

Creation or Evolution?

Hermeneutical Reflections on the Margin of the Creation Accounts

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This essay addresses the Christian roots of the antagonism posited between the theory of evolution and biblical perspectives on creation. The opposition claimed by certain theologians has to do with hermeneutical options and theological views, such as the idea of full verbal inspiration and of the absolute inerrancy of the Bible. First, I briefly tackle with the attempts to solve or to supersede the conflict between the creation accounts and the theory of evolution. Second, I address some hermeneutical principles that should guide the interpretation of the creation accounts. After criticising the idea of full verbal inspiration I emphasise the importance of the historical critical approach. Subsequently, following Ricœur, I argue that the interpretation of biblical texts should pay attention to the symbolic character of religious language.

The debate over the truth or fallacy of the theory of evolution is as heated today – at least in certain contexts – as it was at the end of the nineteenth century. Amazingly, after two centuries of critical biblical scholarship, the biblical creation accounts are still read as if they were contradicting natural scientific findings. The debate between religion and natural science is essentially related to the interpretation of the creation accounts; more precisely it is a consequence of fundamentalist biblical interpretation. The latter implies that the creation accounts should be regarded as the source of objective information on the origin of the universe and of life. This sort of biblical interpretation leads to the explicit rejection of scientific explanations, especially of the theory of evolution.¹ Thus, from the Christian side at least, the antagonism between scientific and religious approaches is essentially related to the view that the competence of Scriptures, generally of religion extends over the entire field of knowledge, scientific issues included. This position is definitely more common in conservative evangelical circles in the USA, but is far from being an exclusively American Protestant position.²

¹ According to the 2004-Gallup polls 45 % of the population of the US thought that God created humans in their present form in the last 10.000 years (creationism); 38 % held that humans evolved from other living beings in a process guided by God, during several million years; 13 % adopted a similar evolutionary perspective, but excluded the role of God, and 4 % had no opinion on the matter (*P. F. Lurquin; L. Stone, Evolution and Religious Creation Myth: How Scientists Respond, Oxford 2007, 3*). The authors stressed the stability of these results over several decades. In the 2007-Gallup polls 39 % held it certainly true, and 27 % probably true that God created humans in the last 10.000 years (*H. Hemminger, Die Geschichte des neuzeitlichen Kreationismus. Von «creation-science» zur Intelligent-Design-Bewegung, in: M. Neukamm, Evolution im Fadenkreuz des Kreationismus. Darwins religiöse Gegner und ihre Argumentation [Religion, Theologie und Naturwissenschaft 19], Göttingen 2009, 15–36 [19]*).

² On the European expansion of creationism: *R. L. Numbers, The Creationists. From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design, Cambridge MA – London, 2006, 399–416*. In Romania, starting with the 2007/2008 academic year, evolutionary theory is no longer part of the high school biology curriculum (Ordinul ministrului

Moreover, a number of scientists also claim that the scientific and the religious world-views are mutually exclusive. Criticism issued by natural scientists results mainly from unawareness concerning the essentials of biblical scholarship, and thus from a naïve interpretation of the creation accounts,³ but is also a reaction to the untenable, pseudo-scientific statements coming from the creationist camp. On a deeper level, however, its foundation is ideological naturalism, which principally excludes the possibility of ultimate non-natural causality, and suggests that all aspects of the world and of human existence, up to the fundamental ground, may be explained in an exclusive and satisfactory manner by natural causes.⁴ Scientists embracing ideological naturalism defend evolutionary theory (that, no doubt, from a scientific perspective, is so far unrivalled) as a sort of ideology. Thus, the debate opposes in fact two ideological approaches.⁵

A further, deep-seated cause of this antagonism is the modern epistemological perspective that marks believers and atheists alike, and equates “truth” with natural scientific and historical “truth”. This epistemological monism indebted to rationalism compels Christian circles to defend the historical character of the creation accounts, and prevents certain scientists from accepting the possibility of ultimate religious interpretations of being. Yet the remarkable complexity of reality, as well as the multiple shifts in interpretative patterns occurring over time should prevent us from regarding any specific description of the world as solely valid. Epistemological prudence also cautions against taking ancient authors’ mythical-symbolical way of thinking as immediately accessible to 20th–21st century readers, without any contextual approach.

In this essay I address the Christian roots of the antagonism posited between evolutionary theory and biblical perspectives. I argue that this opposition has to do with hermeneutical, theological options, and is related to the idea of full verbal inspiration and of the

educației și cercetării nr. 5959/22.12.2006, Anexa 2; Programa Școlară Pentru Ciclu Superior al Liceului, Biologie, Clasa a XII–A1 Aprobat prin Ordinul ministrului nr. 5959/ 22.12.2006, <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/articles/8522>). On the Romanian situation see also *Numbers, Creationists*, 412.

³ An April 2008-edition of the German TV program “Welt der Wunder” argued that science is incompatible with the Bible; the editors thought it frightening that 73 % of German respondents still believed in a Creator, and only 21 % in evolution. Creation and evolution were presented as alternative and mutually exclusive explanations, and evolution as a matter of belief. Criticism of belief in creation was conspicuously based on a naïve interpretation of the creation accounts and addressed creationist perspectives, which were undifferentiatedly presented as *the* Christian interpretation.

⁴ See e.g. *R. Dawkins, The Blind Watchmaker. Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design*, New York – London 1986, republished 1996; *id.*, *The God Delusion*, London 2006. On the phenomenon and on its criticism see also *A. Kreiner, Ordnung – Fingerabdruck Gottes oder blinder Zufall?* paper given at Regensburg, 2005, October 26, Hung. translation: *A rend – Isten ujjlenyomata vagy a véletlen műve?*, in: *Mérleg 1* (2006) 39–48 (40–41); *id.*, *Gott als Designer? Kreationismus, Intelligent Design und Darwinismus*, in: *G. Augustin; K. Krämer (eds.), Gott denken und bezeugen. FS Kardinal W. Kasper, Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2008*, 542–567 (565–566); *H. Kessler, Kreative Schöpfung – Kreativität Gottes. Überlegungen zum Spannungsfeld von Schöpfung und Evolution*, in: *J. Klöse; J. Oehler (eds.), Gott oder Darwin? Vernünftiges Reden über Schöpfung und Evolution*, Heidelberg 2008, 27–57 (28–29); *E. C. Scott, Antievolution and Creationism in the United States*, in: *Annual Review of Anthropology 26* (1997) 263–289 (272). Materialistic evolutionism goes beyond the competence of science when arguing that natural sciences may adequately explain the ultimate ground of all phenomena, excluding the possibility of ultimate transcendent causality, and regarding atheism as the necessary result of evolutionary theory.

⁵ Kessler rightly remarks that both creationism and naturalism are closed dogmatic systems (*Kreative Schöpfung*, 29).

absolute inerrancy of the Bible. My underlying hypothesis is that the creation accounts cannot be used as arguments against evolutionary theory, simply because they deal with other issues than natural science, they reflect a different perspective, and they address reality in a totally different manner.⁶

First, I briefly tackle with the attempts to solve or to supersede the (highly artificial) conflict between the creation accounts and evolutionary theory. Second, I address the hermeneutical principles guiding the interpretation of the creation accounts. After criticising the idea of full verbal inspiration I emphasise the importance of the historical critical approach for understanding ancient texts and their intention; subsequently, following some of Ricœur's hermeneutical principles, I argue that the interpretation of biblical texts should pay attention to the symbolic character of religious language.

1. Creation or Evolution? Attempts to Solve the Dilemma or to Harmonise the Approaches

Downplaying Evolutionary Theory: Evolution is "Just a Theory"

Evolutionary theory is very commonly downplayed by claiming that it is "just" a theory. This position is generally related to the ideological criticism of evolutionary theory (as in creationism, or intelligent design). Allegedly evolution is not a verified *fact*, but "only a theory", and can be therefore dismissed. A comparable position claims that evolutionary theory leaves many unanswered questions, therefore is not necessarily true.⁷ Here two points should be made.

