

meaning and significance of these sources for the critical questions of our time. What these theologians sought was a spiritual and intellectual communion with Christianity in its most vital moments as transmitted to us in its classic texts, a communion which would nourish, invigorate, and rejuvenate twentieth-century Catholicism.

The *ressourcement* movement bore great fruit in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and has deeply influenced the work of Pope John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger, formerly Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, now Pope Benedict XVI.

The present series is rooted in this twentieth-century renewal of theology, above all as the renewal is carried in the spirit of de Lubac and von Balthasar. In keeping with that spirit, the series understands *ressourcement* as revitalization: a return to the sources, for the purpose of developing a theology that will truly meet the challenges of our time. Some of the features of the series, then, will be:

- a return to classical (patristic-mediaeval) sources;
- a renewed interpretation of St. Thomas;
- a dialogue with the major movements and thinkers of the twentieth century, with particular attention to problems associated with the Enlightenment, modernity, liberalism.

The series will publish out-of-print or as yet untranslated studies by earlier authors associated with the *ressourcement* movement. The series also plans to publish works by contemporary authors sharing in the aim and spirit of this earlier movement. This will include interpretations of de Lubac and von Balthasar and, more generally, any works in theology, philosophy, history, literature, and the arts which give renewed expression to an authentic Catholic sensibility.

The editor of the *Ressourcement* series, David L. Schindler, is Gagnon Professor of Fundamental Theology at the John Paul II Institute in Washington, D.C., and editor of the North American edition of *Communio: International Catholic Review*, a federation of journals in thirteen countries founded in Europe in 1972 by Hans Urs von Balthasar, Jean Daniélou, Henri de Lubac, Joseph Ratzinger, and others.

'In the Beginning . . .'

*A Catholic Understanding of the Story
of Creation and the Fall*

Pope Benedict XVI

Joseph Ratzinger

Translated by

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Preface

The human threat to all living things, which is being spoken of everywhere these days, has given a new urgency to the theme of creation.

Paradoxically, however, the creation account is noticeably and nearly completely absent from catechesis, preaching, and even theology. The creation narratives go unmentioned; it is asking too much to expect anyone to speak of them. Against the background posed by this situation I set myself the task, in the early part of 1981, of attempting a creation catechesis for adults in four Lenten homilies in the cathedral of Munich, the Liebfrauenkirche. I was unable then to meet the request of many people to publish the homilies in book form; I had no time to go through the transcripts of them that different persons kindly placed at my disposal. Since then, from the perspective of my new work, the critical state of the creation theme in the pres-

ent-day kerygma has become so much more evident that I now feel pressed to bring out the old manuscripts again and prepare them for printing. The basic character of the homilies has not been changed, and the limits imposed by the homiletic form have been taken into consideration. I hope that this little book may be the occasion for others to pursue this theme better than I have, and for the message of the God who is Creator to find its appropriate place once more in the contemporary kerygma.

Feast of Saint Augustine
1985 Rome

JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER

Author's Note

For the practical abandonment of the doctrine of creation in influential modern theology I would like to mention here just two significant examples. In J. Feiner and L. Fischer, eds., *Neues Glaubensbuch. Degemeinsame christliche Glaube* (Basil-Zurich, 1973), the theme of creation is hidden away in a chapter devoted to "History and Cosmos," which in turn belongs to the fourth part of the book, entitled "Faith and World." The three previous parts deal with "The Question of God," "God in Jesus Christ," and "The New Human Being." One dare not hope for anything more posi-

tive from this arrangement, but the text itself, by A. Dumas and O. H. Pesch, goes beyond one's worst fears. The reader discovers here phrases such as "Concepts like selection and mutation are intellectually much more honest than that of creation" (p. 433); "'Creation' as a cosmic plan is an idea that has seen its day" (ibid.); "The concept of creation is withal an unreal concept" (p. 435); "Creation means a call addressed to the human being. Whatever else may be said about it, even in the Bible, is not the message of creation itself but rather its partly mythological and apocalyptic formulation" (pp. 435-36). Would it be too harsh to say that the continued use of the term "creation" against the background of these presuppositions represents a semantic betrayal?

The same reductionist position, less crassly formulated, appears in *La foi des catholiques. Catéchèse fondamentale* (Paris, 1984). This 736-page work dedicates five full pages to the theme of creation. These are found in the third part, under the heading "Humanity according to the Gospel." (The first two parts are entitled "A Living Faith" and "The Christian Revelation.") Creation is defined as follows: "Thus, in speaking of God as Creator, it is affirmed that the first and final meaning of life is to be found in God himself, most intimately present to our being" (p. 356). Here, too, the term "creation" has completely lost its original meaning. Moreover, in type different from that which appears in the rest of the text and which is

otherwise used for lengthy citations or supplementary texts, the “current objections to creation” are presented in four points, to which the average reader (myself included) can find no response in the text. He would then have to reinterpret creation in an existential sense. With such an “existential” reduction of the creation theme, however, there occurs a huge (if not a total) loss of the reality of the faith, whose God no longer has anything to do with matter.

God the Creator

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. And God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. And

God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day. And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

Genesis 1:1-19

These words, with which Holy Scripture begins, always have the effect on me of the solemn tolling of a great old bell, which stirs the heart from afar with its beauty and dignity and gives it an inkling of the mystery of eternity. For many of us, moreover, these words recall the memory of our first encounter with God's holy book, the Bible, which was opened for us at this spot. It at once brought us out of our small child's world, captivated us with its poetry, and gave us a feeling for the immeasurability of creation and its Creator.

Yet these words give rise to a certain conflict. They are beautiful and familiar, but are they also true? Everything seems to speak against it, for science has long since disposed of the concepts that we have just now heard — the idea of a world that is completely comprehensible in terms of space and time, and the idea that creation was built up piece by piece over the course of seven days. Instead of this we now face measurements that transcend all comprehension. Today we hear of the Big Bang, which happened billions of years ago and with which the universe began its expansion — an expansion that continues to occur without interruption. And it was not in neat succession that the stars were hung and the green of the fields created; it was rather in complex ways and over vast periods of time that the earth and the universe were constructed as we now know them.

