

THE WORLD AS CREATION AND CREATION AS A COSMOTHEANDRIC REALITY IN CHRISTIANITY

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1. Introduction

Every religious tradition is characterized by a specific understanding of the three realms: God, World, and Human. But not every tradition (for example, the religions of the Adivasis, Aborigines of India) reflects thematically on them. Thus the Adivasi religions speak uninhibitedly of the World, Humans, and of the Highest Mystery. They see no problem in this, because they still live in a world of faith. The world of faith is so obvious and immediate to them that it is the perspective, though non-thematic, in which they experience, understand, and act. In such a case it is the world of faith that gives meaning; but as a matter of fact reflection does not belong to their horizon of meaning. The experience of faith is normative, on the one hand; but reflection on the world of faith is missing, on the other. The strength of such traditions is the immediacy of their faith-world. Their weakness, however, lies in the danger that they are not able to distinguish between faith and belief.

But the case is different with religious traditions where reflection plays an important role. A tradition of reflection testifies to the fact that the world of faith is no longer the centre of that tradition and that in some cases it is not always operative. In such cases reflection encounters the world of faith as a subject encounters its object. Reflection constitutes the centre, which poses questions and doubts, but the immediacy of the world of faith is conspicuous by its absence. Reflection demands that the world of faith give an account and a justification for its faith. Faith here is no longer taken for granted. The strength of such traditions lies in the fact that they discern before they believe. Their weakness lies in the fact that their reflection concerns beliefs, and so are not in contact with faith. The danger is that their exclusive concentration is on beliefs.

Besides that, there has to be a hermeneutic dimension in a mature tradition of reflection. Without a hermeneutic consciousness there is danger that religion gets caught up in the realm of reason. A hermeneutic accompaniment protects it from such a danger and sees to it that reflection constantly strives towards the wholeness of being-in-the-world. It does this by reminding us of the diverse presuppositions of being and thinking. The presuppositions of humans and their

cultures are different; the same culture manifests in the course of its history different presuppositions. Because of this, the same thing is understood differently. This explains not only why there are different interpretations of the same religion, but also why it has to be so.

2. The Significance of the Belief in Creation

Most of the Christian traditions are reflection-traditions. To a great extent they are occupied with beliefs. They try to understand and explain everything, i.e. God, World, and Humans, from the viewpoint of their beliefs. Their beliefs are products of their Scripture and Tradition. The Christian tradition to which I belong has much to do with the Western tradition. In what follows, I wish to highlight the specificity of this tradition.

2.1. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN CREATOR AND CREATION IS UNBRIDGEABLE

The Semitic traditions lay stress on the difference between Creator and created. The biblical tradition perceived itself as surrounded by divinizing personifications of natural forces and so distanced itself from any kind of divinization of nature. It did not tolerate any exception and regarded any failing in this respect as the greatest sin. When such failing did occur, the punishment was so severe that in the course of time the temptation became gradually weaker.¹ The first and greatest commandment of the biblical traditions highlights God's sovereignty unambiguously. The first commandment is the first, not because of the numerical order, but because it is the most important commandment. The chasm between God and creation was so exaggerated that it was in danger of separating God and creation. Major problems were connected with this. It is important to note that the difference between Creator and creation in the biblical traditions is unbridgeable.

This distinction was taken so seriously that it has gravely affected the Christian tradition. It appears that in the course of time it even affected the epistemological process. It is true that complex factors led to the separation of Creator and creation. However, the distinction between Creator and creation seems to have become the occasion for the separation of the knowing subject from the object that is to be known. The misunderstood distinction between Creator and creation appears to have been the prototype, as it were, for the distinction between Subject and Object. This in turn seems to have led to a metaphysics of Subject and Object. On such a metaphysics rests the whole realm of the

¹ Exodus 32.

sciences.

We know that history is not a linear, logical process. It has its own dynamic, which does not respect human intentions. Complex combinations of happenings, which no computer programme, however clever, could decipher, bring forth processes that determine the course of history. In such a history the environmental crisis is the world-expression of the separation of subject and object, where humans behave as subjects and treat the world as object. In spite of the appearance that the biblical tradition is responsible for this, it is important to look at the historical processes in order to find out what is to be done.

The subject-object perspective, which in itself is valid in a limited area, has come to determine today the whole realm of the epistemological process. What is reality, how do we reach reality, and which kind of knowledge is valid, are being determined by a scientific mentality that overlooks, neglects, or even denies the most important areas of being.²

No one, whether scientist or a simple soul, can deny that our being-in-the-world is primarily an experience of our limitedness. Limitedness means that there are areas in life that we cannot manipulate at our pleasure. The Ultimate escapes us; we do not have the last word. The acknowledgement of the experience of limit is, ontologically speaking, nothing other than the acknowledgement of our total dependence. Total dependence may sound abstract; what is in effect experienced, however, is our limitedness on the ontological level and our vulnerability on the psychological level.

