

3. Building an Ark. Impulses from biblical creation texts

In 1971, the international non-governmental organisation Greenpeace was founded in Canada. Its concern is twofold: peace among peoples and with creation. The compound name Greenpeace is meant to express this dual goal. After only a few years, the organisation was already using its own ship for many of its campaigns. Now in its third generation, it is called "Rainbow Warrior" and bears the symbol of the rainbow and a white dove with an olive branch on its bow. This is a clear allusion to the biblical story of Noah and the great flood (Gen. 6–9). Sociologically, this is an interesting process: a secular, ideologically neutral NGO has taken its emblem from the Holy Scriptures of the Jewish and Christian religions.

One could criticise this process from two sides: From the point of view of religions, Greenpeace's choice of emblem could be understood as encroaching and appropriating, in extreme cases even as blasphemous, and one could claim that the Noah narrative is about more or other things than environmental protection and world peace. From the point of view of secular society, it could be assumed that Greenpeace is trying to proselytise for a certain religious tradition or to ingratiate itself with it, i.e. that it is by no means ideologically neutral. Neither criticism has been seriously raised. However, this does not necessarily mean agreement. It could also mean that the Greenpeace logo is no longer considered.

On the other hand, the choice of symbolism seems to me to be extremely significant. On the one hand, it draws attention to the fact that an NGO that engages in altruistic activities with a high level of personal commitment needs a "mission" and sources of strength to realise it. The secular humanist and biologist Edward O. Wilson expresses this need more explicitly than Greenpeace. He needs something like "grace", but firmly rooted in the earth: "In essence, I still longed for grace, but rooted solidly on Earth" (Edward O. Wilson 2006, 43–44). On the other hand, Greenpeace's choice of symbolism points to the fact that the Bible offers a rich reservoir of texts that transcend the boundaries of all religions and world views and can serve as a "mission statement" and source of strength at the same time.

This is precisely the core thesis of Alfons Auer's "Autonomous Morality", which, after hard and painful debates, is now a firm part of moral theology, at least in the German-speaking world (Alfons Auer 1971 and 1984²,

212–215). In it, Auer denies that there is a material ethical proprium, a kind of "special morality" for the Christian (or any other) religion. "The human is human for pagans as well as for Christians." (Alfons Auer 1984², 212). So there is no ethical norm that would only apply to Christians or could only be understood by them. Ethical demands must be reasonably comprehensible and binding for all people. Nevertheless, faith opens up a horizon of meaning that integrates, stimulates and criticises the formation and justification of ethical judgements.

- *Integrates*: Faith offers a broader horizon. Thus, the demand to respect the dignity of every creature can be seen as a demand for justice even without faith. But when Christians recognise a being loved by God in every creature, the view opens up the possibility of deeper connections.
- *Stimulates*: The tradition of faith has a strong narrative component. Concrete, vivid narratives in particular can stimulate a more intensive search for moral truth. The Noah narrative, like the biblical creation narratives as a whole, is such a narrative.
- *Criticises*: Ethical judgement is always in danger of settling for mediocrity. Faith, on the other hand, nourishes the inner hunger for more, for the "greater righteousness" (Mt. 5:20), for going beyond the limits. It criticises existing injustices and shortcomings. One thinks of some prophetic texts that do not hesitate to denounce the regional destruction of the environment by the powerful of their time (Is. 14:8; 2 Kings 19:23 etc.).

When Auer speaks here of "the Christian faith", he does not only or primarily mean the single contents of faith (*fides quae*), but above all the practised performance of faith (*fides qua*); one could also say: "the believing" of Christians. This performance manifests itself in very earthly things: in telling (biblical and non-biblical) stories, in singing songs, in performing rituals, in saying prayers, and in experiencing community. "Faith" in Auer's sense is thus meant holistically, perhaps even more emotionally than rationally (though not irrationally), in the sense of loving, trusting and devotion. Precisely because of this emotional penetration, faith can not only integrate thinking—a rather rational event—but also stimulate and criticise thinking—two rather emotional processes.

Without explicitly referring to Auer, Pope Francis framed his 2015 encyclical *Laudato si'* in precisely this way. He writes: "Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality.

If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it. The Catholic Church is open to dialogue with philosophical thought; this has enabled her to produce various syntheses between faith and reason... Furthermore, although this Encyclical welcomes dialogue with everyone ..., I would like from the outset to show how faith convictions can offer Christians, and some other believers as well, ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters." (LS 63–64)

Philosophical thinking, as we will see in the following chapters 5 and 6, will provide the rationale for sustainable environmental ethics. But it needs the experiences of the most diverse cultures, religions and spiritualities to motivate and move from thinking to action. This is entirely in the spirit of Auer's autonomous morality and also in the spirit of philosophy. Thus, philosopher Konrad Ott (2016, 96–97) writes: "Thus it could be that the moral and ethical conflicts of the Anthropocene... can be fought out nowhere better than within the horizon of biblical morality."

So, what criticising, integrating and stimulating impulses can the Christian faith bring to modern environmental ethics? To answer this, I would like to look at two theological sources of knowledge ("loci theologici") in this and the next chapter: the Bible and liturgy. Both hold enormous potential. However, both have also been misinterpreted (Bible) or misdeveloped (liturgy) in the course of history. Therefore, in this biblical chapter, I will begin with some notes on such aberrations and also on the methodology of biblical interpretation. I will then go through the first nine chapters of the Bible to finally open up some more central texts and images from the Bible for creation ethics.

3.1 *The ecclesiastical aberrations in the interpretation of biblical creation texts*

In 1967, the medievalist Lynn White published a sensational article in the scientific journal "Science" on "the historical roots of our ecological crisis". In it, he proved that the technological and scientific dynamism of Western Europe, which began in the 11th century and continues today, has its roots in the widespread Christianisation by the Carolingians in the 9th century. This led to a combination of two basic spiritual attitudes: Firstly, the biblical creation narratives were understood in such a way that everything created existed solely for the benefit and well-being of man,

because he alone was God's image. Christianity had thus become the most anthropocentric religion in the world. "God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image. Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. (...) Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends." (Lynn White 1967, 1205)

Secondly, the significant difference between the Latin Western and Greek Eastern Churches has to be explained, for only the Latin Church had produced the aforementioned technological and scientific dynamic, while the Christian East had lagged behind technically and scientifically. Here, White refers to the Voluntarism of the Western Church, which emerged in the 11th century, and which places the human will and its freedom before or above the knowledge of reason. In contrast, the Greek Eastern Church remained intellectualistic, i.e. it placed the knowledge of reason before will and freedom.

This leads to the following conclusion for White: "first, that, viewed historically, modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and, second, that modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realisation of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature" (Lynn White 1967, 1206). The ecological crisis cannot be solved simply by more natural science and more (environmental) technology, but only by spiritual conversion. The creation mysticism of Francis of Assisi and his idea of fraternity with all creatures lends itself to this, White concludes.

With this small essay, White initiated a debate that has not died down to this day. However, his thesis has often been coarsened and robbed of its temporal and spatial limitations. The medievalist White only analyses the Middle Ages. He does not ask where the medieval interpretations of the biblical narratives come from and whether they are exegetically correct. He also does not ask what is at the origin of Western voluntarism and why this only affected the Christian West, but not the Christian East. Finally, he does not analyse post-Reformation and modern developments, which suggest that it was not so much Catholicism as Protestantism (especially Calvinism and the Free Churches) that promoted environmental destruction (cf. Peter Hersche 2020 and 2020a). As a medievalist, White sticks to his last. However, the title suggests that one has arrived at the roots of

history, as if there were no prehistory to the Middle Ages. This is precisely what leads to uncovered generalisations and very sweeping accusations of "Christianity". In the German-speaking world, it was above all Carl Amery who spoke out in 1972 with his monograph on the "merciless consequences of Christianity" and Eugen Drewermann in 1986 with his treatise on the "destruction of the earth and of man in the legacy of Christianity".

In the meantime, the accusations have been dealt with in a clean and nuanced way, e.g. by Udo Krolzik in 1979, Hans J. Münk in 1987 and Simone Rappel in 1996. This book, which has a systematic-ethical and not an analytical-historical intention, is not the place to recapitulate the debate anew. However, it will be important to look at both the biblical texts and, in the following chapter, the liturgical practices of Christianity self-critically and honestly through the filter of ecologically motivated criticism of Christianity.