Do these words, then, count for anything? In fact a

theologian said not long ago that creation has now become an unreal concept. If one is to be intellectually honest one ought to speak no longer of creation but rather of mutation and selection. Are these words true? Or have they perhaps, along with the entire Word of God and the whole biblical tradition, come out of the reveries of the infant age of human history, for which we occasionally experience homesickness but to which we can nevertheless not return, inasmuch as we cannot live on nostalgia? Is there an answer to this that we can claim for ourselves in this day and age?

The Difference between Form and Content in the Creation Narrative

One answer was already worked out some time ago, as the scientific view of the world was gradually crystallizing; many of you probably came across it in your religious instruction. It says that the Bible is not a natural science textbook, nor does it intend to be such. It is a religious book, and consequently one cannot obtain information about the natural sciences from it. One cannot get from it a scientific explanation of how the world arose; one can only glean religious experience from it. Anything else is an image and a way of describing things whose aim is to make profound realities graspable to human beings. One must

distinguish between the form of portrayal and the content that is portrayed. The form would have been chosen from what was understandable at the time — from the images which surrounded the people who lived then, which they used in speaking and in thinking, and thanks to which they were able to understand the greater realities. And only the reality that shines through these images would be what was intended and what was truly enduring. Thus Scripture would not wish to inform us about how the different species of plant life gradually appeared or how the sun and the moon and the stars were established. Its purpose ultimately would be to say one thing: *God* created the world. The world is not, as people used to think then, a chaos of mutually opposed forces; nor is it the dwelling of demonic powers from which human beings must protect themselves. The sun and the moon are not deities that rule over them, and the sky that stretches over their heads is not full of mysterious and adversary divinities. Rather, all of this comes from one power, from God's eternal Reason, which became — in the Word — the power of creation. All of this comes from the same Word of God that we meet in the act of faith. Thus, insofar as human beings realized that the world came from the Word, they ceased to care about the gods and demons. In addition, the world was freed so that reason might lift itself up to God and so that human beings might approach this God fearlessly. In this

Word they experienced the true enlightenment that does away with the gods and the mysterious powers and that reveals to them that there is only one power everywhere and that we are in his hands. This is the living God, and this same power (which created the earth and the stars and which bears the whole universe) is the very one whom we meet in the Word of Holy Scripture. In this Word we come into contact with the real primordial force of the world and with the power that is above all powers.¹

I believe that this view is correct, but it is not enough. For when we are told that we have to distinguish between the images themselves and what those images mean, then we can ask in turn: Why wasn't that said earlier? Evidently it must have been taught differently at one time or else Galileo would never have been put on trial. And so the suspicion grows that ultimately perhaps this way of viewing things is only a trick of the church and of theologians who have run out of solutions but do not want to admit it, and now they are looking for something to hide behind. And on the whole the impression is given that the history of Christianity in the last four hundred years has been a constant rearguard action as the assertions of the faith and of theology have been dismantled piece by piece. People have,

1. A good presentation of this exegesis of the Genesis account, along with extensive references, may be found, e.g., in M. Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik 2* (Munich, 1949), 30-39.

it is true, always found tricks as a way of getting out of difficulties. But there is an almost ineluctable fear that we will gradually end up in emptiness and that the time will come when there will be nothing left to defend and hide behind, that the whole landscape of Scripture and of the faith will be overrun by a kind of "reason" that will no longer be able to take any of this seriously.

Along with this there is another disquieting consideration. For one can ask: If theologians or even the church can shift the boundaries here between image and intention, between what lies buried in the past and what is of enduring value, why can they not do so elsewhere — as, for instance, with respect to Jesus' miracles? And if there, why not also with respect to what is absolutely central — the cross and the resurrection of the Lord? This would be an operation whose aim would be, supposedly, to defend the faith, inasmuch as it would say: Behind what is there, which we can no longer defend, there is something more real. Such an operation often ends up by putting the faith itself in doubt, by raising the question of the honesty of those who are interpreting it and of whether anything at all there is enduring. As far as theological views of this sort are concerned, finally, quite a number of people have the abiding impression that the church's faith is like a jellyfish: no one can get a grip on it and it has no firm center. It is on the many halfhearted interpretations of the biblical Word that can

be found everywhere that a sickly Christianity takes its stand — a Christianity that is no longer true to itself and that consequently cannot radiate encouragement and enthusiasm. It gives, instead, the impression of being an organization that keeps on talking although it has nothing else to say, because twisted words are not convincing and are only concerned to hide their emptiness.

The Unity of the Bible as a Criterion for Its Interpretation

So now we still have to ask: Is the distinction between the image and what is intended to be expressed only an evasion, because we can no longer rely on the text even though we still want to make something of it, or are there criteria from the Bible itself that attest to this distinction? Does it give us access to indications of this sort, and did the faith of the church know of these indications in the past and acknowledge them?

Let us look at Holy Scripture anew with these questions in mind. There we can determine first of all that the creation account in Genesis 1, which we have just heard, is not, from its very beginning, something that is closed in on itself. Indeed, Holy Scripture in its entirety was not written from beginning to end like a novel or a textbook.

It is, rather, the echo of God's history with his people. It arose out of the struggles and the vagaries of this history, and all through it we can catch a glimpse of the rises and falls, the sufferings and hopes, and the greatness and failures of this history. The Bible is thus the story of God's struggle with human beings to make himself understandable to them over the course of time; but it is also the story of their struggle to seize hold of God over the course of time. Hence the theme of creation is not set down once for all in one place; rather, it accompanies Israel throughout its history, and, indeed, the whole Old Testament is a journeying with the Word of God. Only in the process of this journeying was the Bible's real way of declaring itself formed, step by step. Consequently we ourselves can only discover where this way is leading if we follow it to the end. In this respect — as a way — the Old and New Testaments belong together. For the Christian the Old Testament represents, in its totality, an advance toward Christ; only when it attains to him does its real meaning, which was gradually hinted at, become clear. Thus every individual part derives its meaning from the whole, and the whole derives its meaning from its end — from Christ. Hence we only interpret an individual text theologically correctly (as the fathers of the church recognized and as the faith of the church in every age has recognized) when we see it as a way that is leading us ever forward, when we

see in the text where this way is tending and what its inner direction is.²

What significance, now, does this insight have for the understanding of the creation account? The first thing to be said is this: Israel always believed in the Creator God, and this faith it shared with all the great civilizations of the ancient world. For, even in the moments when monotheism was eclipsed, all the great civilizations always knew of the Creator of heaven and earth. There is a surprising commonality here even between civilizations that could never have been in touch with one another. In this commonality we can get a good grasp of the profound and never altogether lost contact that human beings had with God's truth. In Israel itself the creation theme went through several different stages. It was never completely absent, but it was not always equally important. There were times when Israel was so preoccupied with the sufferings or the hopes of its own history, so fastened upon the here and now, that there was hardly any use in its looking back at creation; indeed, it hardly could. The moment when creation became a dominant theme occurred during the Babylonian Exile. It was then that the account that we have just heard — based, to

