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Towards a Theology of Death in Light of Evolutionary Theory

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Preface

The theory of evolution has challenged me ever since my first encounter with the idea in science classes at school. Darwin loomed over my existence like a threat. The cultural context for this encounter was Norway in the 1980s. My personal interpretation of that context was that it had a preference for a thoroughly materialistic worldview. The science teacher expanded the methodological reductionism in the field of science to an ideological and ontological understanding of everything. This included who we are, where we come from, and what makes us tick. The “I” in me and my emotions were reduced to mere chemistry. Life faded before my eyes; poetry, beauty, and love lost real substance.

My life as a Christian has been marked by an opposition to science and reductionistic interpretations of life. For a time I was intrigued by “Young Earth Creationism” (YEC) and the interpretation of the cosmos that it implied. But I have been growing increasingly wary of the overly aggressive rhetoric that many YEC spokespersons use against all and any Christians who think differently. I have also come to see that YEC's hermeneutical approach to the Bible is questionable, in that it is deeply embedded in a modern, rationalistic way of thinking that distances the Bible from much of Christian tradition as well as from a postmodern reading. It locks the Bible into a certain period of the Enlightenment. Finally, philosophical and theoretical considerations have led me to worry about YEC's scientific integrity.¹

So again I am led back to that dreadful science classroom to revisit fear, to put it quite frankly. I had already understood that if I were to take the implications of the theory of evolution seriously, it would mean one thing: death. Death in all its monstrosity. Death of theological conceptions, death of personal persuasions; death as a cool scientific natural fact as opposed to death as the curse of the Fall. For me, the main obstacle that stands in the way of a fruitful theological dialogue with the evolutionary theory is the role of death. Therefore I have chosen to pursue death, to try to discover its theological significance in light of the evolutionary theory.

The way to formulating a worldview that takes science and theology seriously has been a long journey, but I was very much helped along the way by studying under Dr. Duane A. Priebe, Dr. Samuel D. Giere, and Dr. Craig L. Nesson at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. The most profound guidance was given through their devotion to Jesus Christ and through their example of faithful theological imagination. Fellow students Jennifer (imagination) Agee,² Matt (gospel) Agee, Paul (faith) Schick and Garrett (devotion) Siemsen were equally encouraging, both professionally and

¹ Cf. Peters and Hewlett:89ff

² I am also very grateful to Jennifer Agee for her help in editing this dissertation.

personally. I am very grateful for all they taught me.

In Norway I have studied at Ansgar Theological Seminary in Kristiansand and at Norwegian School of Theology in Oslo. Here I have a great debt of gratitude to all my professors and fellow students, but I will especially honor Dr. Reidar Salvesen at Ansgar for his generosity as second-advisor for this dissertation, and Professor Gunnar Heiene for his encouragement as main advisor for this dissertation.

1 Introduction

In the beginning God created heaven and earth. Genesis 1:1

In the beginning were the replicators. Richard Dawkins

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die. Genesis 2:17

Death is a biological and ecological necessity. Niels Henrik Gregersen

For the wages of sin is death. Romans 6:23

In theology and physics time is stranger than we think; it is stranger than we *can* think. Duane A. Priebe

Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. Revelation 21:4

1.1 Background

1.1.1 What is Death?

Death plays a fundamental role in philosophy and religion. It is ambivalent in that it can be glorified as the liberation of *the exiled soul* in Greek philosophy and Gnosticism. Several other religious conceptions also view death as liberation, e.g., Hinduism and Buddhism. Death can otherwise be welcomed as liberation by the starving, the tortured, or the terminally ill. Death can be used to remind the conquering emperor of his creatureliness: *Memento mori!* It is thus a safeguard against *hubris*, which the gods would surely punish. But more than anything death is connected to loss of relationship, to loss of life and its opportunity. Death is feared for its secrets, for its darkness and its inescapable threat to life. For this reason the denial of death is a common trait in modern western society; death is the blunt antithesis to self-realization. It is the crude end of all *causa sui* aspirations.³ To quote Ernest Becker: “A person spends years coming into his own, developing his talent, his unique gifts ... it takes sixty years of incredible suffering and effort to make such an individual, and then he is good only for dying”.⁴

Natural science will beyond any doubt emphasize that death is a natural, even a productive and necessary part of the evolution of life. Theology, on the other hand, has traditionally maintained that death is the result of sin. It is nevertheless possible to trace a fundamental reorientation concerning death among several contemporary theologians. Many modern theologians recast the death sentence in Genesis 2 and Paul's description of death in Romans to be about spiritual death, second death, or the existential fear of death. An influential reason for this recasting of the meaning of death is undoubtedly insights from science. Before proceeding further it is necessary to briefly sketch the perspective of science concerning the origins of life and the role of death.

1.1.2 Death and Evolutionary Theory

Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* gives a creative account of the insights from science. He states: “In the beginning were the Replicators”. This is an obvious allusion to Genesis 1: “In the beginning God ...”. Dawkins is very clear that evolution theory gives an intellectually fulfilling account of the origins of the various life forms on Earth without reference to God; all explanations concerning life preceding Charles Darwin's famous publication in 1859 “are worthless and ... we will be better off if we ignore

³ *Causa sui* (cause of self). Here the expression is used in the same way Ernest Becker uses it to describe the human striving to deny death through immortality projects, cf. also fn.139. First used by Descartes and Spinoza to describe God as causing God-self. However, God is not caused at all; Küng:121

⁴ Becker: 268f

them completely”.⁵

Prevailing theory holds that the Big Bang initiated the universe. This is where the elements that the world consists of came from. The atoms that form stable connections in the presence of energy tend to stay that way.⁶ This is what one might call the earliest example of natural selection; stable forms prevailed, and unstable patterns disintegrated.⁷

Eventually the “replicators” formed: molecules with the distinctive property of being able to replicate themselves.⁸ The replicators were chains of molecules that could split apart and go on to make further copies. The copying process was simple and stable, but tiny mistakes, known as mutations, did occur. As copies continued making copies, the small mistakes slowly created significant differences from the first replicator. The modern descendant of the replicator, the DNA molecule,⁹ is very accurate, but still small copying mistakes appear, and this is what makes evolution of the species possible.