First, while there is no consensus regarding the *mechanisms* of evolution, evolution as such is not a matter of debate within scientific circles. Yet, there is more to the matter. Scientific theory may not be opposed to reality/to facts, as the two concepts are not interchangeable. Theory is the organizing frame of observable facts, of phenomena, and in its absence "facts" are only the accumulation of unrelated observations. The observation of phenomena only makes sense within an explanatory theory. Further, theories lead to predictions or observations that may occasion the discovery of new facts.⁸ On the other hand a "fact" is not necessarily true, as it may also be the result of erroneous observations.

⁶ Chr. Aus der Au, Wie Orgel und Staubsauger. Das Verhältnis zwischen Evolutionstheorie und Schöpfungsgeschichte aus theologischer Sicht, in: Neukamm, Evolution, 341–350. Otherwise, the creation accounts do not exhaust all issues of a biblical theology of creation, since the matter is also addressed in prophetic and wisdom literature and in Psalms. Yet, these texts, their importance notwithstanding, are not part of the public common thought to the same extent as the creation accounts, and do not figure in the debate opposing science and religion.

⁷ Chr. Schönborn, The Reflections of Joseph Ratzinger Pope Benedict XVI on Evolution, in: W. Arber; N. Cabibbo; M. Sánchez Sorondo (eds.), Scientific Insights into the Evolution of the Universe and of Life. The Proceedings of the Plenary Session on Scientific Insights into the Evolution of the Universe and of Life 31 October – 4 November 2008 (Pontificiae Academiae Scientiarum Acta 20), Vatican City 2009, 12–21; *id.*, A teremtés hite és a fejlődésmélelet, in: Communio 1 (2004) 11–21 (15–16, 21).

⁸ Lurquin; Stone, Evolution, 7–9, 29–30. See also N. Murphy, Phillip Johnson on Trial: A Critique of His Critique of Darwin, in: R. T. Pennock (ed.), Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives, Cambridge MA – London 2001, 451–469.

“Fact” is not identical with reality. A fact, beside being observable and reproducible, is meaningful and has explanatory value only if it can be integrated into a scientific theory. Theory and fact can therefore not be opposed, as they are not alternative concepts. As a result, it does not make sense to claim that evolutionary theory is “only a theory”, and not a “fact”. Scientific research involves experiment, observation *and theories that explain facts*.⁹

Creationism

The basic assumption of creationism is that the Bible is the revealed word of God without any further qualification, therefore it must be *literally true*.¹⁰ Creationism implies a number of theses, such as the immediate, special, *ex nihilo* creation of the universe and of life, the insufficiency of mutations and natural selection to explain the appearance of all species of living beings out of a single precursor; the occurrence of changes exclusively within created kinds of plants and animals; the rejection of a common ancestor of humans and apes; a catastrophe theory including a worldwide flood that shaped the Earth; the (relatively) young age of the Earth and of the kinds of living beings (this last assumption needs further qualification).¹¹ Due to the literal interpretation of the creation accounts, creationism rejects evolutionary theory, thought to be incompatible with the word of God.

(1) *Young Earth creationism* dates the origin of the universe to the last 10,000 years, based on the literal interpretation of the six-day creation account and of the narrative of the flood. In view of some other biblical passages (Ps 90,4; 2 Pet 3,8) the six days are taken for 6,000 years, i.e. six epochs of thousand years. A radical stream defends a 6x24 hours creation.¹² God is thought to have created the world, the kinds of living beings, as well as humans directly, pretty much in their present form (special creation).¹³ The most radical groups defend a flat Earth-theory and geocentrism. Young Earth creationists take the stratification of fossils as markers of the flood(s). (2) *Old Earth creationism*¹⁴ accepts

⁹ “[A] theory can be defined as «organized knowledge applicable in a wide variety of circumstances devised to analyze and predict the nature of a specified set of phenomena (or facts)». Further, one can say that, in science, progress can be achieved only through the interplay of experimentation or observation (discovery of new facts) with theory (making sense of the new facts).” (*Lurquin; Stone, Evolution, 8*).

¹⁰ A distinction should be made here between what for instance Catholic exegesis calls the “literal sense” of the biblical text [*sensus literalis*], i.e. the meaning intended and expressed by the author, the primary sense of the text that requires historical critical interpretation, and “literal interpretation” proper to fundamentalist approaches, which implies that the meaning of biblical texts is immediately accessible to readers without further interpretation and reflection. This distinction should be born in mind when I speak of the literal interpretation marking out creationism. On the *sensus literalis*: R. E. Brown; S. M. Schneiders, *Hermeneutics*, in: R. E. Brown; J. A. Fitzmyer; R. E. Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* [further on: NJBC], Englewood Cliffs NJ 1990, 1146–1165 (1148–1149).

¹¹ On creationism *Numbers*, Creationists, esp. 268–372; *Hemminger*, *Geschichte*, 15–36; *Scott, Antievolution*, 266–270; *Kreiner*, *Gott*, 543–552; A. E. McGrath, *Darwinism*, in: Ph. Clayton; Z. Simpson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, Oxford 2006, 681–696 (692).

¹² E.g. G. F. Hasel, *The ‘Days’ of Creation in Gen 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Periods/Epochs’ of Time?*, in: *Origins* 21.1 (1994) 5–38.

¹³ For a criticism of special creation and of creationism see also: *Van Till*, *When Faith and Reason Cooperate*, 148, 151.

¹⁴ *Scott, Antievolution*, 269–271.

that the Earth has a much higher age, possibly of billions of years. (a) “Gap theory” or “restitution theory” postulates a temporal gap between Gen 1,1 and 1,2:¹⁵ the first refers to the initial, preadamite creation, destroyed by God, followed by the recreation of the world and the creation of humans. This gap would explain the high age of the Earth. (b) The “day-age theory” takes the days for longer, undefined periods of several million years possibly corresponding to geological periods. (c) *Progressive creationism* accepts many results of modern physics and cosmology (some even the Big Bang theory), but limits the possibility of biological evolution to genetic variability within the created kinds, i.e. to the microevolutionary level, and rejects macroevolution. The stratification of fossils is due to the fact that God created kinds at different times.

Intelligent Design

“Intelligent design”, similarly to creationism, postulates that evolutionary theory is wrong. The main objection is that Darwinism is essentially atheistic. Contrary to creationism, the strategy of ID implies leaving aside biblical arguments¹⁶ and references to God. ID is presented by its proponents as a scientific theory, as the alternative of evolutionary theory. Its premise is that the theory of evolution must be wrong, because the alleged “irreducible complexity” of living beings and organs may not be explained by hazard, but requires an intelligent designer.¹⁷ This intelligent designer is not called God, to avoid the accusation of unscientific bias, yet extraterrestrial intelligence is hardly what proponents have in mind. The examples used to illustrate irreducible complexity (watch,

¹⁵ This theory is based on the supposition that Gen 1,2 would describe conditions that succeeded (after an indeterminate period), the original creation of a perfect universe. See V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*. Chapters 1–17 (The new international commentary on the Old Testament), Grand Rapids 1990, 115–116.

¹⁶ “In good time new theories will emerge, and science will change. *We shouldn't try to shortcut the process by establishing some new theory of origins* until we know more about exactly what needs to be explained. Maybe there will be a new theory of evolution, but it is also possible that the basic concept will collapse and science will acknowledge that those elusive common ancestors of the major biological groups never existed. If we get an unbiased scientific process started, we can have confidence that it will bring us closer to the truth. *For the present I recommend that we also put the Biblical issues to one side. The last thing we should want to do, or seem to want to do, is to threaten the freedom of scientific inquiry.* Bringing the Bible anywhere near this issue just raises the «Inherit the Wind» stereotype, and closes minds instead of opening them. *We can wait until we have a better scientific theory, one genuinely based on unbiased empirical evidence and not on materialist philosophy, before we need to worry about whether and to what extent that theory is consistent with the Bible.* Until we reach that better science, it's just best to live with some uncertainties and incongruities, which is our lot as human beings – in this life, anyway.” Ph. E. Johnson, *How to Sink a Battleship: A Call to Separate Materialist Philosophy from Empirical Science*, in: *The Real Issue*, November/December 1996, online: <http://www.leaderu.com/real/tri9602/johnson.html>, quoted by B. Forrest, *The Wedge at Work: How Intelligent Design Creationism is Wedging Its Way into the Cultural and Academic Mainstream*, in: Pennock, *Intelligent Design*, 5–53 (18; cf. 42–43, emphases KZ).