2. Re this and the following, cf. esp. C. Westermann, *Genesis 1* (Neukirchener Verlag, 1974), 1-103. On reading the Bible from the point of view of the unity of its history, cf. esp. H. Gese, *Zur biblischen Theologie. Alttestamentliche Vorträge* (Munich, 1977), 9-30.

be sure, on very ancient traditions — assumed its present form. Israel had lost its land and its temple. According to the mentality of the time this was something incomprehensible, for it meant that the God of Israel was vanquished — a God whose people, whose land, and whose worshipers could be snatched away from him. A God who could not defend his worshipers and his worship was seen to be, at the time, a weak God. Indeed, he was no God at all; he had abandoned his divinity. And so, being driven out of their own land and being erased from the map was for Israel a terrible trial: Has our God been vanquished, and is our faith void?

At this moment the prophets opened a new page and taught Israel that it was only then that the true face of God appeared and that he was not restricted to that particular piece of land. He had never been: He had promised this piece of land to Abraham before he settled there, and he had been able to bring his people out of Egypt. He could do both things because he was not the God of one place but had power over heaven and earth. Therefore he could drive his faithless people into another land in order to make himself known there. And so it came to be understood that this God of Israel was not a God like the other gods, but that he was the God who held sway over every land and people. He could do this, however, because he himself had created everything in heaven and on earth. It was in exile

and in the seeming defeat of Israel that there occurred an opening to the awareness of the God who holds every people and all of history in his hands, who holds everything because he is the creator of everything and the source of all power.

This faith now had to find its own contours, and it had to do so precisely vis-à-vis the seemingly victorious religion of Babylon, which was displayed in splendid liturgies, like that of the New Year, in which the re-creation of the world was celebrated and brought to its fulfillment. It had to find its contours vis-à-vis the great Babylonian creation account of Enuma Elish, which depicted the origin of the world in its own fashion. There it is said that the world was produced out of a struggle between opposing powers and that it assumed its form when Marduk, the god of light, appeared and split in two the body of the primordial dragon. From this sundered body heaven and earth came to be. Thus the firmament and the earth were produced from the sundered body of the dead dragon, but from its blood Marduk fashioned human beings. It is a foreboding picture of the world and of humankind that we encounter here: The world is a dragon's body, and human beings have dragon's blood in them. At the very origin of the world lurks something sinister, and in the deepest part of humankind there lies something rebellious, demonic, and evil. In this view of things only a dictator, the king of

Babylon, who is the representative of Marduk, can repress the demonic and restore the world to order.³

Such views were not simply fairy tales. They expressed the discomfiting realities that human beings experienced in the world and among themselves. For often enough it looks as if the world is a dragon's lair and human blood is dragon's blood. But despite all oppressive experiences the scriptural account says that it was not so. The whole tale of these sinister powers melts away in a few words: "The earth was without form and void." Behind these Hebrew words lie the dragon and the demonic powers that are spoken of elsewhere. Now it is the void that alone remains and that stands as the sole power over against God. And in the face of any fear of these demonic forces we are told that God alone, who is the eternal Reason that is eternal love, created the world, and that it rests in his hands. Only with this in mind can we appreciate the dramatic confrontation implicit in this biblical text, in which all these confused myths were rejected and the world was given its origin in God's Reason and in his Word. This could be shown almost word for word in the present text — as, for example, when the sun and the moon are referred to as lamps that God has hung in the sky for the measurement of time. To the people of

3. The text of Enuma Elish is translated by E. A. Speiser in J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 2nd rev. ed. (Princeton, 1955), 60-72.

that age it must have seemed a terrible sacrilege to designate the great gods sun and moon as lamps for measuring time. Here we see the audacity and the temperateness of the faith that, in confronting the pagan myths, made the light of truth appear by showing that the world was not a demonic contest but that it arose from God's Reason and reposes on God's Word. Hence this creation account may be seen as the decisive "enlightenment" of history and as a breakthrough out of the fears that had oppressed humankind. It placed the world in the context of reason and recognized the world's reasonableness and freedom. But it may also be seen as the *true* enlightenment from the fact that it put human reason firmly on the primordial basis of God's creating Reason, in order to establish it in truth and in love, without which an "enlightenment" would be exorbitant and ultimately foolish.

To this something further must be added. I just said how, gradually, in confronting its pagan environment and its own heart, the people of Israel experienced what "creation" was. Implicit here is the fact that the classic creation account is not the only creation text of sacred Scripture. Immediately after it there follows another one, composed earlier and containing other imagery. In the Psalms there are still others, and there the movement to clarify the faith concerning creation is carried further: In its confrontation with Hellenistic civilization, Wisdom literature reworks the

theme without sticking to the old images such as the seven days. Thus we can see how the Bible itself constantly re-adapts its images to a continually developing way of thinking, how it changes time and again in order to bear witness, time and again, to the *one* thing that has come to it, in truth, from God's Word, which is the message of his creating act. In the Bible itself the images are free and they correct themselves ongoingly. In this way they show, by means of a gradual and interactive process, that they are only images, which reveal something deeper and greater.

