I,3,3.

⁹ *Is There a God?*. 47 and often.

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– seem to confuse resurrection and resuscitation, the biblical insights with regard to this topic are clear. They report that in the encounter with the resurrected people pay him homage, they fall down in worship (*proskynesis*) before this theophany – and yet this revelation of God is mixed with doubt at the same time.¹⁰ Jesus' resurrection is a reality which, on the one hand, has characteristics of something sensory, while on the other hand it retains the character of an appearance, even an apparition. The Emmaus story is especially revealing: the eyes of the disciples are kept from recognizing the resurrected one. Their eyes are opened through the ritual of the breaking of the bread. Then in the next verse it says: "And he vanished out of their sight." Instead of complaining about a spooky event, about just having seen a ghost, the disciples remember a second experience which had not seemed to be a revelation at first: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:30ff).

The witnesses recognize the resurrected one not only by his salutation, the breaking of the bread, the greeting of peace, the way he opens up the meaning of Scripture, and other signs, but also through his appearances in light. These clearly speak against any confusion of the resurrection with a physical resuscitation. A multitude of diverse experiences of encounter with Christ brings about the certainty that Christ is, remains and will be bodily present among us. In contrast, the stories of the empty tomb show that a single moment of revelation alone, even if it is a spectacular one involving heavenly messengers, is not in itself enough to cause belief. Instead, what remains after the empty tomb are fear, amazement and silence (Mark). Meanwhile, the belief that the corpse was stolen is disseminated, used for propaganda purposes, and becomes widespread (John and Matthew). According to Luke, the visions at the empty tomb are dismissed as "women's chatter."

The certainty that Christ has risen does not imply that he is present in the way the pre-Easter Jesus was present. In fact, *the complete fullness of his person and his life is now present* "in Spirit and in faith." This presence

¹⁰ Cf. for the following Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Michael Welker (eds.), *Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung*, Neukirchener: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2nd ed. 2004; Ted Peters, Robert Russell, Michael Welker (eds.), *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2002, esp. 31-85; John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World*, Yale University Press: New Haven and London 2002, 66ff.

“in Spirit and faith” is hard to comprehend, not only for naturalistic and scientific thought, but also for Common sense which instead tends to fixate itself on the pros and cons of a physical resuscitation. In contrast, **the fullness of the person and life of Christ accentuates the community of witnesses in Spirit and faith for which the entirety of Jesus’ life, his charisma and his power are present and efficacious in the resurrected and exalted one.**

The presence of the resurrected one conveys the powers of love, forgiveness, healing, and his acceptance of children, the weak, the rejected, the sick, and those in misery. Furthermore, the struggle to confront the so-called “powers and principalities” begins to take shape in his presence, for example in conflict with political and religious institutions in the search for truth and demands for justice. The person and life of Jesus Christ brings about normative and cultural renewals and other creative impulses. The presence of the resurrected Christ is perceived among the witnesses in many signs – including small ones – signs of love, healing, forgiveness, devotion, acceptance and the passionate search for justice and truth. In this often inconspicuous way Christ and the kingdom of God are “coming.”

Apart from this emergent coming, for which we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, the biblical traditions also offer visions of the “final coming of the Son of Man”. They deal with so-called “end-time” eschatological visions, and these are necessarily visions, because the resurrected and exalted one will not come only in a specific year or to a specific area of the world. The resurrected and exalted one comes in all times and to all areas of the world. He will, as the Apostle’s Creed says, judge “the living and the dead.” This is a vision which necessarily transcends all natural and empirical conceptions. But it is this important and healing vision which opposes all explicit and implicit egoisms of particular cultures and eras. However, if we only have a vision of the Son of Man coming from the heavens with his angels, “we are of all people most to be pitied,” to echo Paul in 1 Cor 15. If we had only this vision in eschatology, the conversation between theology and science on eschatology would be over before it began. The reason for the fact that the talk of the “coming” Christ becomes transparent for immanent perception and realistically comforting is, first, that the one who is “coming” will not be revealed for the first time only at the end of all times and eras, but rather he is already among us now as the crucified and resurrected one; and, second, that the crucified and resurrected one is

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the one who, in the historical pre-Easter Jesus, has been revealed in his incarnational and kenotic nearness of his human life and work. For this reason we cannot separate the memory of the historical Jesus from the realization that the crucified and resurrected one is present and will “come again” in his full parousia. The creating and saving God is present here, surrounding and carrying us in his confirmation of life against the powers of sin and death. These powers are dramatically depicted at the cross of Christ.