The acknowledgement of our limitedness, I submit, has to do with the first commandment. Not only our experience and our activity are limited; there is also something beyond our experience and activity, however we may name it, which we cannot control. The first commandment demands an acknowledgement of this realm, without which humans would have a fundamentally wrong self-understanding. Since any self-understanding has to do with meaning in life, the role of a right self-understanding cannot be underestimated. Hence one must not behave as if this were unimportant or irrelevant. True, religion and philosophy concentrate *ex professo* on this field. Still, it is fitting that humans concern themselves with and think about meaning in life. For it is a matter that has to do with the highest values and their role in life, where a one-sided scientific mentality cannot be of service.

² H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Method: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 4th Ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1974), p. xxvii: "Das Phänomen des Verstehens durchzieht nicht nur alle menschlichen Weltbezüge. Es hat auch innerhalb der Wissenschaft selbständige Geltung und widersetzt sich dem Versuch, sich in eine Methode der Wissenschaft umdeuten zu lassen. Die folgenden Untersuchungen knüpfen an diesen Widerstand an, der sich innerhalb der modernen Wissenschaft gegen den universalen Anspruch wissenschaftlicher Methode behauptet. Ihr Anliegen ist, Erfahrung von Wahrheit, die den Kontrollbereich wissenschaftlicher Methodik übersteigt, überall aufzusuchen, wo sie begegnet und auf die ihr eigene Legitimation zu befragen."

2.2. CREATION MEANS TOTAL DEPENDENCE ON THE GOD OF CREATION

Being created means being totally dependent upon God and God's Word and God's Presence. There is no area in which a creature would be self-dependent and independent of God. Creation means a complete, total in every respect dependence on the God of Creation. To believe in God means nothing else but to believe in the God of Creation. In the biblical tradition God is always the God of Creation. In other words, Creation means that God, no other divinity, is really the Life of all that is created. With Hans Kessler, we can formulate it thus: God is the one, without whom there is nothing.³ This implies a very close relation between Creator and Creation. The existence of every single creature is a pure gift of the Creator. No creature can give itself existence, much less keep itself in existence. Creation in its very depths is dependent on the Creator.⁴

The other side of the belief in creation refers to the fact that all creatures are intimately connected with one another. Creation is a living unity in diversity. A human being, to say nothing of other creatures, can do nothing by him/herself. Not only breath, but every aspect of all life is the result of this belonging together. Appearances to the contrary, not even our breathing in and breathing out is a human achievement. We can breathe in and out, because it is made possible through mutual interdependence and belongingness.⁵ Humans as trustees carry responsibility for the maintenance of this belongingness; they have to see to it that it is in no way destroyed.

Right up to our times, the biblical traditions have been blamed for the fact that humans have "subdued" the earth. For has not the Bible revealed the unambiguous command of God: "Subdue the earth, rule over the animals" (Gen 1, 26-28)?⁶ A refutation of such views would be out of place in this paper; it would disrupt its whole scheme. It is enough to point out that serious studies

³ H. Kessler, *Das Stöhnen der Natur: Pläydoyer für eine Schöpfungsspiritualität und Schöpfungsethik* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1990), p. 52.

⁴ Cf. J. Ratzinger, "Schöpfung," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 9, 1967, p. 464: "Die Totalabhängigkeit, in der das geschaffene Sein, sofern es *Sein* hat, dem Schöpfer zugeordnet bleibt, wird von der traditionellen Theologie als 'Erhaltung' der Schöpfung bezeichnet, deren konkrete Bedeutung in der Lehre von der Mitwirkung Gottes näher durchreflektiert wird."

⁵ H. Kessler, *Das Stöhnen der Natur*, p. 54 emphasizes that the human person is created in solidarity with all beings. He also cites the more recent literature, which has worked out the details of this aspect. The overemphasized anthropocentricity of the earlier Christian interpretations of creation makes room today for a solidarity of the human person with creation in its entirety. The anthropocentric tendency of Walter Kern is exemplary. See his "Zur theologischen Auslegung des Schöpfungsglaubens," in J. Feiner and M. Löhrer, eds., *Mysterium Salutis: Grundriss heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik*, Vol. II (Einsiedeln/Zürich/Köln: Benziger, 1967), pp. 529 ff.