The Churches took up Lynn's criticism late, but very clearly and acknowledged their complicity. The European Ecumenical Assembly in Basel in 1989 stated: "We have failed because we have not borne witness to God's caring love for all and every creature and because we have not developed a lifestyle that corresponds to our self-understanding as part of God's creation." And: "Conversion to God (metanoia) today means the commitment to seek a way out of the separation between human beings and the rest of creation, out of human domination over nature, out of a lifestyle and economic modes of production that seriously damage nature, out of an individualism that violates the integrity of creation for the sake of private interests, into a communion of human beings with all creatures in which their rights and integrity are respected." (EEA 45)

Pope Francis also candidly admits in 2015: "This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man "dominion" over the earth (cf. Gen. 1:28), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. ... Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures." (LS 67), which is all the more reason to ask what the biblical texts really mean.

3.2 Hermeneutical and exegetical preliminary remarks on Gen. 1–9

Hermeneutically, we must first clarify what the biblical texts mean by "*creation*" (Karl Löning/ Erich Zenger 1997, 17–20, 40–42). In biblical thought, "creation" means first and foremost the foundation of a relationship between Creator and creature that is ongoing and has a goal. This goal is already recognisable in the origin and thus "real", effective. Despite the transgression of set boundaries (Gen. 3) and the act of violence by human beings (Gen. 6), it is not ultimately threatened.

The biblical creation *narratives* are written as *myths*. A myth describes basic features of the world as it permanently is (and not as it once was in the past!) in the form of a story that "was". The past tense of the narrative is thus a stylistic device. In the liturgy and in the telling, this history is made present, as if it were happening now, in order to lament and invoke something with it: the intercession of the Divinity in favour of life. The biblical creation narratives were told at festivals when this intercession of God in favour of life is particularly questionable: at the annual New Year's festival, which then as now raises many questions about what the new year will bring, and at the birth of a human being, when the relatives also wonder what will happen to this person in life. Thus, behind the creation narratives is primarily the question of theodicy: Is God really good and just, when there is so much suffering and hardship in creation? The creation ethical question of what contribution humans can make to the well-being of all creation, on the other hand, is secondary. The biblical narratives are not treatises on creation ethics, even though they contain a multitude of impulses relevant to creation ethics.

An important question to be clarified in advance is that of *the delimitation of the creation narratives*. Classically, the first major textual unit in the Book of Genesis has been identified in chapters 1–11, and recently Georg Fischer (2018, 72) has rejoined this debate. Then the narrative culminates in the Tower of Babel, and only the first two chapters are perceived as two distinct creation narratives. The majority of exegetes in the last 25 years, however, follow the suggestion of Karl Löning and Erich Zenger (1997, 135–142) in understanding the death of Noah in Gen. 9:28–29 as the conclusion of this first great unit of the Book of Genesis and in reading Gen. 10–11 already as a prelude to the subsequent story of the Patriarchs, for Gen. 1–9 is a self-contained composition that can be read in itself: Including the story of Noah, it is a single, coherent creation narrative that reaches its climax and crowning conclusion in God's covenant with all creatures: never again shall chaos, which is hostile to life, have the

upper hand. Never again shall the survival of living beings as a whole be endangered.

Basing my analysis on these reflections, I would like to read the creation narrative Gen. 1–9 "backwards". I will begin with the Noahide covenant as a model of justice for the present (Gen. 9), which is a response to the flood narrative Gen. 6–8, which speaks of the ecologically disastrous consequences of human violence. In a second major part, I will first read the narrative of man and animals in the Garden of Paradise and of the violation of its integrity (Gen. 2–3) and finally the narrative of the seven-day work, in which the great house of life of creation comes into being (Gen. 1). But first, I will consider one of the most beautiful creation texts in the entire Bible, Psalm 104.

3.3 *Prelude: The vision of a great family of all creatures (Ps. 104)*

At the beginning of the biblical faith in creation is the "conviction that, as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect." (LS 89). This is magnificently expressed in Ps. 104, a wise hymn of creation (on the following cf. Karl Löning/ Erich Zenger 1997, 52–65).

Verses 1–4 portray God as a universal king who places all creation at his service: Light is his mantle, the heavens his tent, the waters the foundation of his dwelling, the clouds his chariot and the winds his wings. This God needs no intermediaries to relate to his creation—neither man nor the temple and its cult.

The powers of chaos in the form of destructive floods have also already been put in their place and overcome by God. Verses 6–9 allude to the work of creation on the third day, the separation of water and land (Gen. 1:9–10), and to the overcoming of the great flood (Gen. 6–8), which will never return: "A boundary you have set, they [the waters, MR] must not cross it; never again shall they cover the earth" (Ps. 104:9). Verse 5 preceding this passage therefore confesses the "fundamental unshakability of the earth" (Karl Löning/ Erich Zenger 1997, 53), for "for all eternity it shall not shake" (Ps. 104:5).

Verses 10–16 are dedicated to (tamed) water as the basis of life for animals and plants. Water supplies land animals and birds, grass and crops, and vines and trees. Bread, wine and oil, the prestige products of the

Mediterranean farming culture of the time, are explicitly mentioned and referred to man, his nourishment and his zest for life.

The following section of verses 17–23 is about the habitats (biotopes) and the activity times (chronotopes) of living beings: Either they have their own habitat where they are undisturbed, or they share the same habitat with each other but use it at different times—some at night, others during the day. Finally, after jubilant praise in verse 24, marine habitats and creatures are depicted in verses 25–26. Again, the allusion to Gen. 1 cannot be overlooked.

Verses 27–30 address a final theme: the neediness and fragility of creaturely life: creatures need constant nourishment, and eventually they all return to the dust of the earth. Whether they live, have enough food or die is in the hands of the Creator.

With praise of the greatness and goodness of the Creator in verses 31–35, the Psalm ends and closes the circle to its beginning.

Ps. 104 draws on an extraordinarily accurate and varied observation of nature. He "uncovers their interdependent connections, especially the constitutive interdependence of all life in the world and of the living God" (Karl Löning/Erich Zenger 1997, 53). But he does not do this from the detached, sober observation perspective of the scientist, but from the amazed, moved attitude of the participant who praises and glorifies God. At the same time, the psalmist knows about the threats to life on earth. Earthquakes, flood disasters and volcanic eruptions, even death, are named with a shudder, but then placed in the hands of God, who does what is right for his creatures.

A common thread in Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* is "the conviction that everything in the world is connected" (LS 16; cf. also LS 91; 117; 138). Later, as already quoted, the Pope speaks of the "conviction that, as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect" (LS 89). Here the concept of family is applied to all creatures—entirely in the tradition of Francis of Assisi, who calls all living beings his sisters and brothers, for "we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion. As believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings" (LS 220). This interconnectedness has tangible consequences: "Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity." (LS 240). "Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and

respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another." (LS 42). These thoughts reflect much of what Psalm 104 sings about jubilantly two and a half millennia earlier. It is thus a good door opener for the first chapters of the Bible, which I will look at below.

3.4 *The Noahide Covenant as a model of justice for the present day*

3.4.1 God's Covenant with His Creation (Gen. 9)

As already mentioned, the purpose of both the flood narrative (Gen. 6–9) and the entire creation narrative (Gen. 1–9) becomes clear from its end, i.e. from God's covenant with Noah and all creatures living at present and in the future. This statement reads: God's faithfulness to his creation is greater than all human power; precisely as threatened, the earth is loved and supported by God (cf. on the following Karl Löning/ Erich Zenger 1997, 160–177). This statement is in complete agreement with God's promise to Noah in Gen. 8:21–22: Never again shall all living creatures be "smitten". The preceding flood narrative is thus an "antimythos": In it, what "was" there is fictitiously told in order to say what will never be: absolute chaos; total destruction.

This is exactly what Gen. 9 focuses on. In verses 1 and 7, the blessing of fertility and multiplication from Gen. 1 "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth" is repeated and affirmed. Then follows a description of the present real world. The animals live in "fear and dread" of man. They exist in competition not only with each other but also with man. Man cannot help but eat living creatures, and he is allowed to do so (verse 3). However, there are limits to his hunger: The blood, the lifeblood, remains forbidden to him: "Flesh with its life, its blood, you may not eat" (verse 4). The fact that in the ritual slaughter of Judaism and Islam, which goes back to this instruction, the blood must flow out completely, is a strong symbol of reverence. The person slaughtering or eating meat should always remember that he is consuming a living being.