¹⁷ M. J. Behe, *Molecular Machines: Experimental Support for the Design Inference*, in: Pennock, *Intelligent Design*, 241–256 (originally in: *Cosmic Pursuit* 1.2 [1998] 27–35); Ph. E. Johnson, *Creator or Blind Watchmaker?*, in: Pennock, *Intelligent Design*, 435–449 (orig. in: *First Things* 29 [1993] 8–14); W. A. Dembski, in *Defence of Intelligent Design*, in: Clayton; Simpson, *Oxford Handbook*, 715–731; W. B. Provine, *Evolution, Religion, and Science*, in: Clayton; Simpson, *Oxford Handbook*, 667–680. See also Kreiner, *Gott*, 552–565; *Numbers*, *Creationists*, 373–398; *Lurquin*; *Stone*, *Evolution*, 15–18, 68; *McGrath*, *Darwinism*, 81–696 (692–693); *Scott*, *Antievolution*, 279–285.

bicycle, mouse trap, aircraft) are taken from the world of mechanical devices. ID admits variability within species, but rejects macroevolution. The origin of species is related to purposeful design, to the immediate and specific intervention of the intelligent designer. Although it is presented as a scientific theory, the argumentation of its proponents clearly shows that ID in fact turns religious convictions into an ideology.¹⁸

Critics articulate with good reason a number of objections.¹⁹ In spite of its self-representation as scientific theory, and its refraining from biblical arguments, the “hypothesis”, or the postulate of ID is that the intelligent designer intervenes directly in the world. Although concealed, this position is grounded in the literal interpretation of the Bible, which makes evolutionary theory principally unacceptable. Thereby ID is fundamentally different from scientific theories. Its hypothesis may not be verified (the existence of the intelligent designer may not be proved).²⁰ ID-institutes and “researchers” carry out no research programmes, do not formulate scientific theories, and its proponents do not publish scholarly articles in peer-reviewed journals.²¹

The biological views defended are also problematic, since ID wrongly postulates the perfection of organisms, biological structures and physiological processes (the eye, the coagulation system, the flagellum), leaving aside the imperfections, the undesirable manifestations, or the existence of elements with no evident purpose; all these would suggest an incompetent designer.²² ID argues without ground that allegedly “irreducibly complex” organs and metabolic chains could not have evolved from earlier, simpler forms.²³ Further, the mechanical devices used by ID-advocates for the purpose of analogy may not be compared to living beings, since these are not merely a summation of pre-existent components (although simpler components may exist), and certain simpler precursors may be found.

In its criticism of Darwinism, ID conflates methodological and ideological naturalism (materialistic evolutionism), and wrongly claims Darwinism to be necessarily atheistic. On this ground it postulates the incompatibility of religion and evolutionary theory;²⁴

¹⁸ Johnson, Creator, 442–443 on creation and miracles. Yet, see B. Weissmahr’s criticism of the scholastic definition of miracles (Gottes Wirken in der Welt. Ein Diskussionsbeitrag zur Frage der Evolution und des Wunders, Frankfurt a.M. 1973; Filozófiai és fundamentális-teológiai megfontolások a csoda problémájához, in: B. Gy [ed.], Csoda-elbeszélések. Szegedi Biblikus Konferencia 1998, Szeged 2000, 171–185).

¹⁹ For the criticism of ID: B. Forrest, The Wedge at Work: How Intelligent Design Creationism Is Wedging Its Way into the Cultural and Academic Mainstream, in: Pennock, Intelligent Design, 5–53; R. T. Pennock, The Pre-Modern Sins of Intelligent Design, in: Clayton; Simpson, Oxford Handbook, 732–748; for its scientific critique: Lurquin; Stone, Evolution, 58–62, 68–71; M. J. Brauer; D. R. Brumbaugh, Biology Remystified: The Scientific Claims of the New Creationists, in: Pennock, Intelligent Design, 289–334.

²⁰ Lurquin; Stone, Evolution, 8–10.

²¹ Forrest, Wedge, 5–53.

²² Lurquin; Stone, Evolution, 75–79; Kessler, Kreative Schöpfung, 37.

²³ K. R. Miller, The Flagellum Unspun. The Collapse of «Irreducible Complexity», in: W. A. Dembski; M. Ruse (eds.), Debating Design: From Darwin to DNA Black Box. The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution, Cambridge 2004, 81–97.

²⁴ Ph. E. Johnson, Evolution as Dogma: The Establishment of Naturalism, in: Pennock, Intelligent Design, 59–76 (first published in: First Things 6 [1990] 15–22); Johnson, Creator, 438–442. Even A. Plantinga, When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible, in: Pennock, Intelligent Design, 113–145 (orig. in: Christian Scholar’s Review 21.1 [1991] 8–32), arguing that the theory of evolution is not religiously or theologically neutral (122–123, 125–126). His examples are however ideological scientists like Dawkins, and fundamentalist

moreover, it also rejects theistic evolutionism.²⁵ ID is also problematic from a philosophical-theological perspective. Defending special creation, ID reduces God to one of the natural causes within the universe, and suspends divine transcendence.²⁶ ID is an apologetic-polemic programme, with an exceptionally combative strategy, eventually aimed at disseminating an ideology, and as such it is also part of a political struggle.²⁷ To sum up, ID is eventually a version of creationism, and in no way a scientific theory.²⁸

The Harmonisation of the Creation Accounts with Scientific Explanations

Harmonisation may occur either by the projection of scientific notions into the biblical texts, or by the teleological interpretation of the universe and of life.

The first approach implies searching in the biblical accounts elements that may appear to coincide with or to substantiate scientific theories. Thus the creation of light before that of the Sun is seen to coincide with the cosmic background radiation following the Big Bang. The sequentiality of creation, the sequence of the living beings, is seen to be pretty similar to that of evolution.²⁹ The theory of the “mitochondrial Eve”³⁰, and of the genetic (Y-chromosomal) Adam³¹ may seem to support the monogenism grounded in the second creation account.³² Such harmonisations, often attempting to prove that the Bible

evangelicals, i.e. representatives of extreme positions. One wonders how relevant these examples are, when compared to the work of scientists and theologians who find no such conflict between evolutionary theory and faith. See *Pennock*, *Naturalism; id.*, *Pre-Modern Sins*, 739: “Methodological naturalism does not claim access to all possible truths.”

²⁵ ID present theistic evolutionism as a catastrophic accommodation to Darwinism, as an appearance of biblical interpretation, a false intellectual system that adopts symbolic, instead of literal interpretation (Johnson). Dembski is clear: “Design theorists are no friends of theistic evolution”, 1995, 3, cited by *Pennock*, *Pre-Modern Sins*, 744.

²⁶ *Kreiner*, *Gott als Designer?*, 563; *Van Till*, *When Faith and Reason Cooperate*, 158–159, 161; *G. V. Coyne*, *Science Does Not Need God. Or Does It? A Catholic Scientist Looks at Evolution*, Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach, FL, (1/31/2006), http://www.catholic.org/national/national_story.php?id=18504; *Kessler*, *Kreative Schöpfung*, 47; cf. *Weissmahr*, *Fundamentális-teológiai és filozófiai megfontolások*, 178–183. *Pennock* shows that any scientific research is based on the conscience of the stability of natural laws that would be obliterated by God’s occasional interventions (*Naturalism, Evidence, and Creationism: The Case of Phillip Johnson*, in: *id.*, *Intelligent Design*, 77–97 [88–90]; orig. in: *Biology & Philosophy* 11.4 [1996] 543–549).