At the cross of Christ, Jesus is condemned in the name of politics and in the name of religion. He is executed in the name of both the Jewish and the Roman law. Even public opinion is against him: “Then they cried out again ‘Crucify him!’” (Mark 15:13f. par.) Jews and Gentiles, Jews and Romans, natives and foreigners are all agreed. All principalities and powers work together, and all worldly “immune-systems” collapse. The reciprocal checks and balances among religion, politics, law and morality fail in the event of the cross. Conflicts between the occupiers and the occupied, the world superpower and an oppressed people are simply glossed over. Even the disciples betray Jesus, when they abandon him and flee, as the tradition of the Last Supper, the Gethsemane story and the “night of betrayal” only make all too clear.

The cross, as the biblical texts say, reveals “the world under the power of sin.” It reveals “the night of godforsakenness,” not only of Jesus himself – but of the whole world. The cross reveals the presence of this dire misery, not only in Jesus’ hour of death, but as a real and present danger in all times. The resurrection liberates from this night of godforsakenness. God’s activity alone, and not a human initiative, brings salvation. The true saving power and the vital necessity of the resurrection first become manifest against the background of the cross. That God and God alone brings salvation to humanity becomes recognizable in view of the harrowing possibility and reality that, despite the best intentions and the best systems, humanity alone is doomed. Even God’s “good law” – whose the impressive normative dynamics we discussed in the previous presentation – can become fully corrupted and be abused by humanity under the power of sin. Perversions of religion, law, politics, and public opinion then triumph. Therefore it is crucial to recognize that God has saved and saves humanity which is completely lost without God. The way in which God does so is also crucial: in a powerful yet emergent way without fanfare and drumbeats.

Impressive as the Isenheim altar-piece's portrayal of the resurrection may be, the witnesses to the resurrection in the biblical traditions describe the reality of God's salvific work in quite a different way.

V. The Transformative Power of the Spiritual Body: Sustenance, Rescue, and Ennoblement Into Eternal Life

Although the experiences of the resurrected Christ both of the first witnesses and of contemporary witnesses do have the character of visions, memories and anticipatory imaginations, they are not mere mental or psychic phenomena. They respond to the self-presentation of the resurrected and elevated Christ in his post-Easterly body and they participate in his real life. The structured pluralism of the canonical witnesses, the structured pluralism of the ecumenical witnesses, the structured pluralism¹¹ of a multi-disciplinary theology and the structured pluralism in the families of Christian liturgies work time and again against illusionary productions of Jesus-images, wishful Jesus-morals and Jesus-ideologies.

It is the faithful realistic response to his presence and his word in truth- and justice-seeking communities which critiques and purifies the witness to Christ and to the workings of the Triune God and thus saves it from being confused with all sorts of self-made religiosity.

In order to do focus on this reality it is crucial to respect both continuity and discontinuity between the life and body of the pre-Easter Jesus, of the resurrected and exalted Jesus Christ and Christ as the ultimate Judge and Saviour of the world in his parousia. John Polkinghorne has rightly stressed the general eschatological relevance of this perspective: "In so far as present human imagination can articulate eschatological expectation, it has to do so within the tension between continuity and discontinuity. There must be sufficient continuity to ensure that individuals truly share in the life to come as their resurrected selves and not as new beings simply given the old names. There must be sufficient discontinuity to ensure that the life to come is free from the suffering and mortality of the old creation."¹²

¹¹ It is crucial to differentiate a context-sensitive multi-systemic pluralism from a mere "plurality" of individuals, groups and their various goals and opinions. The first constellation challenges us to understand a complex structure and circulation of power; the second presents just a soft relativism.