Animals may be eaten under certain conditions and under the inculcation of restraint and moderation. Humans, on the other hand, may not be killed (verse 5). Gen. 9 thus reckons with a conflictual and not non-violent reality. It sees a certain amount of violence as inevitable. Life is possible in the creation house of the earth only at the expense of other life. But the two prohibitions of the consumption of blood and the killing of human beings are meant to limit and regulate violence.

In the following verses 8–17, the actual covenant is made with Noah and his family, with their descendants for all generations and with all living creatures: "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with all living creatures among you, with the birds and the cattle and all the wild animals of the earth among you, with all that have come out of the ark, with all the wild animals of the earth in general." (Gen. 9:9–10). The fact that God's covenant is not only made with human beings seems so important to the text it is repeated again and again: It is the covenant "between me and you and the living creatures with you for all generations to come" (Gen. 9:12), "between me and the earth" (Gen. 9:13), "between me and you and all living creatures, all creatures of flesh" (Gen. 9:15), "between God and all living creatures, all creatures of flesh on earth" (Gen. 9:16), "between me and all creatures of flesh on earth" (Gen. 9:17)—as if the authors wanted to hammer it into the heads of those reading and listening: Do not forget the non-human creatures! They are my and your covenant partners, your brothers and sisters!

Gen. 9 thus sets a decisive ethical course: justice cannot be defined exclusively between humans. Justice, as demanded by the Bible, is to be done to all God's creatures. The Noahide narrative and a large part of the biblical texts as a whole represent biocentrism. Logically, the commandments of the Torah subsequently contain a series of regulations that protect animals and give them certain rights.

As a sign of the covenant, God refers to the rainbow (Gen. 9:13). Originally, it was a symbol of the bow with which the father of the gods shoots his arrows (thunderbolts) at the earth, thus a symbol of punishment, revenge and enmity. In the Noah narrative, it is turned into the positive opposite. From now on, it is supposed to be a sign of peace, the renunciation of violence and the fraternal bond between all creatures.

God offers his protection and care to creation. His attention and his offer come first. But now man owes him a response: he is to treat all creatures justly and with respect.

3.4.2 The flood of violence and the lifeboat of the ark (Gen. 6–8)

According to Gen. 6, the fact that a flood comes over the whole earth is not a whim of God, but a consequence of real deeds of earthly beings. The earth is full of the violent deeds of all beings (Gen. 6:13) and increasingly full of the wickedness of men (Gen. 6:5). In a myth, as is the narrative, the

flood, figuratively portrayed as a solitary decision of God, must be understood in real terms as a consequence of human violence and destruction. Man's actions deprive all creatures of their habitats and rob them of the air they need to breathe. Violence and destruction are like water up to their necks.

Noah recognises the signs of the times and breaks out of the cycle of violence. He builds a lifeboat, the ark, which has become a symbol of the community of fate between animals and humans that is still so well understood today: Either they share the small boat or they perish together. The story emphasises the ark's exact dimensions: "Three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high" (Gen. 6:15). It is also emphasised that the ark has three floors (Gen. 6:16). Thus, the narrators make a connection with the Jerusalem temple as described in Ex. 26:15–30: ten cubits high, twelve cubits wide and thirty cubits long. The ark is thus exactly ten times as long and three times as high as the temple in Exodus (Karl Löning/ Erich Zenger 1997, 166). In 1 Kings 6:2, the temple has other dimensions: thirty cubits high, twenty cubits wide and sixty cubits long. This would make the ark the same height, two and a half times as wide and five times as long as the temple (Georg Fischer 2018, 421). The most important worship, according to the statement symbolically hidden in both comparisons, does not take place in the Jerusalem temple, but where people, like Noah, work for human and non-human creatures, for peace and justice in God's house of life. In this way, the text ties in with the ancient prophetic tradition of Israel that social action is more important than participation in worship. Jesus also clearly advocated this position. The highlight of the Noahide narrative, however, is that ethically responsible action does not only concern the interpersonal sphere but must prove itself towards all creatures.

The Noah narrative is laid out in concentric circles, as is considered *opinio communis* in exegesis today. Its centre is Gen. 8:1: "Then God remembered Noah, and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark." God is caring and wants to preserve the life of his creatures. And in fact, in the style of the entire creation narrative, the life of all (!) creatures. This is also specifically emphasised here: "There is a 'middle' with the divine remembrance in 8:1, at which events surprisingly turn to good and bring forth even better things." (Georg Fischer 2018, 401).

In the overall context of the creation narrative Gen. 1–9, the Noah narrative thus has a strong message: the ark is the small area in which the peace of creation already begins, of which Gen. 1–2 tell. Noah practises justice towards all that lives and shares the scarce resources of the tiny

boat with them. He is the prototype of what is called "the image of God" in Gen. 1:26, for his actions are similar to God's actions. Noah abides by the covenant and its righteousness before it is even made. So, one cannot understand Gen. 1–3 without Gen. 6–9 and vice versa. The two parts of the creation narrative are placed in a reciprocally interpretative context.

3.5 *The Peace of Creation as a Utopian Model for Dynamising the Present*

3.5.1 Man and animals in the garden of paradise (Gen. 2–3)

Gen. 2:4–3:24 does not offer a universal view of the world as a whole, like the Noah narrative or Gen. 1:1–2:3, but tells of a small paradisiacal garden that God creates in the middle of the desert, which is hostile to life. There he "places" a single human being and many animals (Gen. 2:5–15), which he forms out of clay and then breathes life into, in order to give the still lonely human being help. They are not the equal help he is looking for, but the story implies a great closeness and similarity between animals and humans. Both are formed of earth and animated by the living breath (*nəfəš chajjāb*: Gen. 2:7–19). Both are mortal (Gen. 3:19), although at the time the text was written there was no thought whatsoever of human beings continuing to live after death—death is the natural end of life for animals and humans. "He has life only because God breathed into him the breath of life. That this illusionless view of man is a negative answer to the question of a potential immortality of man, which was much discussed in Mesopotamia, is still shown by the fragmentary mention of the tree of life in Gen. 3:22 and the mention there of God's fear that man, already detached from God, could take from this tree of life. Man as 'dust' is, strictly logically speaking, not capable of a life without death at all." (Joachim Jeremias 1990, 33)

In particular, however, a close relationship is established through the names that humans give to animals: If the names are to express the essence of the animals—and that is what it is all about—man must know them well. In giving them names, humans establish a relationship to the animals that is more than just factual and rational because they recognise their being and show them respect. Man and animals are each other's companions and helpers, even though the animals are not equal to man. Only the woman whom God creates as the crowning achievement of his work is man's equal.

Together, man and woman are to work in the garden or, as the Hebrew verb *abad* could also be translated (Georg Fischer 2018, 202), serve and care for it (Gen. 2:15). Human labour is thus part of the divine act of creation (Othmar Keel/ Silvia Schroer 2002, 144). Humans are allowed to use everything; it is only the tree in the middle (Gen. 3:2), which symbolises the divine order, that they are not allowed to touch. Gen. 2–3 thus reveals that the garden that God creates in the midst of the hostile, disorderly desert has an order: There is a centre in which a tree stands. The rivers that originate in the garden and flow in the four directions divide the earth into four areas. Their fullness of life flows over the whole earth—for once, the view of the narrative expands here to the global dimension. Finally, man's naming of the animals is also a "symbolic ordering of the world" (Bernd Janowski 1993, 9) in the sense of recognising their God-given nature. Man can "classify" the animals in a larger context. The giving of names is thus not to be read as evidence of man's position of dominion but stands for his ability to recognise beings (Marie Louise Henry 1993, 26–27; Henry refers to Ex. 3, where Moses cannot recognise the name of God by his own power because the essence of God is not accessible to him).

God gave all the trees in the garden to humans and animals for their use, well-being and joy. "Eden" (*edæn*), where the garden is located in Gen. 2:8, literally means "delight" or also "land of pleasure". This is a significant difference from other ancient Near Eastern creation myths: while there humans and animals are created for the benefit and delight of the deity, in Gen. 2–3 they are there for the sake of themselves and their delight in life (Othmar Keel/ Silvia Schroer 2002, 142). The narrative does not think theocentrically or anthropocentrically, but biocentrically. The fact that it was later interpreted anthropocentrically in both Judaism and Christianity is one of the tragic aberrations of both religions.

God has excluded one single tree from use. This restriction would actually be negligible. Even without the fruit of this one tree in the middle, a very good life would be possible. But the restriction offends man. He cannot bear it. All at once he perceives God as "begrudgingly withholding a privilege" (Georg Fischer 2018, 266–267), and so the human couple feel they must cross the line. Gen. 3 tells how man and woman together, and equally responsible for doing so, abuse God's trust and defy the order of the garden.