²⁷ Johnson asserted that 20th century Christianity adopted a defensive strategy; ID will go into the camp of the enemy and blow up its ammunition dump, i.e. their version of creation. But see the criticism of *H. J. Van Till*, *When Faith and Reason Cooperate*, in: *Pennock*, *Intelligent Design*, 147–163 [147–148, 152] (orig. in: *Christian Scholar’s Review* 21.1 [1991] 33–45).

²⁸ *Kessler*, *Kreative Schöpfung*, 28.

²⁹ E.g. the introductory considerations of *W. Arber* (*W. Arber; N. Cabibbo; M. Sánchez Sorondo* (eds.), *Scientific Insights into the Evolution of the Universe and of Life*. The Proceedings of the Plenary Session on Scientific Insights into the Evolution of the Universe and of Life, 31 October – 4 November 2008 [Pontificiae Academiae Scientiarum Acta 20], Vatican City 2009, LXVI).

³⁰ *Lurquin; Stone*, *Evolution*, 92–93.

³¹ *Lurquin; Stone*, *Evolution*, 93–95; *U. Lüke*, „Als Anfang schuf Gott...” *Bio-Theologie. Zeit – Evolution – Hominisation*, Paderborn – München – Wien – Zürich 1997, 214–215.

³² On the difficulties of this harmonization: *Lüke*, *Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 215. On the issues of hominisation: *Lurquin; Stone*, *Evolution*, 85–105; *Lüke*, 228–236.

is nonetheless right, do not take into account the fact that biblical texts do not speak of the *how* of creation in a scientific sense.³³

The second approach incorporates the concept of tuning and the anthropic principle. Natural constants in the universe appear to be tuned to such extent, that an alteration would have made the apparition of life impossible. This tuning, it is argued, may not be the result of hazard.³⁴ To some it also seems that the universe is oriented toward the apparition of humans/of intelligence (the anthropic principle).³⁵ This view was challenged by the theories of multiverses or parallel universes, yet even these seem to be highly hypothetical.³⁶

While these approaches have much to commend them, there is no need to harmonise Scriptures with the Big Bang or with the theory of evolution, attempting to prove that the Bible already knows these concepts. It has to be recognised that the Bible speaks of something else, in a largely dissimilar cultural environment, within a different epistemological frame. Ancient authors have been thinking differently, have searched answer to other questions, and have expressed their thoughts in various genres, very dissimilar from contemporary scientific discourse. Theology may not sustain an indefensible literalism. Theology aims instead at developing an understanding of creation that is based on the one hand on the sensible interpretation of the biblical texts, and on the other is construed in dialogue with scientific research, integrating the concepts emerging from it. As Pannenberg puts it: "A theological doctrine of creation should follow where the biblical witness leads by claiming current knowledge of the world for a description of the divine work of creation, using the resources that are actually at hand."³⁷

Theistic evolution

A theology that takes into account the results of scientific research, and reckons with a personal God who creates by making use of the autonomy and creative potential of creatures is not a recent development. It suffices to recall the work of Teilhard de Chardin. In a more recent version, theistic evolution essentially argues that God's creating activity is mediated by evolution.³⁸ According to Howard J. Van Till, God creates a "fully gifted creation", characterised by functional integrity, and enables it to develop. God does not

³³ R. Mosis, *Biblische Schöpfungsaussagen und heutiges Selbstverständnis des Menschen*, in: K. Schmitz-Moormann (ed.), *Schöpfung und Evolution. Neue Ansätze zum Dialog zwischen Naturwissenschaften und Theologie*, Düsseldorf 1992, 58–75 (67).

³⁴ Tuning is commonly linked to Freeman Dyson (*Lurquin; Stone*, *Evolution*, 12–13).

³⁵ Lüke, *Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 243–250 (the criticism from biology); E. P. Fischer, *Evolution und Schöpfung – Was erklärt die Evolutionstheorie?*, in: *Gott oder Darwin?*, 95–102 (101); Ph. Hefner, *Religion-and-science*, in: Clayton; Simpson, *Oxford Handbook*, 562–576 (570); Kessler, *Kreative Schöpfung*, 48–49.

³⁶ *Lurquin; Stone*, *Evolution*, 13–14 (cf. V. J. Stenger, *The Unconscious Quantum: Metaphysics in Modern Physics and Cosmology*, Amherst NY 1995). For a critique: Kessler, *Kreative Schöpfung*, 48–49.

³⁷ W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology 2*, tr. G. W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids MI – Edinburgh 1994, 117, compare 119 on the possibility of integrating evolution as a view that sustains God's ongoing creating activity.

³⁸ Scott, *Antievolution*, 271–272; cf. McGrath, *Darwinism*, 693 (evolutionary theism).

need therefore to intervene every now and then, in a miraculous manner.³⁹ The activity of the world is largely autonomous. There are no gaps in the functioning of the world that would compel God to step in and to take over thereby the role of the creatures.⁴⁰ This perspective may be connected to the doctrine of *creatio continua*: God creates in a mediated manner, continuously, gradually, through the development of the aptitudes of the world.⁴¹

These endeavours are highly creditable for theologians open to the dialogue with science (and hopefully for scientists, as well). Yet, I shall not discuss them in more detail, as they pertain to the field of systematic theology, and my main interest here concerns the hermeneutics of biblical texts, more specifically of the creation accounts. It is not my intention to propose a detailed discussion of the question of inspiration, or to assess the various models of biblical hermeneutics. I only wish to show how the understanding of inspiration determines the way in which the biblical texts on creation are read.

2. Hermeneutical Reflections on the Creation Accounts

Preliminary Considerations

As shown earlier, critics of the theory of evolution claim that scientific explanations regarding the origins of life, especially of humans, are incompatible with the statements made in the Bible about the immediate, purposeful creation of the world. This view is grounded in fundamentalist biblical understanding, intimately connected with a particular interpretation of the authority of the Bible: the Bible *is* without any further specification the revealed word of God, and as such it is entirely free of error, and right in all its statements (this explains why the most virulent attacks on evolutionary theory come from the fundamentalist evangelical circles in the US⁴²). Because the Bible is without any further qualification the word of God, it may not be interpreted otherwise as literally.⁴³ Such understanding of the inerrancy and of the absolute authority of the Bible comes partly from a certain interpretation of inspiration; on the other hand – within Protestant circles – it is connected to the principle of the *sola Scriptura*. Ultimately, therefore, the debate is related to certain hermeneutical options. Second, the discussion has an epistemological aspect as well, as it expresses one specific choice in comprehending and describing reality.

³⁹ H. J. Van Till, *The Fully Gifted Creation*, in: J. P. Moreland; J. M. Reynolds (eds.), *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, Grand Rapids MI 1999, 161–247; *id.*, *The Creation: Intelligently Designed or Optimally Equipped?*, in: Pennock, *Intelligent Design*, 487–512 (orig. in: *Theology Today* 55.3 [1998] 344–364).

⁴⁰ Van Till, *When Faith and Reason Cooperate*, 158.

⁴¹ Kessler, *Kreative Schöpfung*, 46: evolutionary theory and *creatio continua* are two representations of the same reality. On the encounter between scientific and theological approaches: A. Peacocke, *Science and God the Creator*, in: *Zygon* 28.4 (1993) 469–484.

⁴² McGrath, *Darwinism*, 691; Kessler, *Kreative Schöpfung*, 28. A. Mazur, *Believers and Disbelievers in Evolution*, in: *Politics and the Life Sciences* 23.2 (2004) 55–61, shows a positive correlation between disbelief in evolution and fundamentalist religiosity.

⁴³ For a criticism of literal interpretation see e.g. Mc Mullin, *Plantinga's Defense of Special Creation*, 171, 173–175.