Christology as a Criterion

One decisive fact must still be mentioned at this point: The Old Testament is not the end of the road. What is worked out in the so-called Wisdom literature is the final bridge on a long road that leads to the message of Jesus Christ and to the New Testament. Only there do we find the conclusive and normative scriptural creation account, which reads: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1, 3). John quite consciously took up here once again the first words of the Bible and read the creation account anew, with Christ, in order to tell us

definitively what the Word is which appears throughout the Bible and with which God desires to shake our hearts. Thus it becomes clear to us that we Christians do not read the Old Testament for its own sake but always with Christ and through Christ. Consequently the law of Moses, the rituals of purification, the regulations concerning food, and all other such things are not to be carried out by us; otherwise the biblical Word would be senseless and meaningless. We read all of this not as if it were something complete in itself. We read it with him in whom all things have been fulfilled and in whom all of its validity and truth are revealed. Therefore we read the law, like the creation account, with him; and from him (and not from some subsequently discovered trick) we know what God wished over the course of centuries to have gradually penetrate the human heart and soul. Christ frees us from the slavery of the letter, and precisely thus does he give back to us, renewed, the truth of the images.

The ancient church and the church of the Middle Ages also knew this. They knew that the Bible is a whole and that we only understand its truth when we understand it with Christ in mind — with the freedom that he bestowed on us and with the profundity whereby he reveals what is enduring through images. Only at the beginning of the modern era was this dynamic forgotten — this dynamic that is the living unity of Scripture, which we can only under-

stand with Christ in the freedom that he gives us and in the certitude that comes from that freedom. The new historical thinking wanted to read every text in itself, in its bare literalness. Its interest lay only in the exact explanation of particulars, but meanwhile it forgot the Bible as a whole. In a word, it no longer read the texts forward but backward — that is, with a view not to Christ but to the probable origins of those texts. People were no longer concerned with understanding what a text said or what a thing was from the aspect of its fulfillment, but from that of its beginning, its source. As a result of this isolation from the whole and of this literal-mindedness with respect to particulars, which contradicts the entire inner nature of the Bible but which was now considered to be the truly scientific approach, there arose that conflict between the natural sciences and theology which has been, up to our own day, a burden for the faith. This did not have to be the case, because the faith was, from its very beginnings, greater, broader, and deeper. Even today faith in creation is not unreal; even today it is reasonable; even from the perspective of the data of the natural sciences it is the “better hypothesis,” offering a fuller and better explanation than any of the other theories. Faith is reasonable. The reasonableness of creation derives from God’s Reason, and there is no other really convincing explanation. What the pagan Aristotle said four hundred years before Christ — when he opposed those who asserted that every-

thing has come to exist through chance, even though he said what he did without the knowledge that our faith in creation gives us⁴ — is still valid today. The reasonableness of the universe provides us with access to God's Reason, and the Bible is and continues to be the true "enlightenment," which has given the world over to human reason and not to exploitation by human beings, because it opened reason to God's truth and love. Therefore we must not in our own day conceal our faith in creation. We *may* not conceal it, for only if it is true that the universe comes from freedom, love, and reason, and that these are the real underlying powers, can we trust one another, go forward into the future, and live as human beings. God is the Lord of all things because he is their creator, and only therefore can we pray to him. For this means that freedom and love are not ineffectual ideas but rather that they are sustaining forces of reality.

And so we wish to cite today, in thankfulness and joy, the church's creed: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." Amen.

4. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Z7.

The Meaning of the Biblical Creation Accounts

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day. And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle ac-

ording to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 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." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the

seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Genesis 1:20-24

In our first encounter with the Bible's and the church's faith in creation, two realizations became particularly clear. We can sum up the first in this way: As Christians we read Holy Scripture with Christ. He is our guide all the way through it. He indicates to us in reliable fashion what an image is and where the real, enduring content of a biblical expression may be found. At the same time he is freedom from a false slavery to literalism and a guarantee of the solid, realistic truth of the Bible, which does not dissipate into a cloud of pious pleasantries but remains the sure ground upon which we can stand. Our second realization was this: Faith in creation is reasonable. Even if reason itself cannot perhaps give an account of it, it searches in faith and finds there the answer that it had been looking for.

The Reasonableness of Faith in Creation

This insight now has to be deepened along two lines. The first thing to be considered is the "that" of creation. This "that" requires a reason; it points to the power that was there at the beginning and that could say: "Let there be. . . ." In the nineteenth century this was viewed otherwise. The natural sciences were profoundly influenced by the two great theories of the conservation of matter and the conservation of energy. As a result, this whole universe appeared to be an ever-existent cosmos, governed by the unchanging laws of nature, depending on itself alone, and needing nothing outside of itself. It was there as a whole, and Laplace was able to say of it: "I no longer need the hypothesis of God." But then new discoveries were made. The theory of entropy was postulated, which says that energy once used up in a particular area can never be restored. But that means that the universe is subject to both becoming and destruction. Temporality is inscribed upon it. After that came the discovery of the convertibility of matter into energy, which substantially altered the two theories of conservation. Then came the theory of relativity, and still other discoveries were made, all of which showed that the universe, so to speak, was marked by temporality — a temporality that speaks to us of a beginning and an end, and of the passage from a beginning to an end. Even if time were virtually immea-

asurable, there would still be discernible through the obscurity of billions of years, in the awareness of the temporality of being, that moment to which the Bible refers as the beginning — that beginning which points to him who had the power to produce being and to say: "Let there be . . .," and it was so.

A second consideration goes beyond the pure "that" of being. It touches upon the so-called design of the universe, the model that was used in its construction. Out of that "Let there be" it was not some haphazard stew that was concocted. The more we know of the universe the more profoundly we are struck by a Reason whose ways we can only contemplate with astonishment. In pursuing them we can see anew that creating Intelligence to whom we owe our own reason. Albert Einstein once said that in the laws of nature "there is revealed such a superior Reason that everything significant which has arisen out of human thought and arrangement is, in comparison with it, the merest empty reflection."¹ In what is most vast, in the world of heavenly bodies, we see revealed a powerful Reason that holds the universe together. And we are penetrating ever deeper into what is smallest, into the cell and into the primordial units

1. A. Einstein, *Mein Weltbild*, ed. C. Seelig (Stuttgart-Zurich-Vienna, 1953), 21. Cf. also my *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (New York, 1973), 106.