Gen. 3:14 impressively demonstrates how relationships are disturbed by the transgression of set boundaries: Enmity and opposition arise between man and the serpent, man and his habitat (soil, thistles, thorns), and man and woman. Work and birth, central orders from God to man, which

originally promised blessing, are now perceived as laborious and painful. The presumption of man and his self-conceit over set limits disturbs the community of life in the garden of paradise that God wanted and made possible. The paradisiacal peace of creation is not a characteristic of the present reality.

3.5.2 The great house of life of creation (Gen. 1)

Gen. 1 begins exactly the opposite way as Gen. 2–3. Chaos is here at the beginning, not at the end of the narrative (cf. Karl Löning/ Erich Zenger 1997, 20–24, 29–35): the great "*tohuwabohu*" (*tohû wāwobû*; Gen. 1:2), which has become a common word, translated as "desolate and confused" in the Einheitsübersetzung of 2016 or more onomatopoeically as "madness and confusion" ("Irrsal und Wirrsal") in the translation by Martin Buber (2020). According to this conception, God does not create the world out of nothing, as Christian dogma later states, but out of chaos. As such, the "non-creation" or "counter-creation" of the destructive powers retains power "after" the creative beginning: chaos constantly threatens life. God must permanently intervene, order the chaos and open up spaces for life. Many ancient oriental images testify to how the deities fight against chaos (cf. Otmar Keel/ Silvia Schroer 2002, 123–133). It is therefore a primal human experience: life is constantly threatened and must be protected, as must its habitat.

According to Gen. 1, four "elements" belong to the original chaos: the desert earth, which is hostile to life, darkness as the power of disaster, the primeval sea and "the waters". While Gen. 2 depicts chaos in the image of an arid desert, from which God has to extract a garden through irrigation, Gen. 1 depicts a water desert, from which God wrests the habitats by setting limits to the waters. Thus, Gen. 1 (as well as Ps. 104) is figuratively closer to the flood narrative. And indeed, among Bedouins there is still the dictum that more people die in the desert from too much water than from too little. They do not die of thirst but perish in floods that suddenly shoot through the wadis when it unexpectedly begins to rain. Creation in the sense of Gen. 1 then means that chaos is (partially) ordered and thus contained. God separates the light from the darkness, the water above and below the vault of heaven, the water from the dry land.

From a literary point of view, the *overall structure of the seven-day work* of Gen. 1 is tremendously well thought out and reveals the status of the text as world literature (cf. Karl Löning/ Erich Zenger 1997, 142–146). Already

in purely formal terms, the narration of the works of creation of the first to third days differs significantly from that of the fourth to sixth days. While in the first half of the week the separation of existing life-threatening realities is narrated in order to limit the chaos (light from darkness, water above from water below, water below from land), the second half of the week is about the creation of "beings" that are not there before: sun, moon and stars; animals and humans⁶. While the things separated in the first half of the week are named by God, this does not happen with the newly created beings (not even with sun, moon and stars!). Finally, while habitats are created in the first half of the week, they are populated in the second half. "Successively... the deadliness of the primordial flood is eliminated, so that finally the tohuwabohu earth becomes a nourishing (!) earth, which can serve as a habitat for the living beings then to be created." (Erich Zenger 1983, 84)

On the first, fourth (middle) and seventh (last) days of creation, the *temporal order* of the house of life is created: the daily rhythm (first day), weekly rhythm (seventh day) and monthly and annual rhythm (fourth day, symbolised by sun and moon). The narrative knows that without regularly recurring times, no life is possible on this earth. Trees prepare their buds in winter—if spring did not come or came too late, they would perish. Humans calculate the time of sowing and harvesting precisely—if it were to shift significantly, it would be problematic. So, in addition to ordered habitats (called biotopes in modern biology), there also needs to be temporal order (called chronotopes in modern biology).

While the second and third days are dedicated to the creation of habitats, the fifth and sixth days are dedicated to the *creation of living beings*: animals in the water, in the air and on the land, and humans. In the process, the habitats and living beings are paralleled: The animals of the fifth day colonise the habitats of the second, the animals of the sixth day the habitats of the third. So, it is not a question of an ontological "scala naturae". Habitats and living beings are not ordered in an ascending or descending line from the "lower" to the "higher" living being or vice versa, but according to their (living) spatial proximity to humans (Albert de Pury 1993, 139–140). The decisive structuring and interpretive principle of

6 The plants have a hybrid position in Gen. 1. They are not created by separation, but are brought forth from the earth, as are the animals. However, through classification on the third day of creation, they are part of the living space and do not count as living beings. This is where the Old Testament differs from the Greek philosophy of the time.

Gen. 1 is the distinction between living spaces and living beings, "living space' and 'inhabitants'" (Albert de Pury 1993, 139; similarly, Erich Zenger 1995, 99) as well as their correlative allocation and embedding in supporting rhythms of life. Animals and humans are equally inhabitants of the earthly habitats and receive the same reproductive blessing and equally only plants as food. Eating meat is not permitted in this ideal situation of the peace of creation, as it would imply the killing of living beings and thus violence. As long as plants are not regarded as living beings, this reasoning works. Gen. 1 thus designs "as a positive utopia for dealing with creation a peaceful and non-violent relationship between humans and animals" (Bernhard Irrgang 1992, 130). The living creatures live in habitats that have been assigned to them, there is enough space for all of them, provided they share with each other, and there is sufficient plant food available. No creature goes empty-handed or comes up short.

Diagram: Genesis 1—outline principles (simplified in line with Erich Zenger 1983, 200)

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Day 1: TIME RHYTHMS | Day and night | |
| | Day 2: LIVING SPACE | Sky and water |
| | Day 3: LIVING SPACE | Soil and plants |
| Day 4: TIME RHYTHMS | Sun and moon (year and month) | |
| | Day 5: LIVING BEINGS | Aquatic and aerial ani- mals |
| | Day 6: LIVING BEINGS | Land animals and People |
| Day 7: TIME RHYTHMS | Sabbath (week) | |

Now Gen. 1 nevertheless ascribes a special role to human beings. And it is precisely these sentences that have had the most far-reaching consequences in the history of Christianity. On the one hand, man is described as the image of God; on the other hand, he is given a "mandate to govern". Both aspects require a thorough analysis that is independent of later theological and ecclesiastical interpretations.

In the 2016 Einheitsübersetzung, *Gen. 1:26–27* reads: "Then God said, 'Let us make man as our image, in our likeness. They shall rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. God created man as his image, as the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them.'"

Kehl and Schroer first point out that the concept of the *image of God*, although highly prominent in this narrative and recurring in *Gen. 5:1* and *Gen. 9:6*, has not found any echo beyond the Noah narrative in the entire Hebrew Bible—in contrast to its central meaning in Christian dogmatics (Otmar Keel/ Silvia Schroer 2002, 177–178). This calls for caution, for it could well be that Christian anthropology has interpreted things into the term that it does not contain. So, what is meant? First of all, it is striking that the biblical text says that man was created "as" the image. The "as" points to a role, a function of man in Creation. It is not an ontological statement about the nature of man, but a statement about his relationship to his fellow creatures.