Inspiration and the Authority of the Bible

The absolute inerrancy of the Bible is interrelated with its full, literal inspiration. The roots of this view go back to the model of inspiration understood as dictation, an idea that appears already in some patristic authors and becomes dominant in the late middle ages up to the modern period. It is defended by Catholic and Protestant authors, Catholic ecclesial documents and Protestant confessional writings alike.⁴⁴

This is the position of the Council of Trent and of Vatican I.⁴⁵ The *Providentissimus Deus* (1893)⁴⁶ of Leo XIII. reflects the new situation marked by the emergence of the historical critical method, and for that reason it expresses a rather apologetic position. While it strongly defends the full inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, it also states that “those facts of natural science which investigators affirm to be now quite certain are not contrary to the Scripture rightly explained”; it goes on nonetheless expressing scepticism about the reliability of scientifically proved facts (“much which has been held and proved as certain has afterwards been called in question and rejected”).⁴⁷ The polemic against historical criticism explains why at the beginning of the 20th century the Pontificia Commissio Biblica strongly defends the historical character of Gen 1–3 (including such naïve views like the creation of woman from man), but interestingly does not extend historicity to all details, e.g. to the literal interpretation of the days of creation.⁴⁸ With *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943)⁴⁹ comes the official recognition of the historical critical method; while defending scriptural inerrancy, it assigns great significance to the authorial intention, to the question of literary genres, and to the historical and cultural context of the biblical books. The encyclical operates with a slightly modified model of inspiration, as it lays greater emphasis on the role and abilities of human authors. This view encourages the critical approach of biblical texts. The importance assigned to human authors, to authorial intention, to literary genres and to the circumstances that influenced the formation of the text is even more marked in the *Dei Verbum* (1965).⁵⁰

In the Catholic Church a hermeneutical shift occurs with the *Divino afflante Spiritu* and especially with the *Dei Verbum*, in what concerns the understanding of inspiration, of divine and human authorship and its influence on interpretation. This is one of the reasons explaining why some of the mid-20th century Catholic church-declarations show certain openness toward reconciling evolutionary theory and biblical accounts.⁵¹

The conservative evangelical position is greatly influenced by the strict understanding of scriptural inerrancy and of its exclusive authority.⁵² This certainly does not mean that

⁴⁴ On the models of inspiration: R.F. Collins, *Inspiration*, in: NJBC, 1023–1033. See also N. T. Wright, *The Last Word. Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture*, San Francisco 2005.

⁴⁵ H. Denzinger, *Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen*, ed. P. Hünermann, Freiburg i.Br. 432010 (= DH), 1501 and 3006.

⁴⁶ AAS 26 (1893–1894) 279–291; Engl. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_18111893_providentissimus-deus_en.html; excerpts in DH 3280–3294.

⁴⁷ *Providentissimus Deus* 18. While refraining from saying that the Bible may err in scientific matters, it follows Augustin in saying that the Holy Spirit does not teach us about the nature of things, as such knowledge does not serve salvation.

⁴⁸ *Pontificia Commissione Biblica*, *Sul carattere storico dei primi tre capitoli della Genesi* (1909), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19090630_genesi_it.html.

⁴⁹ AAS 35 (1943) 309–319; Engl. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_30091943_divino-afflante-spiritu_en.html; excerpts: DH 3825–3831.

⁵⁰ *Dei Verbum* 11–12.

⁵¹ *Humani generis* 36 (at least concerning the material aspect of hominisation, since it defends the direct creation of the soul; further, it rejects polygenism 37); *Pope John Paul II, Message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences: On Evolution* (1996.10.22); <http://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/jp961022.htm>.

⁵² For an overview of the various trends of evangelical biblical interpretation, on inspiration, literalism, and inerrantism: H. A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford Theological Monographs), Oxford 1998,

literalism is a necessary consequence of Protestant biblical interpretation. Major Protestant scholars have developed sensible hermeneutical approaches that do not promote a naïve interpretation of inspiration.⁵³ The ecstatic model of inspiration, proposed by Tillich, an approach that does not exclude reason,⁵⁴ as well as his emphasis on the organic unity between word and event in revelation⁵⁵ disallow the quasi-magical interpretation of the written word and the unequivocal identification of revelation with the word of the Bible.⁵⁶ Protestant hermeneutics also apply the principles of divine accommodation and of progressive revelation which allow dispensing with literal interpretation, placing biblical statements in their historical and cultural context, and forbid reading the Bible as a source of scientific information proper.⁵⁷ Revelation does not obliterate reason and scientific research, argues Tillich.⁵⁸ I do not claim therefore that fundamentalism is a mark of Protestant hermeneutics; such a view would be utterly mistaken. I merely wish to point here to the relationship between the strict interpretation of inerrancy, the principle of *sola Scriptura*, literal interpretation and the rejection of evolutionary theory. The position defended by a well-known scholar like Alvin Plantinga may be relevant. Plantinga explicitly explains the possible antagonism between faith and reason with the principles of inerrancy and of *sola Scriptura*.⁵⁹ Because of its almost absolute authority, the competence of the Bible logically extends, in his view, to every domain of cognition, a conclusion apparently sustained by the fact that it also narrates historical events. Therefore, Plantinga ar-

esp. 63–66; 135–179, 181–190. See also *E. Barker*, Does it Matter How We Got Here? Dangers Perceived in Literalism and Evolutionism, in: *Zygon* 22.2 (1987) 213–225 (216–217).

⁵³ *P. Tillich*, Systematic Theology I, Chicago 1973, 106–162; Ricœur's oeuvre in the field of biblical hermeneutics is outstanding. See e.g. *P. Ricœur*, Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation, in: L. S. Mudge (ed.), Essays on Biblical Interpretation, Philadelphia 1980, 73–118; *P. Ricœur*; *A. LaCocque*, Penser la Bible, Paris 1998, and the works referred to in section 2.4.

⁵⁴ *Tillich*, Systematic Theology I, 112–115, 117–118, 158.

⁵⁵ *Tillich*, Systematic Theology I, 125–126.

⁵⁶ *Tillich*, Systematic Theology I, 114, 158; criticising the idea of dictation.

⁵⁷ *D. C. Harlow*, Creation According to Genesis: Literary Genre, Cultural Context, Theological Truth, in: Christian Scholar's Review 37.2 (2008) 163–198; *D. O. Lamoureux*, Lessons from the Heavens: On Scripture, Science and Inerrancy, in: Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith 60.1 (2008) 4–15. *Van Till*, When Faith and Reason Cooperate, 151–153: the authors could not have been acquainted with concepts like galactic redshift, thermonuclear fusion, plate tectonics, spacetime metrics, radiometric dating, stellar evolution, chemical reaction, atomic spectra, DNA, genetic drift, molecular clock, micro-/macroevolution and alike. One may therefore not expect from the Bible statements that would help assessing scientific theories. Similarly, Harlow refers to the concepts of divine accommodation and progressive revelation, and defends the need to understand the historical and religious background of biblical texts, the issue of literary genres, and the significance of a changed cultural context for interpretation (Creation, 167–168, 196).

⁵⁸ *Tillich*, Systematic Theology I, 117–118.

⁵⁹ “Now we Reformed Christians are wholly in earnest about the Bible. We are people of the Word; Sola Scriptura is our cry; we take Scripture to be a special revelation from God himself, demanding our absolute trust and allegiance.” (When Faith and Reason Clash, 113; the author continues emphasizing that Protestantism also assigns major importance to reason, but his further argument clearly shows that he thinks that the Bible may be competent in scientific issues as well). Cf. 119: “Scripture is inerrant: the Lord makes no mistakes; what he proposes for our belief is what we ought to believe.” His sole concession is that our understanding of what the Bible teaches may not correspond to its true message. While such views are more common in evangelical circles, a fundamentalist interpretation of inerrancy may be encountered in Orthodox and Catholic circles as well.

gues, God may wish to communicate through the Bible scientific knowledge, as well.⁶⁰ Plantinga makes no reference to the results of critical biblical scholarship.⁶¹ His perspective leads to the conclusion that there may well be an antagonism between the assertions of the Bible and faith holding to them, on the one hand, and the statements made by science and reason acknowledging them, on the other.⁶² Plantinga further argues that the interpretation of biblical texts should focus on the intention of the divine, and not of the human author.⁶³ A laudable aspiration, indeed, which can nonetheless hardly be attained by dismissing the human author.