of life; here, too, we discover a Reason that astounds us, such that we must say with Saint Bonaventure: "Whoever does not see here is blind. Whoever does not hear here is deaf. And whoever does not begin to adore here and to praise the creating Intelligence is dumb." Jacques Monod, who rejects as unscientific every kind of faith in God and who thinks that the world originated out of an interplay of chance and necessity, tells in the very work in which he attempts summarily to portray and justify his view of the world that, after attending the lectures which afterward appeared in book form, François Mauriac is supposed to have said: "What this professor wants to inflict on us is far more unbelievable than what we poor Christians were ever expected to believe."² Monod does not dispute this. His thesis is that the entire ensemble of nature has arisen out of errors and dissonances. He cannot help but say himself that such a conception is in fact absurd. But, according to him, the scientific method demands that a question not be permitted to which the answer would have to be God. One can only say that a method of this sort is pathetic. God himself shines through the reasonableness of his creation. Physics and biology, and the natural sciences in general, have given us a new and unheard-of creation account with vast

2. J. Monod, *Zufall und Notwendigkeit. Philosophische Fragen der modernen Biologie* (Munich, 1973), 171 and 149.

new images, which let us recognize the face of the Creator and which make us realize once again that at the very beginning and foundation of all being there is a creating Intelligence. The universe is not the product of darkness and unreason. It comes from intelligence, freedom, and from the beauty that is identical with love. Seeing this gives us the courage to keep on living, and it empowers us, comforted thereby, to take upon ourselves the adventure of life.

The Enduring Significance of the Symbolic Elements in the Text

To these two considerations, with which we have deepened our fundamental understanding of our first observation, must now be added a further step. Thus far it has become clear that the biblical creation narratives represent another way of speaking about reality than that with which we are familiar from physics and biology. They do not depict the process of becoming or the mathematical structure of matter; instead, they say in different ways that there is only *one* God and that the universe is not the scene of a struggle among dark forces but rather the creation of his Word. But this does not imply that the individual passages of the Bible sink into meaninglessness and that this bare extract alone has any value. They, too, express the truth—in another

way, to be sure, than is the case in physics and biology. They represent truth in the way that symbols do — just as, for example, a Gothic window gives us a deep insight into reality, thanks to the effects of light that it produces and to the figures that it portrays.

I would like to seize upon two elements here. The first is that the biblical creation account is marked by numbers that reproduce not the mathematical structure of the universe but the inner design of its fabric, so to say, or rather the idea according to which it was constructed. There the numbers three, four, seven, and ten dominate. The words “God said” appear ten times in the creation account. In this way the creation narrative anticipates the Ten Commandments. This makes us realize that these Ten Commandments are, as it were, an echo of the creation; they are not arbitrary inventions for the purpose of erecting barriers to human freedom but signs pointing to the spirit, the language, and the meaning of creation; they are a translation of the language of the universe, a translation of God’s logic, which constructed the universe. The number that governs the whole is seven; in the scheme of seven days it permeates the whole in a way that cannot be overlooked. This is the number of a phase of the moon, and thus we are told throughout this account that the rhythm of our heavenly neighbor also sounds the rhythm of our human life. It becomes clear that we human beings are not bounded by

the limits of our own little “I” but that we are part of the rhythm of the universe, that we too, so to speak, assimilate the heavenly rhythm and movement in our own bodies and thus, thanks to this interlinking, are fitted into the logic of the universe. In the Bible this thought goes still further. It lets us know that the rhythm of the heavenly bodies is, more profoundly, a way of expressing the rhythm of the heart and the rhythm of God’s love, which manifests itself there.³

Creation and Worship

With this we have arrived at the second symbolic element in the creation account about which I wanted to make some comments. For here we encounter not merely the rhythm of the seven and its cosmic significance. This rhythm is itself at the service of a still deeper meaning: Creation is oriented to the sabbath, which is the sign of the covenant between God and humankind. In a short while we shall have to reflect more closely on this, but for the time being, as a first step, we can draw this conclusion: Creation is designed in such a way that it is oriented to worship. It fulfills its purpose and assumes its significance when it is lived, ever new, with a view to worship.

3. For the exegesis of the Genesis account, in addition to C. Westermann, *Genesis 1* (Neukirchen, 1974), 1-103; cf. esp. G. von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. J. H. Marks, 3rd rev. ed. (Philadelphia, 1972) and also J. Scharbert, *Genesis I-II* (Würzburg, 1983).

Creation exists for the sake of worship. As Saint Benedict said in his Rule: *Operi Dei nihil praeponatur* — “Nothing must be put before the service of God.” This is not the expression of an otherworldly piety but a clear and sober translation of the creation account and of the message that it bears for our lives. The true center, the power that moves and shapes from within in the rhythm of the stars and of our lives, is worship. Our life’s rhythm moves in proper measure when it is caught up in this.

Ultimately every people has known this. The creation accounts of all civilizations point to the fact that the universe exists for worship and for the glorification of God. This cultural unity with respect to the deepest human questions is something very precious. In my conversations with African and Asian bishops, particularly at episcopal synods, it becomes clear to me time and time again, often in striking ways, how there is in the great traditions of the peoples a oneness on the deepest level with biblical faith. In these traditions there is preserved a primordial human knowledge that is open to Christ. The danger that confronts us today in our technological civilization is that we have cut ourselves off from this primordial knowledge, which serves as a guidepost and which links the great cultures, and that an increasing scientific know-how is preventing us from being aware of the fact of creation.

But in honesty we are obliged to add here that this knowledge is being constantly distorted. The world religions

are all aware of the profound idea that the universe exists for the sake of worship, but this idea is frequently misinterpreted to mean that in worship the human being gives something to the gods that they themselves stand in need of. It is thought that the divinity demands this attention on the part of human beings and that this worship has for its purpose the preservation of the world. Here, however, the possibility lies open for manipulation. The human being can now say: The gods need me, and so I can put pressure on them and, if I must, force them. Out of the pure relationship of love, which is what worship is supposed to be, there develops the manipulative attempt to seize control of the world, and thus worship can lead to a debasing of the world and of the human person. The Bible, to be sure, could take up the fundamental notion of the universe as existing for the sake of worship, but at the same time it had to purify it. This idea is to be found there, as has already been said, in the context of the sabbath. The Bible declares that creation has its structure in the sabbath ordinance. But the sabbath is in its turn the summing up of Torah, the law of Israel. This means that worship has a moral aspect to it. God’s whole moral order has been taken up into it; only thus is it truly worship. To this must be added the fact that Torah, the law, is an expression of Israel’s history with God. It is an expression of the covenant, and the covenant is in turn an expression of God’s love, of his “yes” to the human being that he created, so that he could both love and receive love.