In this respect, exegesis names three meanings of the concept of the image (cf. Karl Löning/ Erich Zenger 1997, 146–155 and Otmar Keel/ Silvia Schroer 2002, 178–180): Man is the image

- 1) like a statue of a god: In the ancient Orient, statues of gods were called images of the deities. The role assigned to them is intended to be a medium of divine life force for all Creation. Whoever looks at the statue and prays receives blessings and salvation.
- 2) like a king: In the ancient oriental kingdoms, kings were called images of the Godhead because, on the one hand, they were given the divine authority to rule in the name of the Godhead within their kingdom, but on the other hand, they were also charged with the duty of defending the order of life of their God, especially with regard to the weak. It is not only in the Bible that the king is committed to the ideal of a caring shepherd. And not only in Israel are there depictions that show the king as the protector of the tree of life, and thus of the divine order of Creation (cf. chapter 3.8). A king thus fulfils his role as God's image when he ensures justice in Creation. This is what is meant when *Gen. 1:26*, in the revised Einheitsübersetzung, formulates that man should "rule" over animals in their various habitats.
- 3) like a child: Some ancient oriental Creation myths tell us that man emerged from the womb of the Godhead and therefore resembles it like an image. The likeness is, as it were, the similarity of a child to its

parents. This likeness should be shown by all human beings in their actions towards Creation, according to the impulse from Gen. 1:26–27. Keel and Schroer assume that in Gen. 1 this last aspect is the most important: "The aspect of vicarious dominion is not a theme in Gen. 5:3, an association with an image of a god is not implied. Thus, one may also assume for Gen. 1:26 that with the likeness not only thoughts of representation and dominion were connected, but above all the greatest possible kinship between God and man was to be expressed." (Otmar Keel/ Silvia Schroer 2002, 180)

In continental European philosophy and theology, the image of God was translated by René Descartes (1596 La Haye en Touraine—1650 Stockholm) as "*maîtres et possesseurs de la nature*"—"masters and possessors of nature" (René Descartes 1637, *Discours de la méthode* VI,2). Descartes was not thinking of the ruthless exploitation of nature, but of its comprehensive mastery by human technology and science, and at least unintentionally paved the way for modern anthropocentrism. In contrast, Anglo-Saxon philosophy and theology had already begun to interpret the concept of the image of God with the concept of "stewardship" a generation after Descartes. The term was introduced into the debate on creation ethics in 1676 by Matthew Hale (1609–1676 Alderley, Gloucestershire)⁷ and in recent decades has also been discovered in continental Europe (Gotthard

7 The term stewardship itself is very familiar in the religious debates of the 17th and 18th centuries in the Anglo-Saxon language area. Matthew Hale, however, makes it the key concept in his reflections on contract theory and asks about the ethical consequences that follow from it. In his *Contemplations Moral and Divine*, Volume 1, published posthumously in 1676, he entitled an entire chapter "The Great Audit, with the Account of the Good Steward" (Matthew Hale 1676, 409–484). In it he draws on Jesus' parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14–30) and lists a total of 17 groups of entrusted gifts. Among them are, as the 6th group, the works of Creation and, as the 10th group, non-human creatures. However, while the works of Creation call primarily for wonder and greater praise of God (theocentric), non-human creatures call for stewardship, fiduciary treatment (biocentric). Thus, Hale writes: "I have esteemed them as thine in Propriety: thou hast committed unto me the use; and a subordinate Dominion over them; yet I ever esteemed myself an Accountant to Thee for them... I received and used thy creatures as committed to me under a Trust, and as a Steward and Accomptant for them; and therefore I was always careful to use them according to those Limits, and in order for those Ends, for which thou didst commit them to me." (Matthew Hale 1676, 441–443). Cruelty and mistreatment of animals, as well as intemperance and lack of compassion towards them, are a breach of God's covenant with Creation, a breach of trust and justice (Matthew Hale 1676, 445–446). The book has gone through numerous editions, and the chapter quoted here in particular has been

M. Teutsch 1985, 98). Since then, it has become established as a useful term. The term stewardship also corresponds more to the description of God's actions in the act of Creation. This is because, in contrast to the Babylonian Creation myth *Enuma elish*, which depicts the creation of the world as a divine conquest, Gen. 1 emphasises God's caring, loving relationship with his Creation (Anathea Portier-Young 2019, 45–67). Thus, it can be summarised: God-imageability means the "active responsibility of the royal human being as God's steward for the entire world of creation in the power of divine blessing" (Walter Gross 1995, 871).

Of course, there is also criticism of the concept of likeness and its transposition with "stewardship". The concept behind both is half-hearted because it still gives humans a special position (Robert Shore-Goss 2016, 14). It falls short because it separates humans from other creatures instead of connecting them (Gloria L. Schaab 2011, 59). The talk of stewardship is seductive because it views Creation as a household to be used and promotes utilitarian thinking (Gloria L. Schaab 2011, 58). It is seductive because it suggests that humans can manage and control the earth's house of life (Michael S. Northcott 1996, 129). These criticisms are certainly to be taken seriously, and I will return to them in chapter 5.1 when discussing anthropocentrism. However, it can already be said that the criticisms are only justified if the two concepts of the image of God and stewardship are taken out of their biblical context and isolated. In the overall context of Gen. 1, it is perfectly clear that the earth must not be seen primarily in terms of utility. And it is equally clear that humans have more in common with other living beings than what separates them. In this respect, it takes a very selective reading of Gen. 1 to fall prey to an anthropocentric misinterpretation.

Because it is directed against the real patriarchal environment, the strong impulse in Gen. 1 that all human beings are to rule as God's images, men as well as women, is revolutionary. Moreover, likeness is not attributed to the king alone, but to every human being. In the concept of the image, therefore, and at least in this the later Christian reception is right, the fundamental equality of all human beings is expressed. In the house of Creation, all human beings are called to shape this house with direct authority given by God, but also with indispensable responsibility to be there for the community of all living beings in a caring, life-serving and beneficial way.

reproduced in many smaller writings. So, one can hardly claim that the history of Christianity is exclusively anthropocentric.

Gen. 1:28 in the 2016 Einheitsübersetzung reads, "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that creeps on the earth.'"

This is the so-called "*dominion order*", the "*dominium terrae*". While the first half of the verse with the blessing of fertility and procreation is also promised to all animals, the second part is only dedicated to humans. But what does it mean? First of all, a comparison of different translations shows that the exact choice of words is important.

- "fill the earth and subdue it to you, and have dominion over..." (according to the revised Luther Bible 2017),
- "populate the earth, subdue it to you and rule over..." (according to the 1983 Einheitsübersetzung),
- "fill the earth and subdue it and rule over..." (according to the Einheitsübersetzung of 2016) or
- "fill the earth and make it arable and rule over..." (according to Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer 2002).

First of all, it is noticeable that the latter two translations omit the "to you". It does not appear in the Hebrew text. And of course, it makes a considerable difference whether human beings subdue the earth for themselves or for another, greater being. In the sense of the aforementioned image metaphor, it is actually clear that it can only be a matter of subduing the earth to God, i.e. of making sure that God's will is done in the whole of Creation.

Furthermore, there are two verbs in Hebrew:

- *kabash* literally means "to set foot on". It could refer to the ancient oriental ritual used when someone took over a territory or a house in fief. The moment he first set foot on it, he assumed care and responsibility for it, but of course also power. This power, when "setting foot on the earth", would then consist of keeping the life house of Creation liveable for all its inhabitants and defending it against destruction. Ancient oriental depictions show people defending their livestock against attacks from predators, placing their foot on the animal to be protected. One can interpret this as selfish, because the cow or goat is worth a lot to its owner. But one can also make the point that a living being is being protected in a caring way—at the risk of human life.
- *radah* literally means "to rule, to tread down". The subsequent enumeration of the habitats of animals indicates what is meant: Man should ensure that all living creatures get their habitat. This is often made clear in ancient oriental images of the so-called "Lord of the Beasts":

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two ibexes or ostriches or other animals fighting with each other are separated by man in order to end their competition. However, "to rule" does not mean to kill. For in the sentence that follows, humans are also only given plants for food.

Of course, even caring, just and altruistic governance remains linked to the use of force. This is no different even in a modern democratic constitutional state. Order cannot be established without violence. But violence should serve to establish justice. It must be measured against this: "The terms *kibbesch* 'to set foot on' and *radah* 'to tread down, trample underfoot, dominate' used in Gen. 1:28 denote rule that may include the use of violence... Apologetic exegesis that seeks to completely exclude the aspects of violence... and only focuses on responsibility does not contribute to processing the history of the impact of this command to rule." (Othmar Keel/ Silvia Schroer 2002, 181)



Illustration: The Lord of the Ibexes illustrates well what is meant by governing animals: scarab from Akko (Tell Fuchar) c. 1600–1500 BC (taken from: Henrike Frey-Anthes 2010, Fig. 4; cf. also Othmar Keel/ Silvia Schroer 2002, 208, fig. 161).

3.5 The Peace of Creation as a Utopian Model for Dynamising the Present



Illustration: On this Early Sumerian scroll seal from c. 3300–2900 BC, a naked man defends a calving cow against a lion while placing his foot on it (taken from: Jan Dietrich 2017, Fig. 1).