¹² *The God of Hope and the End of the World*, 149.

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The amazing continuity between the pre-Easter and the post-Easter body of Christ and also of the Christian witnesses as the members of his body is described by Paul with the imagery of the seed and the full-grown plant (1. Cor. 15:36-38.44). Yet this amazing continuity is correlated with almost frightening discontinuities: “the *dying* of the seed and an act of (*new*, M.W.) *creation* by God (15:38). Our whole perishable person will be transformed (*metaschematizo*, Phil 3:21) into a new and imperishable heavenly personality that will be qualitatively different from our first. It will be – thank God – much better!”¹³

Both continuity and discontinuity are expressed in the term “**spiritual body**.” Since Paul differentiates between “*flesh*”, (*sarx*, as perishable matter) and “*body*” (*soma*, as matter shaped by mind and Spirit into a living spiritual existence bearing information and giving information), he can perceive continuity and discontinuity in the following way: the body as flesh and as dominated by non-divine powers will decay and die; the body as the spiritual body will be recreated by God’s grace in the resurrection.¹⁴ Although “*flesh*” is definitely doomed to decay and to death, it is full of energies and logics of self-sustenance and of self-perpetuation. However, since these energies fall short of aiming at the existence of the “*spiritual body*,” they are bound to “sin and death.”

There would be no substantial hope for our lives if there was not a continuity between our bodily existence on earth – undeniably also shaped by the flesh – and our spiritual body, shaped by the powers of faith, love and hope. Paul challenged the Corinthians who wanted to connect Christ and the soul here and in eternity, but wanted to leave room for any behaviour in terms of sex and food since the earthly body would die in any case. “In Paul’s holistic perspective ... the reality of salvation is not *another* reality apart from the outer everyday life, not just a religious reality for the *inner* life of a person. It grasps and embraces the whole of human existence, the entire personality ... For exactly this reason, Paul talks about ‘resurrection’ and not of such things as ‘spiritual immortality’ and ‘ascending souls.’”¹⁵

¹³ Peter Lampe, Paul’s Concept of a Spiritual Body, in: The Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments, 103-114, 108.

¹⁴ It is most important not to associate “*flesh*” with an understanding of matter in a Newtonian sense as “solid, massy, hard, impenetrable, moveable particles.” The notion of “*flesh*” is not to be confused with “material stuff” without any information.

¹⁵ Cf. Lampe, 104f.

Connected with this anthropological realism is an eschatological realism which sees all possible perspectives on creation already in the light of the new creation. This eschatological realism affirms that the creative God is not a mere sustainer of the world, since this world is full of ambiguity and despair because of creaturely co-creative freedom and its potentials to misuse; it is full of ambiguity and despair because of the inert brutality and finitude of life in the flesh. The mere affirmation that the Triune God opens much richer perspectives for creation than its continuation until a timely or untimely death is not strong enough to sustain a viable faith and hope towards our eternal existence in a spiritual body. According to Paul, it is rather the presence of the resurrected Christ – in continuity and discontinuity with his pre-Easter life and body and the rich spiritual orientation and information given with this presence – which opens up a totally new perspective. Those who live in Christ as members of his body are transformed into his likeness and are preserved towards the eternal life of God.

It is not only the life of the believers and followers of Christ which gains a salvific perspective through its participation in Christ's spiritual body. In the celebration of the Holy Communion / the Eucharist the "elements" bread and wine also participate in the edification of the spiritual body. These gifts of creation (not just gifts of nature, but gifts of the interaction between nature and culture and thus already richly blessed by the working of the Holy Spirit!)¹⁶ become gifts of the "new creation." Bread and wine do not only symbolically edify the natural bodies of the community assembled. As "bread and wine from Heaven," as the body and blood of Christ they edify the members of the body of Christ, the members of the "new Creation," the bearers of the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Here the continuity between creation and new creation, between creation old and new becomes palpably present in the middle of the overwhelming discontinuity. It is the "spiritual information"¹⁷ – to call it thus in search of a more appropriate term – which operates on the material fleshly bodies and minds through the presence of Christ in word and sacrament, causing

¹⁶ Cf. Michael Welker, *What Happens in Holy Communion?*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2000.