To sum up, rather simplistically, the relationship between revelation, inspiration and the interpretation of Scriptures, two positions may be distinguished: according to the one, the Bible is the word of God, according to the other it is a witness to the word of God.⁶⁴ In a similarly simplistic manner, the first approach is adopted by conservative, more often evangelical, circles⁶⁵ that assign an exclusive authority to the Bible. To the extent to which the Bible is without any further qualification the word of God, it must be literally true, even when literalist interpretation goes against scientific (rational) evidence. If, conversely, the Bible comprises the testimony of human authors to what they understood to be the word of God, which they expressed according to their cultural horizon, responding to the questions of their time, engaging in polemics against the currents and views of their

⁶⁰ “[...] a sensible person might be convinced, after careful and prayerful study of the Scriptures, that what the Lord teaches there implies that this evidence [the scientific evidence for the old age of the Earth, K.Z.] is misleading and that as a matter of fact the earth really is very young. So far as I can see, there is nothing to rule this out as automatically pathological or irrational or irresponsible or stupid. [...] this sort of view can be developed in more subtle and nuanced detail. For example, the above teachings may be graded with respect to the probability that they really are what the Lord intends us to learn from early Genesis. Most clear, perhaps, is that God created the world, so that it and everything in it depends upon him and neither it nor anything in it has existed for an infinite stretch of time. Next clearest, perhaps, is that there was an original human pair who sinned and through whose sinning disaster befell both man and nature [...]. That humankind was separately created is perhaps less clearly taught; that many other kinds of living beings were separately created might be still less clearly taught; that the earth is young, still less clearly taught. [...] I do not mean to endorse the view that all of these propositions are true: but it isn't just silly or irrational to do so” (*Plantinga*, *When Faith*, 121–122). For the criticism of Plantinga: *Van Till*, *When Faith and Reason Cooperate*, 147–163; *E. Mc Mullin*, *Plantinga's Defense of Special Creation*, in: *Pennock, Intelligent Design*, 165–196 (*Christian Scholar's Review* 21.1 [1991] 55–70); *id.*, *Evolution and Special Creation*, in: *Zygon* 28.3 (1993) 299–355.

⁶¹ *Plantinga*, *When Faith*, 113 (“Taken at face value, the Bible seems to teach that God created the world relatively recently, that he created life by way of several separate acts of creation, that in another separate act of creation, he created an original human pair, Adam and Eve, and that these our original parents disobeyed God, thereby bringing ruinous calamity on themselves, their posterity and the rest of creation”); cf. 121–122. *Van Till* notes that Plantinga eschews biblical scholarship and the critical reading of the Bible, creation accounts included, relying on a naïve exegesis (*When Faith and Reason Cooperate*, 149–150).

⁶² *Plantinga*, *When Faith*, 123–124. On this ground he argues for the higher probability of special creation compared to evolution (130–131). Against such conclusion see *Van Till*, *When Faith and Reason Cooperate*, 147–148, 152 (criticising Plantinga's discussion of evolution within the historical faith-versus-reason tension).

⁶³ *A. Plantinga*, *Evolution, Neutrality, and Antecedent Probability: A Reply to McMullin and Van Till*, in: *Pennock, Intelligent Design*, 197–236 (214, though rejecting the crude concept of dictation).

⁶⁴ *Collins*, *Inspiration*, 43.

⁶⁵ An example of Catholic fundamentalism is recorded by *N. P. G. Austriaco*, *Reading Genesis with Cardinal Ratzinger*, in: *Homiletic & Pastoral Review* (2003) 1–6, referring to *V. Warkulwiz*, who argued that the Catholic Church should return to the traditional Catholic interpretation of origins, based on the literal meaning of Gen 1–11.

age, the theological message of the text (“the word of God”) may not be thought to be immediately and directly available, without further reflection.⁶⁶ In this case one needs to take into account the human element: human creativity, as well as the limits of scientific and social perspectives, of human cognition.

The Epistemological Aspects of Describing Reality

The absolute inerrancy of the Bible and its assumed authority over every field of knowledge is a view reflecting a sort of epistemological monism. The entire world may be appropriately known by means of a single source, in this case the Bible (religion), provided its assertions are correctly understood; thus information drawn from the Bible may allow criticising scientific knowledge. The rejection of the religious interpretations by some scientists, because of their alleged incompatibility with scientific knowledge, reflects the other side of epistemological monism, as it takes science as the sole and sufficient discourse to adequately describe reality. Yet, reality is far more complex, and requires multiple perspectives, coming from various disciplines.⁶⁷

It is a commonplace that natural sciences tackle with the laws governing the universe, with natural causality, whereas philosophy, and in a different manner, theology, inquire about the ultimate ground and cause of reality, about the existential aspects of life.⁶⁸ The latter questions go beyond those asked by natural science and beyond its competence. The alleged antagonism between creation and evolutionary theory implies that theological interpretation (creation), and scientific explanations (Big Bang, theory of evolution) are alternative responses to the same question.⁶⁹ Yet, religion points in fact to a radically different dimension of the existence.⁷⁰ As long as the specificity of each field is taken into account, and critical thinking is not given up, there can be no real antagonism between the scientific and the religious/theological approach.

⁶⁶ H. Haag, Die biblische Schöpfungsgeschichte heute, in: H. Haag; A. Haas; J. Hürzeler (eds.), *Evolution und Bibel*, Luzern – München 1962, 7–56 (14: the Bible is not only the word of God, but the word of God through humans, to humans).

⁶⁷ Kessler, *Kreative Schöpfung*, 34–36; Harlow, *Creation*, 166.

⁶⁸ Kessler, *Kreative Schöpfung*, 36–37 (“Naturwissenschaft untersucht regelhafte [=gesetzmäßige] Funktionszusammenhänge zwischen endlichen Ursachen; sie fasst das expandierende Universum als lückenlosen Kausalzusammenhang auf und sie bedarf zu dessen Beschreibung keines Schöpfergottes. Aber naturwissenschaftliche Wie-Beschreibung und Kausal-Erklärung der Dinge und des Kosmos im Ganzen ist keine vollständige Erklärung, sondern nur ein möglicher Zugang zur Wirklichkeit unter anderen. [...] Die Physik als solche und Naturwissenschaft insgesamt blendet Zwecksetzen und Sinnverstehen aus. Einen Sinn der Welt kann sie weder finden noch leugnen. Letzte menschliche Fragen nach dem Warum und Wozu der Welt, nach Geist, Freiheit oder Gott vermag die Naturwissenschaft nicht zu beantworten. Naturwissenschaft muss Gott aus dem Spiel lassen, die Freiheit und einen Sinn auch. [...] Der Mensch aber [auch der Physiker oder der Hirnforscher als Mensch] fragt nach dem Sinn des Ganzen: dem Sinn des Lebens, der Geschichte, der ganzen Welt-Einrichtung. Der Mensch sucht sich und die Welt zu verstehen”). On philosophy and theology: Kessler, *Kreative Schöpfung*, 38–39.

⁶⁹ Van Till, 155 (“the common error of treating creation and evolution as if they were in essence alternative answers to the same question”). Cf. Mc Mullin, *Plantinga’s Defense of Special Creation*, 175.

⁷⁰ Kessler, *Kreative Schöpfung*, 39.