Illustration: On this Neo-Assyrian scroll seal from the 9th–7th century BC, a man presents his dominion over the earth through his stamped foot on a caprid and his simultaneous defence of a lion (taken from: Jan Dietrich 2017, Fig. 9). Keel and Schroer comment on the illustration thus: "Having under foot' or 'treading' does not necessarily mean brutal, certainly not arbitrary submission, but can also imply the protection of the weaker from the stronger." (Othmar Keel/ Silvia Schroer 2002, 181, Fig. 144)

The narrative ends in *Gen. 1:29–2:3* with the vision of cosmic peace (Karl Löning/ Erich Zenger 1997, 155–162). With a so-called *formula of transfer*, God, like a lord to his vassals, gives all living beings the earth as a house and the plants as food. Every living being has its place and its food. In this context, the vegetarian nourishment of all living beings is a sign of the fullness of life: "That the most precious good in the house of life of creation is the happy life of all living beings unfolds [in] *Gen. 1:29f* with an image of peace that we must meditate on and concretise especially today as a paradigm critical of progress [...] The central point of this utopia is a coexistence of all living beings without violence." (Erich Zenger 1989, 142)

3.6 *The guiding principle of the peace of Creation and the norms of Creation justice*

Now the question inevitably arises as to how the utopian narratives of Gen. 1–2 relate to the chapters of Gen. 3 and Gen. 6–9, which are characterised by transgressions and violence. Classically, the texts have been interpreted in succession: First everything was peaceful, then came sin and finally God's attempt to give his Creation the prospect of survival under the conditions of sin. With such an interpretation, however, the mythical character of the texts is not taken seriously. It is not about something that was, but about what is and what is to be. This is a systematic theological question, not a historical one.

What is a situation of competition for scarce resources, a struggle for survival that inevitably requires violence? No living being can live without affecting other living beings, without restricting their habitat and their claim to resources. One can now call every claim to living space and resources, i.e. also stepping on grass or eating a head of lettuce, a sin. But in doing so, one would forfeit the distinction between avoidable, ergo sinful, and unavoidable, ergo non-sinful, violence. The classical Christian theory of justice, however, assumes that this distinction exists. Violence must justify itself, but sometimes it can. This very idea is reflected in the Noahide covenant and its commandments: Violence is to be limited to the necessary minimum—it cannot be completely avoided.

But why then are visions of completely non-violent coexistence of creatures prefixed to the Noahide covenant in the Bible? Beyond realistic norms of justice, man needs a vision of the fullness of life, which has a double meaning for him:

- Through its *cognitive component*, a vision functions as a guiding principle according to which people *orient* their lives and towards which they can shape their everyday lives. The value horizon of a person or a society is stored in this mission statement: everything that makes his or her life worth living. Of course, it is part of the character of a vision or utopia that it is unrealisable in this life and can only be approximately realised. But without it, life would be aimless and disoriented. The prevailing idea of justice would become harsh, merciless and rigid and thus ultimately unjust.
- Through its *emotional component*, i.e. above all through its vividness, a vision functions as a motor that *motivates* further ethical development and as a corrective that *criticises* the current ethical standard as insufficient. For it is not satisfied with it but drives its dynamic further

development and reminds us that there are more ways to do good than those that are already being realised.

It is precisely this dual function that the *vision of the peace of Creation*, illustrated twice in Gen. 1–2, takes on vis-à-vis the ideas of the justice of Creation in Gen. 9 and in the further course of the Bible. It is one of the greatest and most significant biblical utopias and dreams of all creatures living together in a healthy community of justice and peace. It symbolically shows "that the most precious good in the house of life of creation is the happy life of all living beings" (Erich Zenger 1989, 142).

In the Old Testament, this vision is not only found in Gen. 1–2, but also in a number of prophetic texts: Hos. 2:20–21; Is. 32:15–20; 65:25; Ez. 34:25–30 and especially Is. 11:1–9. In this last, extraordinarily well-known text, we are told: At his coming the Messiah will establish justice and righteousness, and there will be peace in his kingdom, not only for the people of Israel but for all Creation. Wolf and lamb, panther and little goat, calf and lion, cow and she-bear, adder and human child will dwell together in peace and make friends. Isaiah's narrative always contrasts a wild animal with a domestic animal or man—again, the criterion for differentiation is the proximity or distance to man. According to Isaiah, messianic peace begins in an exemplary way on Zion and radiates from there into all the world.

In the New Testament, the vision of the peace of Creation is taken up three times: In the prologue to Mark's Gospel Mk. 1:1–15, it is alluded to with an inconspicuous but significant half-sentence: When Jesus retires to the desert for forty days after his baptism in the Jordan, Mark 1:13 says: "He lived with the wild beasts". Even though the other evangelists deleted this reference, it is highly programmatic for Mark: in Christ, the new Adam, the messianic age dawns (Joachim Gnllka 1978, 57–58). In him, the peace of Creation, for which everyone longs, is beginning to become reality. He "is the royal lord of the animals" (Karl Löning/ Erich Zenger 1997, 74) and deals justly and mindfully with all creation. Thus, Christ is the archetype of the image of God. Furthermore, Mark establishes a connection to Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God, which appears directly afterwards in Mk. 1:14–15: When Jesus announces directly after his peaceful coexistence with the animals that the reign of God is near, then this cannot be understood in any other way than as a peaceful community of all living beings. As early as in the prologue, Mark announces Jesus as the bringer of salvation for all Creation.

The two other New Testament texts are found in the epistolary literature. In Rom. 8:18–30, Paul first describes the groaning of the whole

Creation, which is just as subject to "nothingness" (mortality) as man. But then Paul testifies to the firm hope: "it too, the creation (κτίσις), shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption to the freedom and glory of the children of God." (Rom. 8:21). "In the past, there has been intense debate about who or what Paul means here by κτίσις. In the meantime, however, a certain consensus has emerged, according to which the extra-human nature and creature are spoken of here." (Michael Wolter 2014, 509). Through the different attributes he assigns to human beings on the one hand and to the non-human Creation on the other, Paul does reveal that he thinks anthropocentrically, in line with the Stoa, and does not assign an inherent worth to creation like Gen. 1–2 (Michael Wolter 2014, 514). Nevertheless, for the sake of human beings, he assumes that non-human creatures are also liberated from death and transience because human beings are "permanently dependent on the renewed creation and cannot exist without it" (Michael Wolter 2014, 514). To put it bluntly: heaven would not be heaven for humans without plants and animals, but hell. Therefore, Paul gathers the entire range of non-human creatures under the cross of Christ: in suffering, but also in hope.

A final allusion to the vision of the peace of Creation is found in Col. 1:15–20. There it says, among other things: "... all things were created through him and to him. He is before all creation, and in him all things endure. [...] For God willed to dwell in him with all his fullness, to reconcile all things through him to him. He wanted to bring everything in heaven and on earth to Christ, who made peace on the cross through his blood". The peace of Christ is understood here in the clearest possible cosmic terms: Everything created is included in this peace.

Even more remotely connected to the vision of the peace of Creation, but tremendously powerful in its own right, is the Logos hymn at the beginning of John's Gospel (Jn. 1:1–18). The parallels to Gen. 1 are obvious: both texts begin with "In the beginning". In both, the semantic fields "word"/"speak" and "become"/"create" play a central role. At the centre of Jn. 1:1–18 is the Logos, who is before all Creation and uncreated because he is God. "All things came into being through the Word, and without it nothing came into being that has come into being." (Jn. 1:3). Of this Word it says in verse 14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." For many centuries this sentence has been interpreted as the "hominization (becoming human) of God". This is not wrong, and yet it is only half the truth, for: "The absolute σάρξ is not paraphrase for 'man' [...], but [...] expression for the earthly-bound (3, 6),

the perishable (6, 63) [...] in the incarnate Logos heaven descends to earth." (Rudolf Schnackenburg 1981, 243). "Flesh" throughout the Old Testament always means the creaturely or also the creatures in their entirety. With the incarnation of the divine Word, therefore, the whole Creation becomes the body of God (hence the book title by Sallie McFague 1993). The Word made flesh is "the body of the universe" (Sallie McFague 1993, 131) and incarnation the "creaturehood of God" (Michael Rosenberger 2001a, 20–21). "For Christians, all the creatures of the material universe find their true meaning in the incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation." (LS 235). The popular custom of also placing animals at the manger of the Christ Child is a symbolic expression of this truth of faith: the light of the Child of Bethlehem illuminates all Creation (cf. chapter 4.4).

The utopia of the peace of Creation is one, but not the only biblical utopia. Next to it are the utopia of the satiation of all people and the vision of the pilgrimage of all peoples to Zion. While the latter refers to interpersonal peace that transcends all boundaries of nations and religions, and the middle one describes an ideal state of interpersonal justice, the vision of the peace of Creation addresses the greatest reach of divine power. It also extends to non-human living beings: God's faithfulness is to all that he has created. The two visions of the satiation of all and the pilgrimage of peoples could be understood anthropocentrically in themselves. Non-human creatures do not appear in them. The biblical vision of the peace of Creation can theoretically also be understood anthropocentrically, as Paul demonstrates in Rom. 8. Its dynamic, however, is towards a biocentrist view of the world, and in most biblical testimonies it is understood in exactly this way. All creatures are covenant members of God—all are therefore due justice for their own sake. We would think God too small if we imagined that he had created the non-human creation only as a backdrop or resource.