Now we can grasp this notion better. We can say that God created the universe in order to enter into a history of love with humankind. He created it so that love could exist. Behind this lie words of Israel that lead directly to the New Testament. In Jewish literature it is said of Torah, which embodies the mystery of the covenant and of the history of God's love for humankind, that it was in the beginning, that it was with God, that by it was made all that was made, and that it was the light and the life of humankind. John only needed to take up these formulas and to apply them to him who is the living Word of God, saying that all things were made through him (cf. John 1:3). And even before him Paul had said: "All things were created through him and for him" (Colossians 1:16; cf. Colossians 1:15-23). God created the universe in order to be able to become a human being and pour out his love upon us and to invite us to love him in return.

The Sabbath Structure of Creation⁴

Now we have to go one step further and see how we can understand this better. In the creation account the sabbath is depicted as the day when the human being, in the freedom

4. Important remarks are made on this topic in K.-H. Schwarte, *Die Vorgeschichte der augustinischen Weltalterlehre* (Bonn, 1966), esp. 220-56.

of worship, participates in God's freedom, in God's rest, and thus in God's peace. To celebrate the sabbath means to celebrate the covenant. It means to return to the source and to sweep away all the defilement that our work has brought with it. It also means going forth into a new world in which there will no longer be slaves and masters but only free children of God — into a world in which humans and animals and the earth itself will share together as kin in God's peace and freedom.

It is from this notion that the Mosaic law developed, which has as its foundation the idea that the sabbath brings about universal equality. This is extended beyond the weekly sabbath in such fashion that every seventh year is also a sabbath, during which earth and human beings may rest. Every seventh year times seven there is a great sabbath year, when all debts are remitted and all purchases and sales annulled. The earth is to be received back from the creating hands of God, and everyone is to begin anew. We can perhaps best see the significance of this ordinance (which was in fact never carried out) from a brief observation that is made in the Second Book of Chronicles. Already in the first meditation I mentioned how Israel suffered during the exile inasmuch as God, as it were, denied himself and took away his land, his temple, and his worship. Even after the exile people continued to ask themselves: Why did God do this to us? Why this excessive punishment, which God seems to be

punishing himself with? (They could have had no idea at the time of how he would take all punishment on himself on the cross and of how he would let himself be wounded in the course of his love-history with humankind.) How could that be? In the Second Book of Chronicles the answer reads: All the many sins that the prophets inveighed against could not, in the end, be sufficient reason for such inordinate punishment. The reason had to lie somewhere deeper, somewhere closer to the heart of things. The Second Book of Chronicles describes this deepest cause in the following words: "The land enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years" (2 Chronicles 36:21).

What this means is that the people had rejected God's rest, its leisure, its worship, its peace, and its freedom, and so they fell into the slavery of activity. They brought the earth into the slavery of their activity and thereby enslaved themselves. Therefore God had to give them the sabbath that they denied themselves. In their "no" to the God-given rhythm of freedom and leisure they departed from their likeness to God and so did damage to the earth. Therefore they had to be snatched from their obstinate attachment to their own work. God had to begin afresh to make them his very own, and he had to free them from the domination of activity. *Operi Dei nihil praeponatur*: The worship of God, his freedom, and his rest come first. Thus and only thus can the human being truly live.

Exploiting the Earth?

With this we come to a final consideration. One particular word of the creation account requires a special interpretation. I am referring to the famous twenty-eighth verse of the first chapter, when God says to humankind: "Subdue the earth." For some time this phrase has come to be more and more the starting point for attacks against Christianity. Christianity, which is said to bear the guilt for the whole tragedy of our era, contradicts itself through the grace-less consequences of this phrase. The Club of Rome, which with its well-publicized blast about the limits of growth some time ago administered a severe shock to the postwar belief in progress, has since then come to see its critique of civilization (which has been widely accepted) as a critique of Christianity as well. It lies, they say, at the root of this culture of exploitation: The directive given to humankind to subdue the earth has opened the way fatefully to that bitter state of affairs that we now experience. In conjunction with ideas of this sort a Munich author has canonized the expression, enthusiastically taken up since he first used it, "the grace-less consequences of Christianity." What we had previously celebrated — namely, that through faith in creation the world has been demythologized and made reasonable; that sun, moon, and stars are no longer strange and powerful divinities but merely lights; that animals and plants

have lost their mystic qualities: all this has become an accusation against Christianity. Christianity is said to have transformed all the powers of the universe, which were once our brothers and sisters, into utilitarian objects for human beings, and in so doing it has led them to misuse plants and animals and in fact all the world's powers for the sake of an ideology of progress that thinks only of itself and cares only for itself.

What can be said in reply to this? The Creator's directive to humankind means that it is supposed to look after the world as God's creation, and to do so in accordance with the rhythm and the logic of creation. The sense of the directive is described in the next chapter of Genesis with the words "to till it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). An allusion is made here to the terminology of creation itself, and it signifies that the world is to be used for what it is capable of and for what it is called to, but not for what goes against it. Biblical faith implies in the first place that human persons are not closed in upon themselves: they must always be aware that they are situated in the context of the body of history, which will ultimately become the body of Christ. Past, present, and future must encounter and penetrate one another in every human life. Our age is the first to experience that hideous narcissism that cuts itself off from both past and future and that is preoccupied exclusively with its own present.