⁶ C. Amery, *Das Ende der Vorsehung: Die gnadenlosen Folgen des Christentums* (Reinbeck: Rowolt, 1972); E. Drewermann, *Der tödliche Fortschritt: Von der Zerstörung der Erde und des Menschen im Erbe des Christentums* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1983).

express a different conclusion. They show that such sweeping statements and suspicions are short-circuits that distort historical facts.⁷

2.3. CREATION IS AN ON-GOING HAPPENING

Creation is an on-going happening. It is not as if God first brings the universe into being and then the universe moves on its own; as if God had so created the world that it continues to work, as it were, on its own steam. Sometimes creation has been understood in this manner as a once and for all event. As a matter of fact, creation, which is the beginning of the history of salvation, leads to eschatology, which is its fulfilment. The continuously running history of salvation is a continuous creation.⁸

Clearly the biblical language of creation is a symbolic language, not an in-

⁷ H. Kessler, *Das Stöhnen der Natur*, pp. 32-35. Kessler summarizes both the refutation of such opinions and the interpretation of the relevant biblical passages and the historical development as follows:

Zunächst ist es historisch falsch, die Entwicklung von Naturwissenschaft, Technik und Naturobjektivierung im Abendland einfach auf die Voraussetzung des jüdisch-christlichen Schöpfungsglaubens (mit seiner Unterscheidung von Gott und Welt und seiner Entdivinisierung der Welt Dinge zu Geschöpfen) zurückzuführen. Der jüdisch-christliche Schöpfungsglaube mußte überhaupt nicht zu solchen Entwicklungen führen, wie allein schon ein Blick auf das östliche oder das äthiopische Christentum erweist oder auch der Codex Justinians (529), der eine die Mitkreatur einbeziehende Humanität vertritt. Wie wir noch sehen werden, spielten ganz andere (geographische, kulturelle usw.) Faktoren eine ausschlaggebende Rolle – neben der schon antiken Durchsetzung der anthropozentrisch-sophistischen statt der ionischen Naturphilosophie... Sodann: Der biblische Schöpfungsauftrag wurde bis in die Neuzeit hinein in seinem ganzen Zusammenhang gelesen und so gerade nicht als Aufforderung zur selbstherrlichen Instrumentalisierung und Ausbeutung der Natur verstanden. Ganz im Gegenteil. Von Beginn an spielte im Christentum zum Beispiel die Psalmenfrömmigkeit mit ihrem Lobpreis für alle Geschöpfe eine nicht zu unterschätzende Rolle – im Gottesdienst und im täglichen... Stundengebet: wer bei Tagesanbruch die "Laudes" anstimmte, konnte anschließend kaum die Natur – dazu noch im Gegensatz zur Auffassung der Zeit – als seelenlos empfinden. Allein schon von daher erstaunt es wenig, daß sich nicht nur im ostkirchlichen, sondern genauso im westkirchlichen Christentum eine reiche Fülle von Zeugnissen von Naturfrömmigkeit findet. Sie zeigen: hier wie dort hat man durchgängig in einer Schöpfer und ganze Schöpfung umfassenden Dreiecksbeziehung Gott-Mensch-Natur gedacht und diese nicht zu einer bloßen Beziehung Gott-Mensch bzw. gar Gott-Seele verengt; diese verhängnisvolle Verengung blieb wesentlich der westlichen Neuzeit vorbehalten. Historiker urteilen daher: "Wer nicht über die Gabe verfügt,, 'Gras wachsen' zu hören, dürfte Mühe haben, vor der Neuzeit merkliche Unterschiede zwischen östlicher und westlicher Naturtheologie und Frömmigkeit wahrzunehmen." Und auf die Art des erkenntnistmäßigen Umgangs mit der Natur überhaupt bezogen: Es gibt in der Geschichte der Naturerkenntnis mit dem Eintritt des Christentums in die Mittelmeerwelt...keinen schroffen Bruch, sondern allenfalls Akzentverschiebungen." Ganz entsprechend läßt sich eine durchgehende Kontinuität der abendländischen wissenschaftlichen Tradition von der Zeit der Griechen bis zum 17. Jahrhundert" feststellen; erst dort ist ein tiefgehender Traditionsbruch zu erkennen."

⁸ The natural scientist and theologian A. R. Peacocke expresses this as follows: "*Gott erschafft kontinuierlich; Gott ist semper creator. Gott ist der immanente Schöpfer, der in den Prozessen der natürlichen Ordnung und durch sie schöpferisch wirksam ist*" ("Natur und Gott: Für eine Theologie im Zeitalter der Wissenschaft," in *Gott, der Kosmos und die Freiheit: Biologie, Philosophie und Theologie im Gespräch*, ed. G. Fuchs and H. Kessler [Würzburg: Echter, 1996], p. 179).



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