Table: The three great utopias of the Bible:

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Justice | Saturation of all (Is. 55:1–2; Mk. 6:30–44 et al.) |
| Peace | Pilgrimage of the nations to Zion (Is. 2:1–5; Mic. 4:1–5; Rev. 21:24) |
| Integrity of Creation | Peace of Creation (Gen. 1–2; Is. 11:1–9; Mk. 1:13, etc.) |

In church preaching and in the history of theology, the biblically so significant vision of the peace of Creation has largely been passed over. There were certainly several reasons for this: On the one hand, the classification of Greek philosophy that animals are irrational beings (ἄλογα) and as such not capable of redemption prevailed early on. On the other hand, the early church fathers were quickly dominated by the allegorical interpretation of the biblical texts, which looked for the figurative meaning of the texts and tended to disregard their literal meaning. In the piety of believers, on the other hand, the vision of animal peace has always played an enormous role throughout the centuries. It is reflected in countless legends of saints living in a good relationship with animals (Joseph Bernhart 1997³ lists well over 50 saints); in numerous pictorial representations, first and foremost in the depiction of an ox and donkey at the manger, which, unlike the Christmas story Lk. 2:1–14, identifies two animals as the first witnesses to the Saviour's birth and as his closest relatives in Creation (cf. chapter 4.4); and finally in many rituals in dealing with Creation (cf. chapter 4).

In his encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis listened to this sense of faith (sensus fidei) of Christians and recalled the image of an eternity populated by all creatures. "All creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human beings... are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator." (LS 83). "In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God." (LS 244). "Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all." (LS 243)

"Theologically, each creature in the web of life is a symbol of presence; each is intrinsically good, embraced by God and called into redemptive future. In Christ, God entered evolving creation in a profoundly new way: the Incarnate One, Word-become-flesh, became an earth creature, sharing biological life with others on this planet. The risen Christ has assumed a cosmic role, leading creation back into God in a great act of love and thanksgiving that will be realized in its fullness in the great eschaton." (Mary E. McGann 2012, 49)

3.7 *The Sabbath as the Basic Principle of Creation Justice*

In the logic of Gen. 1:1–2:3, the Sabbath is a real symbol of and model for the peace of Creation that is already dawning. It gives all creatures a foretaste of the fullness of salvation. In the logic of the seven-day work, the Sabbath and not man is the "crown of Creation". For the crowning climax and conclusion of the narrative is not the sixth, but the seventh day. Only with it does everything come to completion. And it absolutely has to be the seventh day. That is why the total of eight works are distributed over only six days. God has to work overtime twice, as it were: On the third and sixth day, two works each are necessary so that he can complete his work of Creation in time for the Sabbath. As before, God also blesses the Sabbath (Gen. 2:3) and thus brings about the "continuing, life-promoting validity of this order" (Bernd Janowski 1990, 59).

The Sabbath commandment is one of the pillars of the biblical ethos. It is inculcated five times in the Torah (Ex. 20:8–11; 23:12; 34:21; 35:1–3; Dt. 5:12–15). Its frequent repetition and classification among the Ten Commandments show how important, but also how controversial and disregarded it must have been: The strict prohibition of work on the seventh day was already a severe restriction from an economic point of view.

The *subjects of the right to Sabbath rest* are enumerated individually except in the oldest formulation Ex. 34:21 and the very general text Ex. 35:1–3: the free landowner, his sons and daughters, his slaves, his livestock (cattle and donkeys) and the strangers (asylum seekers, refugees, guest workers) in his village. Mentioning them in this order again shows the closeness of the family to the patriarch: his children are closer to him than his slaves and they are closer to him than his work animals. The foreigners, who do not belong to his household permanently but only work for him as day labourers (today we would say freelancers), come at the very end. Nevertheless, they are all entitled to the weekly day of rest—on this day, everyone is equal. It is precisely the underprivileged and socially weak who must be protected from excessive or immoderate economic exploitation, so that they can really experience the last and deepest freedom from the pressure to perform and from being put to work. Thus, the Sabbath places a clear limit on (agricultural) economic dynamics: six days of work—one day of rest. At the same time, the commandment crosses the boundary of interpersonal relationships: Solidarity and justice apply to all living beings on this earth, including animals.

The very different *justifications* for the commandment in the individual texts are interesting: In the Book of Deuteronomy, keeping the Sabbath

is above all a sign of *gratitude* for Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt (Dt. 5:15). Those who "themselves" once had to suffer under the burden of drudgery (meaning the corporate self of the people of Israel) will, in memory of this, gladly and voluntarily grant a day of rest to those who currently occupy an underprivileged position. Thus, a *social attitude* grows directly out of gratitude. Ex. 20:11 refers to the Creation narrative of Gen. 1:1—2:3: "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and all that pertains to them; and on the seventh day he rested. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath and sanctified it." Thus, the Sabbath rest is justified *theologically in terms of Creation*: God put the rhythm of work and rest into his Creation. The ultimate purpose of his work of Creation is not work and the struggle for survival, but the opportunity for all living beings to "catch their breath" (Ex. 23:12). A good and fulfilled life and the joy of it are the real meaning and purpose of the day of rest. The *cultic significance* of the Sabbath is only in third place, which has been attested to in Israel since the early royal period. Just as the Sabbath is the culmination of the work of Creation, so the encounter of the wandering people of God with God in the tent of the covenant is the climax of their deliverance from Egypt. Just as the creation of the world is the condition for the possibility that God and Creation can encounter each other, this encounter with God is the inner goal of the process of Creation. On the seventh day, all living beings can and should each in their own way encounter and "praise" the one who created them (Bernd Janowski 1990).

The Sabbath commandment impressively shows that the Torah always has all creatures in mind. Environmental protection and animal welfare are integral parts of the divine instructions for God's people. Thus, the commandment of Sabbath rest is the primordial norm of Creation justice.

3.8 The tree of life as an archetypal symbol of Creation justice

The tree of life is a symbol that is at least 5000 years old in the cultures of the ancient Orient. In recent decades, numerous images have been found during excavations that allow us to understand better what was meant by it. Images of the Tree of Life can be found on stone reliefs, scarabs (pendants worn around the neck), clay vessels and scroll seals (clay cylinders in relief that were rolled over wet clay tablets where they created a negative relief) throughout the Near and Middle East. Despite the diversity of cultures and religions, it is a symbol that can be easily understood (cf. on the following mainly Othmar Keel/Silvia Schroer 2002, 62–64).

- In the earliest period that can be identified (3rd–2nd millennium BC), it is primarily a symbol of female deities and thus stands for *fertility and vitality*, which is requested *as a divine gift*. Either the tree is depicted as an attribute of the goddess, who stands next to the tree, or it stands alone and is a representative symbol of the goddess' power and her blessing. Still in Gen. 2:9, the tree of life is symbolic of the animating power of God, who, however, is no longer understood as feminine, but asexual.
- In the 1st millennium BC, the symbolism shifts. The tree now stands for the king who guarantees the *order* that makes it possible for life to be passed on. This is the case, for example, in Ez. 31:3–9: "A cedar on Lebanon, splendid was its branch, abundant its shade, tall its growth, and in the clouds its top rose. Water made it tall. The flood in the deep made it grow high. Its streams flowed all around the place where it was planted, it directed its channels to all the trees of the field. Therefore it grew taller than all the trees of the field. Its branches became very numerous and its boughs spread out because of the abundance of water as it grew up. All the birds of the sky had their nests in its branches. All the wild animals gave birth to their young under its branches. All the many nations dwelt in her shade. She was beautiful in her greatness with her broad branches; for her roots had much water. No cedar in the garden of God was comparable to it. No cypress had branches like it, no sycamore as mighty as it. None of the trees in the garden of God resembled her in beauty. I had made her magnificent with her numerous branches. Full of jealousy for her were all the trees of Eden in the garden of God."—If the tree is associated with the king, then it stands, above all, for the king's task of protecting life in his sphere of power and ensuring an order that is just to all creatures. It is no longer the divine gift but the *human task* that receives priority attention. It is precisely this task that Gen. 1:26–27 transfers from a single king to all men and women with the Godlike image of man. To figuratively represent the importance of ordering, the tree is always a strictly pruned and symmetrical looking, cultivated tree and never a wild growing plant as in other iconographic contexts. In several depictions, the king has to defend the tree against attacks by a monster symbolising the powers of chaos. This corresponds entirely to the ordering of the original "tohuwabohu" in Gen. 1 and the creation of a watered garden in the middle of the desert in Gen. 2. The tree of life is the divine, life-enabling order of Creation. That is why it stands in the middle of

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the garden in Gen. 2, from which four rivers flow in four directions. But it remains vulnerable and must always be protected.