But now we must certainly ask ourselves: How did the mentality of power and activity, which threatens us all today, ever come to be? One of the first indications of a new way of looking at things appeared about the time of the Renaissance with Galileo, when he said that if nature did not voluntarily answer our questions but hid its secrets from us, then we would submit it to torture and in a wracking inquisition extract the answers from it that it would otherwise not give. The construction of the instruments of the natural sciences was for him as it were a readying of this torture, whereby human persons, despotlike, get the answer that they want to have from the accused. Only later, however, does this new way of looking at things take on a concrete and historically effective aspect, and it does this with Karl Marx. He was the one who said that humankind should no longer inquire into its origins and that to do so would be to act foolishly. Marx's intention here was to move from the question of understanding the "whence" of the universe and its design, which we spoke of at the beginning, since creation in its innermost reasonableness attested most strongly and ineluctably to the Creator, from whom we can never emancipate ourselves. Inasmuch as the question of creation can ultimately not be answered apart from a creating Intelligence, the question is seen as foolish from the very start. Creation is of no consequence; it is humanity that must produce the real creation, and it is that which

will count for something. This is the source of the change in humanity's fundamental directive vis-à-vis the world; it was at this point that progress became the real truth and matter became the material out of which human beings would create a world that was worth being lived in.⁵ Ernst Bloch intensified this idea and gave it a truly terrifying mien. He said that truth is now what we take it to be and that the only truth is change. Truth is, accordingly, whatever prevails, and as a result reality is "a signal to invade and an instruction to attack."⁶ It takes a "concrete hate-object"⁷ to stimulate us to make changes. For Bloch, consequently, the beautiful is not the radiance of the truth of things but rather the anticipated appearance of the future, toward which we are going and which we ourselves are constructing. Therefore, in his opinion, the cathedral of the future will be the laboratory, and the Basilicas of San Marco of the new age will be electrical plants. Then — so he asserts —

5. In this regard cf. my short study, *Konsequenzen des Schöpfungsglaubens* (Salzburg, 1980).

6. I take my citations from the illuminating book by F. Hartl, *Der Begriff des Schöpferischen. Deutungsversuche der Dialektik durch Ernst Bloch und Franz von Baader* (Frankfurt, 1979), 74-80. Cf. E. Bloch, *Prinzip Hoffnung* (Frankfurt, 1959), 319.

7. *Prinzip Hoffnung*, 318; Hartl, 80: "Without factionalism in love, even with a concrete hate-object, there is no real love; without factionalism vis-à-vis the revolutionary class standpoint there is merely idealism going backwards rather than praxis going forwards."

people will no longer need to distinguish between Sundays and workdays. There will no longer be any need for the sabbath, since human beings are their own creators in every respect. And they will also cease to concern themselves with merely dominating or shaping nature; now they will transform nature itself.⁸

Here we find the very thing that threatens our age formulated with the rarest clarity. Previously human beings could only transform particular things in nature; nature as such was not the object but rather the presupposition of their activity. Now, however, it itself has been delivered over to them *in toto*. Yet as a result they suddenly see themselves imperiled as never before. The reason for this lies in the attitude that views creation only as the product of chance and necessity. Thus it has no law, no direction of its own. The inner rhythm that we infer from the scriptural account — the rhythm of worship, which is the rhythm of the history of God's love for humankind — is stilled. Today we can see without any difficulty the horrible consequences of this attitude. We sense a threat that does not lie in the

8. Re Basilicas of San Marco and electrical plants cf. *Prinzip Hoffnung*, 928-29. Re the rejection of Sundays and holidays cf. *ibid.*, 1071-72. In general cf. Hartl, 109-46, esp. 130 and 142. Further pertinent material concerning this question from the domain of Marxist thought is to be found in J. Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, trans. R. and C. Winston (Chicago, 1973), 55-59.

distant future but that encounters us in the immediate present. The humility of faith has disappeared, shattered on the arrogance of activity. From this there is devised a new and no less ruinous view — an attitude that looks upon the human being as a disturber of the peace, as the one who wrecks everything, as the real parasite and disease of nature. Human beings no longer have any use for themselves; they would prefer to put themselves out of the way so that nature might be well again. But this is not how to bring healing to the world, for we go against the Creator when we no longer want to exist as the human beings that he wanted to exist. It is not thus that we heal nature, but rather thus that we destroy both ourselves and creation by removing from it the hope that lies in it and the greatness to which it is called.

And so the Christian way remains the one that is truly salvific. Part of this way is the conviction that we can be really “creative” only if we are in harmony with the Creator of the universe. We can really serve the earth only if we accept it under the aegis of God’s Word. Then, however, we shall be able to further and fulfill both ourselves and the world. *Operi Dei nihil praeponatur*: Nothing ought to be preferred to the work of God, nothing ought to be placed ahead of the service of God. This phrase represents the correct attitude with respect to the preservation of creation as opposed to the false worship of progress, the worship

of changes that crush humankind, and the calumny against the human species that destroys the earth and creation and keeps it from its goal. The Creator alone is humanity’s true savior, and only if we trust the Creator shall we find ourselves on the way to saving the world of human beings and of things. Amen.

The Creation of the Human Being

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up — for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground — then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. *Genesis 2:4-9*

What is the human being? This question is posed to every generation and to each individual human being, for in contrast to the animals our life is not simply laid out for us in advance. What it means for us to be human beings is for each one of us a task and an appeal to our freedom. We must each search into our human-beingness afresh and decide who or what we want to be as humans. In our own lives each one of us must answer, whether he or she wants to or not, the question about being human.

What is the human being? The biblical account of creation means to give some orientation in the mysterious region of human-beingness. It means to help us appreciate the human person as God's project and to help us formulate the new and creative answer that God expects from each one of us.

The Human Being — Taken from the Earth¹

What does this account say? We are told that God formed the man of dust from the ground. There is here something at once humbling and consoling. Something humbling because we are told: You are not God, you did not make

1. The thoughts that are presented in the following pages have been developed at greater length in my article "Fraternité," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, 5, 1141-1167.

yourself, and you do not rule the universe; you are limited. You are a being destined for death, as are all things living; you are only earth. But something consoling too, because we are also told: The human being is not a demon or an evil spirit, as it might occasionally appear. The human being has not been formed from negative forces, but has been fashioned from God's good earth. Behind this glimmers something deeper yet, for we are told that *all* human beings are earth. Despite every distinction that culture and history have brought about, it is still true that we are, in the last resort, the same. The medieval notion characterized in the dance of death that arose during the horrible experience of the black plague, which threatened everyone at the time, was in fact already expressed in this account: Emperor and beggar, master and slave are all ultimately one and the same person, taken from the same earth and destined to return to the same earth. Throughout all the highs and lows of history the human being stays the same — earth, formed from earth, and destined to return to it.