¹⁷ Cf. John Polkinghorne, *Faith, Science and Understanding*, SPCK: London 2000, 96f; 123ff; *idem.*, *Science and the Trinity: The Christian Encounter with Reality*, SPCK: London 2004, 82ff.

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sometimes dramatic, but mostly only very calm emergent transformations. It remains to be discussed whether this process can mirror analogies in non-religious and even scientific areas of exploration and interest. With the help of “new style” metaphysics we should try to explore such analogies in the interactions between God, earthly and fleshly creatures, and spiritual orientation.

VI. Eschatological Reality Mirrored in Bottom-Up Experience

In this respect, the realistic anthropology of Paul, which we discussed in the fourth presentation, can provide some clues, when we look at his description of the activities of the spirit. From both theological as well as anthropological perspectives, the Spirit enables a co-presence, contact and even interaction with those who are absent, respectively a presence in absence. Through his Spirit, the invisible God communicates with the human spirit and imparts to it creative impulses. But the communicative power of the spirit can also be vindicated in an anthropological bottom-up approach. According to Paul, even those who are absent can have authentic contact with others “in the spirit”, despite their different locations in space and time. By remembering his own visits, his teaching and preaching, and through his petitions before God, but also through the letters and messages of others, Paul is present to the community “in the spirit”. This presence is not merely a figment of his imagination.

Paul sees himself becoming “spiritually” present in the community. In 1 Cor 5 he describes this process of spiritual communication and co-action: “For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgement in the name of the Lord Jesus ... When you are assembled, ... my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus ...” (1 Cor 5:3–4). One does not need to make reference to the “Holy Spirit” in order to understand the spiritual process of communication between Paul and the Corinthians. We can explain basic functions of the human spirit without direct reference to theological realms.

Memory and imagination are not just “mental constructs” in the “inner subjectivity” which somehow happen to connect and intersect with each other, thus allowing common understanding, consensus and the guided common search for truth. As instances which support individual certainty,

communal consensus and the oriented progress of truth-seeking communities¹⁸ they certainly do have “points of reference” in natural space-time and the matter correlated with it. But in the mediation from empirical experience to shared forms of memory¹⁹ and sustainable common imagination there is a “spiritual loadedness” of the experienced material reality and a transfiguration of it, which will have to be unfolded in future cooperation in the discourse between the humanities and the sciences in general and the theology and science discourse in particular.

In secular terms, this transformation and the mental and bodily participation in it has been beautifully expressed by Wordsworth in his romantic poem “The Daffodils”:

*“Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance ...
I gazed – and gazed – but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:
For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.”*

Wordsworth celebrates the revelatory and life-enhancing power of a specific event in nature, transformed into a “spiritual information”. This spiritual information in memory and imagination has an effect on his mind and his bodily emotions via the heart. Through the poem he passes this spiritual information on. Analogous imaginations can thus be created, and other memories of spring can appear before the “inward eye”, seemingly *ex nihilo*, “out of nothing”. The spiritual information inherent in them enables the memories and imaginations to “eternally” generate joy. Impressive as these events are – they are just a plausibilizing footnote to the impact of the spiritual body of Christ which transforms world and creation.

¹⁸ The texture of truth-seeking communities is described in the last chapter of Polkinghorne and Welker, *Faith in the Living God*.

¹⁹ Cf. Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, Beck: München 1992; Assmann, *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis*, Beck: München 2000; Michael Welker, *Kommunikatives, kollektives, kulturelles und kanonisches Gedächtnis*, *JBTh* 22 (2007), *Die Macht der Erinnerung*, Neukirchener Verlag: Neukirchen-Vluyn 2008, 321-331.