- This order gives all living beings their space in the great house of life of the world. So, the tree also stands for *living spaces*, as in Ez. 31. Land animals gather under its protective roof, birds seek rest in the branches and peck from the fruits of the tree, people stand under it and worship the deity. Everyone has their place, there is room for everyone.

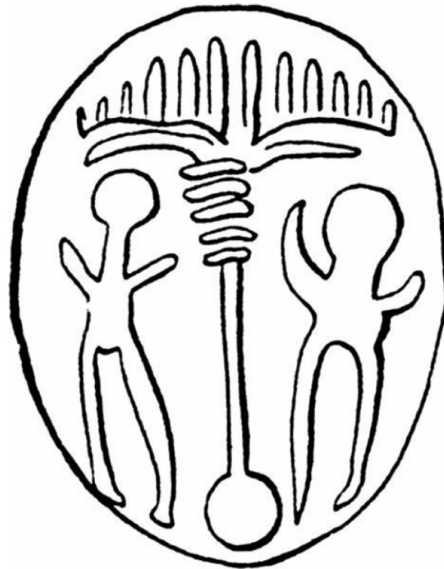


Figure: Scaraboid from Palestine, 9th–7th century BC: Man and woman with raised hands under a tree (taken from: Urs Winter 1986, Fig. 5).

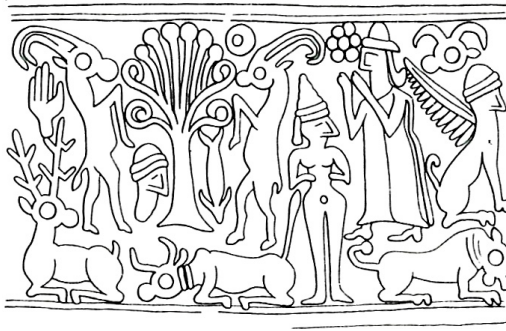


Illustration: Scroll seal from Megiddo, 14th century BC: Naked goddess beside a tree flanked by caprids. Amidst stag, ox and lion, the goddess appears not only as the giver and protector of the tree, but also as the "mistress of the animals" (taken from: Andreas Michel 2015, Fig. 2; cf. also Othmar Keel/ Silvia Schroer 2002, 60, Fig. 30).

In the wisdom texts of the Old Testament (Prov. 11:30; 13:12; 15:4), basic ethical attitudes are compared to the tree of life. Even wisdom itself, which is "closely related to the [...] idea of the right order of life" (Urs Winter 1986, 174), is referred to as the tree of life (Prov. 3:18). Finally, the Revelation of John promises that the righteous in the heavenly Jerusalem will enjoy the fruits of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7; 22:14, 19).

Christian art and literature take up the tree of life motif very early and associate it with the *cross of Christ*. The tree of life in the Garden of Paradise is

- a *reference* to the Crucified in *Justin's* dialogue with the Jew Tryphon (mid-2nd century): "To him who was crucified to come again in glory, as the Scriptures show, the wood of life mysteriously pointed, which, it is recorded, was planted in Paradise..." (Justin, Dialogue with Tryphon 86).
- the *model* of the cross of Christ in the apocryphal text of the so-called *Syrian Treasure Cave* (ca. 6th century): "True is the word and truth-proclaiming: this tree of life in the middle of paradise is a model for the redemption cross, the (actual) tree of life, and this was erected in the middle of the earth". (Carl Bezold 1883, 5–6). Hour by hour, the text parallels the Fall of the first human couple and the crucifixion of Christ, both of which he is convinced took place on a Friday: "In the sixth hour Eve ascended the tree of the transgression of the commandments; and in the sixth hour the Messiah ascended the cross, the tree of life. In the sixth hour Eve gave to Adam the fruit of the bitterness

of death; and in the sixth hour the unrighteous congregation gave to Messiah vinegar and gall. Three hours was Adam bare of his shame under the tree; and three hours was the Messiah naked on the trunk of the cross." (Carl Bezold 1883, 62)

- the *cross of Christ itself* in the hymn "pange lingua" by Venantius Fortunatus (around 570): see the text at the end of this sub-chapter.
- the *biological "father"* of the tree from which the cross of Christ is made, in the *Legenda aurea of Jacobus de Voragine* (second half of the 13th century): It refers to a Greek story in which Seth is supposed to bring his terminally ill father Adam oil from the "tree of mercy" in paradise. At the entrance to Paradise, an angel gives him a branch from the tree and predicts that Adam will get well if the branch bears fruit. Adam dies and Seth plants the branch on his grave. There, King Solomon later finds it to be a large, beautiful tree. He has it cut down and uses it for a footbridge over a lake. But the Queen of Sheba recognises that it is made of special wood and does not walk over it. She tells Solomon that there will be one hanging from the wood whose death will bring disaster to the Jews. Solomon then buries the wood. Later, the Pool of Bethesda is built over the spot, the water from which has healing properties (Jn. 5)—because of the wood lying in it. Shortly before the crucifixion of Christ, the wood floats to the top and is used for the cross of Christ. (Legenda aurea on the Feast of the Finding of the Cross)

As early as the late 4th century, there are numerous depictions of the cross of Christ as a tree of life, especially on sarcophagi, but also in mosaics. Rich, mostly stylised tendrils sprout from the wood of the cross and take on oversized, "cosmic" proportions. Animals and people are often depicted in them—probably most richly in the apsis mosaic of San Clemente in Rome, which in its present version dates back to 1100, but iconographically is largely based on the mosaic of the predecessor church from the 4th century: Birds nest in the tree of life and feed their young; land animals find shade and food; water animals frolic in the four rivers of paradise; and humans are peacefully united with them. In this way, the ancient oriental and Old Testament concept of the tree of life experiences Christological deepening: Christ is the founder of the peace of Creation symbolised in the tree of life, the archetype of the steward who orders the house of life of Creation according to God's will and frees human beings to do the same. Christ suffered for all creatures, and through him all are liberated to new life.

What first appears in the visual arts is condensed textually in the 8th and 9th stanzas of the hymn "Pange lingua" by Venantius Fortunatus around 570. In Latin, the two stanzas, written in trochaic tetrameter, read like this:

"Crux fidelis, inter omnes arbor una nobilis,
Nulla talem silva profert flore, fronde, germine,
Dulce lignum dulce clavo dulce pondus sustinens.

Flecte ramos, arbor alta, tensa laxa viscera,
Et rigor lentescat ille, quem dedit nativitas,
Ut superni membra regis mite tendas stipite. "

The current Book of Hours of the Catholic Church also translates these stanzas in the rhythm of the trochaic tetrameter for the Lauds of Holy Week thus:

"Faithful Cross! above all other, one and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom, none in fruit thy peers may be;
sweetest wood and sweetest iron! Sweetest Weight is hung on thee!

Bend thy boughs, O tree of glory! Thy relaxing sinews bend;
for awhile the ancient rigor that thy birth bestowed, suspend;
and the King of heavenly beauty gently on thine arms extend."

What it means in terms of content that the cross of Christ is the tree of life for all Creation is not unfolded in Venantius Fortunatus. It is clear enough for those participating in the liturgy. Today, on the other hand, we need to open up the tree of life motif anew. It is one of the most telling pieces of proof that the biblical vision of the peace of Creation has always remained alive through 2000 years of Christianity. And that alongside the anthropocentric misinterpretation of the image of God and the mandate to govern in Gen. 1:26–28, there has very much always been a pro-creation current in Christian spirituality. In this respect, Elizabeth Johnson (2018, 192) rightly asks what it would mean for the Church's self-understanding if it were to open itself in its full breadth to belief in the redemption of all Creation. The Tree of Life Cross proclaims unequivocally: the Crucified One is in solidarity with all tortured creatures and opens the door to life for them. For the Creator loves all his creatures—and his faithfulness extends to them all beyond death.