Thus the unity of the whole human race becomes immediately apparent: We are all from only *one* earth. There are not different kinds of "blood and soil," to use a Nazi slogan. There are not fundamentally different kinds of human beings, as the myths of numerous religions used to say and as some worldviews of our own day also assert. There are not different categories and races in which human

beings are valued differently. We are all *one* humanity, formed from God's *one* earth. It is precisely this thought that is at the very heart of the creation account and of the whole Bible. In the face of all human division and human arrogance, whereby one person sets himself or herself over and against another, humanity is declared to be *one* creation of God from his *one* earth. What is said at the beginning is then repeated after the Flood: in the great genealogy of Genesis 10 the same thought reappears — namely, that there is only *one* humanity in the many human beings. The Bible says a decisive “no” to all racism and to every human division.

Image of God

But in order for the human being to exist there must be a ^{earth +} second element as well. The basic material is earth; from this the human being comes into existence after God has breathed his breath into the nostrils of the body that was formed from it. The divine reality enters in here. The first creation account, which we considered in our previous meditations, says the same thing by way of another and more deeply reflective image. It says that the human being is created in God's image and likeness (cf. Genesis 1:26-27). In the human being heaven and earth touch one another.

In the human being God enters into his creation; the human being is directly related to God. The human being is called by him. God's words in the Old Testament are valid for every individual human being: “I call you by name and you are mine.” Each human being is known by God and loved by him. Each is willed by God, and each is God's image. Precisely in this consists the deeper and greater unity of humankind — that each of us, each individual human being, realizes the *one* project of God and has his or her origin in the same creative idea of God. Hence the Bible says that whoever violates a human being violates God's property (cf. Genesis 9:5). Human life stands under God's special protection, because each human being, however wretched or exalted he or she may be, however sick or suffering, however good-for-nothing or important, whether born or unborn, whether incurably ill or radiant with health — each one bears God's breath in himself or herself, each one is God's image. This is the deepest reason for the inviolability of human dignity, and upon it is founded ultimately every civilization. When the human person is no longer seen as standing under God's protection and bearing God's breath, then the human being begins to be viewed in utilitarian fashion. It is then that the barbarity appears that tramples upon human dignity. And vice versa: When this is seen, then a high degree of spirituality and morality is plainly evident.

The fate of all of us depends on whether this moral dignity of the human person can be defended in the world of technology, with all its possibilities. For here a particular temptation exists for our technical scientific age. The technical and scientific attitude has produced a particular kind of certitude — namely, that which can be corroborated by way of experiment and mathematical formula. This has given humankind a certain freedom from anxiety and superstition, a certain power over the world. But now there is a temptation to view as reasonable and therefore as serious only what can be corroborated through experiment and computation. This means that the moral and the holy no longer count for anything. They are considered to belong to the domain of what must be transcended, of the irrational. But whenever the human being does this, whenever we base ethics on physics, we extinguish what is particularly human, and we no longer liberate the human being but crush him or her. We must ourselves recognize what Kant recognized and knew perfectly well — that there are two kinds of reason, as he says: a theoretical and a practical reason. We may call them the physical-natural scientific and the moral-religious reason. It is improper to refer to the moral reason as gross unreason and superstition simply because its contours and the scope of its knowledge are not mathematical. It is in fact the more fundamental of the two reasons, and it alone can preserve the human dimensions of

both the natural sciences and technology and also prevent them from destroying humankind. Kant spoke of a preeminence of the practical over the theoretical reason and of the fact that what is more important, more profound, and more determinative is recognized by the moral reason of the human being in his moral freedom. For it is there, we must add, that we image God and there that we are more than "earth."²

Let us take this further. The essence of an image consists in the fact that it represents something. When I see it I recognize, for example, the person whom it represents, or the landscape, or whatever. It points to something beyond itself. Thus the property of an image is not to be merely what it itself is — for example, oil, canvas, and frame. Its nature as an image has to do with the fact that it goes beyond itself and that it manifests something that it itself is not. Thus the image of God means, first of all, that human beings cannot be closed in on themselves. Human beings who attempt this betray themselves. To be the image of God implies relationality. It is the dynamic that sets the human being in motion toward the totally Other. Hence it means the capacity for relationship; it is the human capacity for God. Human beings are, as a con-

2. On this cf. M. Kriele, *Befreiung und politische Aufklärung* (Freiburg, 1980), esp. 72-107.

sequence, most profoundly human when they step out of themselves and become capable of addressing God on familiar terms. Indeed, to the question as to what distinguishes the human being from an animal, as to what is specifically different about human beings, the answer has to be that they are the beings that God made capable of thinking and praying. They are most profoundly themselves when they discover their relation to their Creator. Therefore the image of God also means that human persons are beings of word and of love, beings moving toward Another, oriented to giving themselves to the Other and only truly receiving themselves back in real self-giving.

Holy Scripture enables us to go a still further step if we again follow our basic rule — namely, that we must read the Old and New Testaments together and that only in the New is the deepest meaning of the Old to be found. In the New Testament Christ is referred to as the second Adam, as the definitive Adam, and as the image of God (cf., e.g., 1 Corinthians 15:44-48; Colossians 1:15). This means that in him alone appears the complete answer to the question about what the human being is. In him alone appears the deepest meaning of what is for the present a rough draft. He is the definitive human being, and creation is, as it were, a preliminary sketch that points to him. Thus we can say that human persons are the beings who can be Jesus Christ's brothers or sisters. Human beings are the

creatures that can be one with Christ and thereby be one with God himself. Hence this relationship of creature to Christ, of the first to the second Adam, signifies that human persons are beings en route, beings characterized by transition. They are not yet themselves; they must ultimately become themselves. Here in the midst of our thoughts on creation there suddenly appears the Easter mystery, the mystery of the grain of wheat that has died. Human beings must die with Christ like a grain of wheat in order truly to rise, to stand erect, to be themselves (cf. John 12:24). Human persons are not to be understood merely from the perspective of their past histories or from that isolated moment that we refer to as the present. They are oriented toward their future, and only it permits who they really are to appear completely (cf. 1 John 3:2). We must always see in other human beings persons with whom we shall one day share God's joy. We must look upon them as persons who are called, together with us, to be members of the Body of Christ, with whom we shall one day sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and with Christ himself, as their brothers and sisters, as the brothers and sisters of Christ, and as the children of God.