Methodological Specificity in the Field of Biblical Studies

Respect for the distinctive competency of various disciplines implies the recognition of specific methodologies. Biblical hermeneutics aims at establishing the principles to be followed in the interpretation of biblical texts. The matter is not simple, however. The shift that occurred roughly in the second half of the 20th century leads to the gradual decrease of the influence previously exerted by historical criticism, at the advantage of synchronic (linguistic, literary, rhetorical) approaches and of theological interpretations (canonical criticism). Whereas historical criticism focuses on the formation of the text, on its cultural background and on the authorial intention, synchronic, literary approaches dismiss the issue of authorial intention as both inaccessible and irrelevant and focus on the (pluri-)form meaning of the text as it is, on the interplay of text and reader, and on the latter's subjectivity.⁷¹ Theological approaches (e.g. canonical criticism), concentrate on the final, canonical form of the Bible as inspired text, and on its theological consequences for systematic theology and church practice.⁷² Not few biblical scholars think that historical criticism, especially with its focus on authorial intention, is outdated. This perspective has adepts among philosophically minded scholars as well. Thus Ricœur, following Gadamer, argued for the emancipation of the written text and its autonomy with respect to authorial intention and to the world of the author.⁷³ The autonomy of the written text removes the reader from the finite horizon of the original audience. Yet, Ricœur does not posit the alternative "authorial intention versus text structure", but focuses on the *world of the text* as object of biblical hermeneutics, i.e. on the world revealed by the text.⁷⁴

In spite of the belittlement of historical critical interpretation, the method continues to be the ground for any serious biblical scholarship. No doubt, it is far from easy to discover the intention of the author; it is also true that any text has occasioned multiple interpretations over the time (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), and interpretation is eventually (also) a dialogue between text and reader (reader-response criticism). Synchronic-literary and theological approaches offer an excellent complement and many valuable insights. Biblical theological reflection may not be absent from systematic theology. Yet, a solid exegesis needs to take into account the historical character of the text, the age and circumstances of its writing, its original readership, and the message the author intends to convey.⁷⁵ A major difficulty of any reading focusing exclusively on the subjectivity of the (atemporal or always different) reader is that in the end one can read anything from or

⁷¹ On the 20th century hermeneutical shift: *Brown; Schneiders*, *Hermeneutics*, 1146–1165; *J. J. Collins*, *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age*, Grand Rapids MI 2005 (esp. 1–25). For a criticism, see also *G. R. Osborne*, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Downers Grove 1997, 518–519.

⁷² *B. S. Childs*, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*, Minneapolis MN ²1993, 70–79; *M. C. Calloway*, *Canonical Criticism*, in: S. R. Haynes; St. L. McKenzie (eds.), *To Each its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*, Louisville KY – London – Leiden – Westminster ²1999, 142–155.

⁷³ *Ricœur*, *Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation*, in: id., *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. L. S. Mudge, Philadelphia 1980, 47–77 (64).

⁷⁴ *Ricœur*, *Hermeneutic*, 64–65.

⁷⁵ *P. L. A. Schökel; J. M. Bravo*, *A Manual of Hermeneutics (The Biblical Seminar 54)*, tr. L. M. Rosa, Sheffield 1998, 32–47.

into a text. On the other hand, a misconceived identification of the biblical text with the very word of God may read into the Bible issues that could not have been addressed by biblical authors.

From the viewpoint of our topic it is emphatically important to take into account precisely the criteria provided by historical criticism: the historical background of the text, the literary genre, the 'Sitz im Leben', the cultural context and the intention of the author.⁷⁶ The misunderstanding of the creation accounts has to do precisely with the neglect of these issues, and with projecting modern assumptions into the text.⁷⁷

Discovering the Symbolic Character of Religious Texts, as Hermeneutical Principle

Beyond methodological problems, the interpretation of the biblical texts has to take into account a more fundamental issue, namely the nature and character of religious discourse. The conflict between the scientific and the theological talk on origins shows that the religious and the scientific discourse are read alike, as source of objective-factual information. In contrast, following Ricœur, I argue that the language of biblical texts is essentially (real)symbolic, metaphoric, and addresses a deeper reality.

Ricœur emphasises the symbolic character of religious language.⁷⁸ In his understanding, the symbol is a linguistic expression with double (or multiple) meanings, that requires interpretation.⁷⁹ Interpretation is therefore aimed at revealing, deciphering the symbols; a symbol exists where an expression requires interpretation because of its double or multiple meanings.⁸⁰ Following Aristotle Ricœur shows that in every *mythos* there is a *logos* to be revealed.⁸¹ A symbol is an intentional structure constituted not in the relation between meaning and thing, but in the relation between the two meanings; this relationship is built on analogy, or the primary meaning reveals the second one.⁸² As opposed to the likeness, which we examine from outside, "a symbol is the very movement of the primary meaning intentionally assimilating us to the symbolized, without our being able to intellectually dominate the likeness".⁸³

In the field of phenomenology of religion this double meaning is expressed in the cosmic symbols (such as the earth, heavens, the water, the tree, the stone), and in the myths of origins.⁸⁴ The *mythos* is not a naïve story, but, originally, a traditional narrative that has to do with the beginning of time, that grounds the rituals, generally those actions and ways of thinking through which humans understand themselves and their relationship to

⁷⁶ *Mc Mullin*, Plantinga's Defense of Special Creation, 175.

⁷⁷ *Kessler*, Kreative Schöpfung, 30.

⁷⁸ *Ricœur*, Freud and Philosophy, New Haven 1970, 7–19; *La Symbolique du Mal*, Paris 1960, 16. On Ricœur's hermeneutical principles see also: *Ricœur*, The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection I, tr. D. Savage, in: id., Conflict of Interpretations. Essays in Hermeneutics, ed. D. Ihde, London 2004, 284–311, esp. 294–296.

⁷⁹ *Ricœur*, Freud and Philosophy, 9, 18.

⁸⁰ *Ricœur*, Freud and Philosophy, 9, 18, 38.

⁸¹ *Ricœur*, Freud and Philosophy, 19; cf. *Ricœur*, *La Symbolique du Mal*, 154.

⁸² *Ricœur*, Freud and Philosophy, 18.

⁸³ *Ricœur*, Freud and Philosophy, 17.

⁸⁴ *Ricœur*, *La Symbolique du Mal*, 18.

reality. At the encounter with modern, rational thinking, myths lose their explanatory power, but turn into symbols, and acquire thereby the power to reveal the relationship with the Sacred.⁸⁵ Symbols express in a powerful manner a deeper reality, which they both conceal and reveal.⁸⁶

Ricœur's approach is conspicuously real-symbolic. The connection between signifier ("expression signifiante") and signified ("le signifié") is "a primordial, unfailing relationship, which never has the conventional and arbitrary character of «technical» signs that mean only what is posited in them".⁸⁷ The symbol presupposes a double bond between signifier and signified, in our case the Sacred. The latter is bound to the primary, literal sense, and this explains the opacity of the symbol. On the other hand the literal sense is bound by the symbolic meaning that inhabits it: this explains the revealing power of symbols.⁸⁸ It is precisely this revealing power that distinguishes symbols from merely informing signs (which Ricœur calls "technical signs"): the symbol gives what it signifies.⁸⁹

For Ricœur hermeneutics has to do with recognising the symbolic nature of (religious) language. Hermeneutics, as *interpretation*, involves both faith and reason. Hermeneutics leading to faith necessarily implies an initial confrontation with suspicion. Faith is not the naïve faith of the simple soul, but the one that has gone through critical reflection; for that reason Ricœur speaks of a postcritical faith, which reaches through the process of interpretation a "second naïveté":

The contrary of suspicion, I will say bluntly, is faith. What faith? No longer, to be sure, the first faith of the simple soul, but rather the second faith of one who has engaged in hermeneutics, faith that has undergone criticism, postcritical faith. Let us look for it in the series of philosophic decisions that secretly animate a phenomenology of religion and lie hidden even within its apparent neutrality. It is a rational faith, for it interprets; but it is a faith because it seeks, through interpretation, a second naïveté. Phenomenology is its instrument of hearing, of recollection, of restoration of meaning. "Believe in order to understand, understand in order to believe" – such is its maxim; and its maxim is the "hermeneutic circle" itself of believing and understanding.⁹⁰

Interpreting the symbolic religious language that passes through deconstruction, one reaches the restoration of the deeper meaning of the text. This progress leads from cri-

⁸⁵ Ricœur, *La Symbolique du Mal*, 12–13, 157.

⁸⁶ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 7.

⁸⁷ Ricœur, *La Symbolique du Mal*, 22; *Freud and Philosophy*, 30–31; see also 48–51 on the artificial character of "logical symbols". In this real-symbolic approach he comes close to 20th century Catholic real-symbolic theology, represented e.g. by K. Rahner (*Zur Theologie des Symbols*, in: id., *Schriften zur Theologie IV*, Einsiedeln – Zürich – Köln 1964, 275–311).

⁸⁸ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 31.

⁸⁹ "The revealing power of symbols opposes symbols to technical signs, which merely signify what is posited in them and which, therefore, can be emptied, formalized, and reduced to mere objects of a calculus. Symbols alone give what they say." Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 31 (emphasis in the original).

⁹⁰ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 28, compare 543. The background of this statement is the criticism of those he calls the "masters of suspicion" – Marx, Nietzsche and Freud and their hermeneutic of suspicion and critique of false consciousness. Yet their destructive criticism based on suspicion enables hermeneutics, as a process of interpretation. The hermeneutic of suspicion has also a positive element as it is aimed at a new form of consciousness (*Freud and Philosophy*, 32–36).

tique to the *second naïveté* that grasps by means of critical reflection the sense of symbolic language.⁹¹

Based on the hermeneutical principles elaborated by Ricœur, psychologists of religion David Wulff⁹² and Dirk Hutsebaut⁹³ have developed scales to evaluate attitudes to religion from the viewpoint of the acceptance or rejection of the transcendent and of the critical or uncritical understanding of religious speech. The post-critical belief scale of Hutsebaut distinguishes four attitudes: (1) *literal affirmation* corresponding to orthodoxy (fundamentalism)⁹⁴ (2) *literal disaffirmation* or *external critique* (3) *reductive interpretation* or relativism, and (4) *restorative interpretation*, or second naïveté.⁹⁵ In terms of inclusion/exclusion of the transcendent, orthodoxy and second naïveté, both inclusive, are at the opposite pole compared to external critique and reductive interpretation, exclusive of this dimension. Yet, orthodoxy and external critique are related in terms of literal interpretation, the first representing literal affirmation, the second literal disaffirmation. Restorative interpretation (second naïveté) adopts a symbolic interpretation and integrates transcendence, while reductive interpretation explains religious phenomena by non-religious factors and rejects the transcendent dimension. For the latter, "If anything is considered to be absolute in this approach, it is the scientific method and rational and formal principles of knowledge".⁹⁶ While these scales pertain to the field of practical theology, the categories on which they are based are useful for biblical hermeneutics. They show that the interpretation of religious statements largely depends on the literal or symbolic reading of texts. The very notion of a symbolic meaning and reading of the biblical text may alarm conservative biblical scholars, as an assault to the authority of the Bible. However, such assumption reveals an exceeding reliance on historical meaning as the

⁹¹ "You must understand in order to believe, but you must believe in order to understand. [...] You must believe in order to understand. No interpreter in fact will ever come close to what his text says if he does not live in the aura of the meaning that is sought. And yet it is only by understanding that we can believe. The second immediacy, the second naïveté that we are after, is accessible only in hermeneutics: we can believe only by interpreting. This is the 'modern' modality of belief in symbols; expression of modernity's distress and cure for this distress. Such is the circle: hermeneutics proceeds from the preunderstanding of the very matter which through interpretation it is trying to understand. But thanks to this hermeneutic circle I can still today communicate with the Sacred by explicating the preunderstanding which animates the interpretation. Hermeneutics, child of 'modernity', is one of the ways in which this modernity overcomes its own forgetfulness of the Sacred. I believe that being can still speak to me, no longer indeed in the precritical form of immediate belief but as the second immediacy that hermeneutics aims at." (Ricœur, *The Hermeneutics of Symbols*, 294–295).

⁹² D. Wulff, *Psychology of Religion, Classic and Contemporary Views*, New York 1991, esp. 630–635.

⁹³ D. Hutsebaut, *Post-Critical Belief. A New Approach to the Religious Attitude Problem*, in: *Journal of Empirical Theology* 9.2 (1996) 48–66; B. Duriez; B. Soenens; D. Hutsebaut, *Introducing the shortened Post-Critical Belief Scale*, in: *Personality and Individual Differences* 38 (2005) 851–857. Hutsebaut is largely dependent on Wulff.

⁹⁴ Although in 1996 Hutsebaut stressed that orthodoxy should not be identified with fundamentalism, as it is open to questions and to a certain degree of symbolic interpretation (*Post-Critical Belief*, 56–57), in 2001 this approach is described as fundamentalist. See B. Duriez; D. Hutsebaut, *Approaches to Religion and the Moods and Emotions Associated with Religion. An Exploratory Study in Flandres (Belgium)*, in: *Journal of Empirical Theology* 14.2 (2001) 75–84 (76–77). Actually this interpretation was characterised by Wulff himself as proper to fundamentalism.

⁹⁵ Hutsebaut, *Post-Critical Belief*, 57–58.

⁹⁶ Duriez; Hutsebaut, *Approaches*, 76.

single way of expressing truth. Applying Ricœur's interpretation of symbols and his hermeneutics shows that the antagonism between faith and natural science, between faith and reason occurs in the case of literal affirmation (orthodoxy/fundamentalism), or of literal disaffirmation (external critique). This opposition is removed in the case of restorative-symbolic interpretation of the text, leading to a second naïveté.

Conclusions

In Christian circles, claiming a conflict between the biblical and the scientific explanation concerning the origin of the world and of humans has to do with specific hermeneutical options, namely biblical literalism, strict inerrantism and a naïve interpretation of inspiration. Recognising the (real)symbolic character of religious language eliminates this difficulty, and reveals the deeper meaning of the text.

Although postmodern, synchronic, literary or canonical readings declared the end of historical criticism, knowledge of the 'Sitz im Leben', of the genre, of the cultural, historical and religious context of the author and of the authorial intention are essential for understanding biblical texts. Otherwise the meaning of the text becomes entirely subjective. This should be maintained even when historical criticism is not the one and only path to discovering the meaning of the text. More important for our topic, awareness of these issues prevents the interpreter from reading into the text modern questions, including scientific matters.

Beyond issues of biblical hermeneutics, there is broader question that needs to be considered, concerning our presuppositions about the cognition of reality. Biblical fundamentalists and ideologically oriented natural scientists share in a sense an epistemological monism, according to which reality may be appropriately described using one single approach (bible *or* science). However, reality is far more complex to be accurately described by a single mode of cognition, let this be that of natural science or religion. Whereas these approaches have distinct principles and methods, they should not be regarded as mutually exclusive or, at best, parallel. Examples of fruitful dialogue between religion and science strengthen this perspective.

Der Beitrag befasst sich mit den christlichen Wurzeln der Auseinandersetzung zwischen der Evolutionstheorie und biblischen Sichtweisen der Schöpfung. Der von einigen Theologen geltend gemachte Gegensatz hängt mit hermeneutischen Entscheidungen und theologischen Auffassungen zusammen, wie etwa der Annahme einer vollständigen Verbalinspiration und der absoluten Irrtumslosigkeit der Bibel. Zunächst werden die Versuche behandelt, den Konflikt zwischen den Schöpfungsberichten und der Evolutionstheorie zu lösen oder zu überwinden. Nach einer Kritik an der Verbalinspiration wird die Relevanz der historisch-kritischen Methode herausgestellt. Ricœur folgend wird schließlich dargelegt, inwiefern bei der Interpretation biblischer Texte der symbolische Charakter religiöser Sprache beachtet werden muss.