The first step was what Dawkins coined “the survival of the stable”; the next step was “the survival of the fittest”. The Earth and its resources are ultimately finite, and consequently every environment has finite resources. In the primeval soup, the building blocks for the replicators were limited. Therefore the replicators with longevity in “life,” fecundity, and relative accuracy in reproduction survived at the expense of other, less-fit molecules. Some replicators discovered how to chemically break up other molecules and use their building blocks to make further copies of their own makeup.¹⁰

Dawkins concludes that the replicators “are in you and me: they created us body and mind; and their preservation is the ultimate rationale for our existence. They have come a long way, those replicators. Now they go by the name of genes, and we are their survival machines”.¹¹

The world of creatures as we know it, including all animals, insects, plants, bacteria, and viruses, are survival machines for basically the same kind of molecules called DNA. All the various survival

⁵ Dawkins: 1

⁶ Ibid: It is not yet obvious what stable forms, or what chemical raw materials, existed on Earth before life evolved. But after the Earth had formed and cooled down considerably, it is likely that at least water, carbon dioxide, methane, and ammonia were present. All of these are simple, stable compounds known to be present on some other planets in our solar system. Experiments have shown that these simple substances, when subjected to energy (such as electric sparks and ultraviolet light, simulating primordial lightning and sunlight), will form amino acids. Amino acids are the building blocks for proteins. Laboratory simulations have also shown that organic substances such as purines and pyrimidines may have been formed; these are in turn building blocks for DNA. These building blocks were likely components that made up the “primordial soup” some three to four billion years ago.

⁷ Dawkins: 12f According to Dawkins, there is no mystery or providence involved in this process; “it had to happen by definition”.

⁸ This process is conceived to be analogous to how crystals form.

⁹ The original replicators may have been related to DNA, or they may have been totally different. This is obviously a very brief and simplistic version of the evolutionary process. Dawkins: 21

¹⁰ The process of improvement relentlessly continued; some replicators invented a physical shield of protein to protect themselves from other “proto-carnivorous” replicators. This could have been what formed the first living cell; a protective coat that became a “survival machine” for the replicator to live in. Four billion years later, these replicators are not just floating around as single-cell life forms. They have evolved and cumulatively made stronger and stronger survival machines.

¹¹ Dawkins: 20

machines have evolved to exploit certain resources in their environment. There is, however, a fierce competition for resources, as they are always limited. There is an ongoing struggle to find food and avoid being eaten. Death is a part of this process. A plant dies to feed a cow, the cow feeds the lion, and humans kill the lion to avoid the fate of the cow. Death is a natural and necessary part of this picture.

The world's ecosystem would be quickly exhausted if death did not check the expansion of species. According to Dawkins, the ultimate rationale for creaturely life, i.e., the survival machine, is not the survival of an individual or even of a species, but the preservation of the replicator. Death is no threat to the replicator; it lives on through in the next generation of its survival machine. Death simply makes resources available for the improved descendent.

There is however no value judgment in using words such as "improved." This is simply an observation that natural selection favors those modifications that help survival. There is no explicit purpose or direction visible in the evolutionary process, except perhaps a tendency toward more complex survival machines. Ultimately, this apparent tendency towards more complex life forms has given rise to consciousness, particularly observable in the human species.

This is the genesis story of the world according to Richard Dawkins, and it is a rough approximation of a worldwide consensus view within modern science. I will now give an approximation of the genesis story and the role of death according to traditional western theology after Augustine.

1.1.3 Death and Theology

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. God created plant life and animal life and crowned creation with human beings created in God's own image. "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). Major strands of theological thought, especially after Augustine's controversy with Pelagius,¹² view Adam and Eve as being created immortal. Death had no place in the initial, "very good" creation. Death entered creation because of Adam and Eve's fall into sin: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Genesis 2:17). Genesis goes on to say that Adam and Eve transgressed this prohibition. Thus death is viewed as a punishment or an effect of human sin. The Apostle Paul seems to confirm this when he writes "For the wages of sin is death" in Romans 6:23.

It is the intention of this dissertation to work towards a theology of death that takes both the scientific

¹² Pelagius maintained that humans are currently as they were when they were first created; there has not been a "fall" that has fundamentally changed human existence.

and the traditional theological account into consideration. I will now move to identifying problem areas and research questions.

1.2 Problem and Aims

1.2.1 The Statement of Problems and Research Questions

The background and thematic presentation that has been given thus far identifies a problem area: There is a clear discrepancy between the biological and the theological understanding of death. It is precisely this area that the main title of this dissertation proposes to investigate.

This naturally leads to the formulation of a main research question:

How should a theology of death be formulated in light of the challenge from the evolution theory?

In order to work towards answering this main research question, I have isolated three main areas of special interest. I have formulated three subordinate research questions connected to an understanding of death in relation to creation, anthropology, and finally to God's plan of salvation. In the following I will give the rationale for my sub-research questions and the isolated areas of interest.

1. How can this world, so fundamentally defined by death and waste, be created by the almighty and benevolent God of the Bible?

The Christian understanding of God as Creator is undeniably challenged by the evolutionary perspective on death and the concept of deep time. The process of evolution presupposes billions of years, deep time, including the rise and extinction of innumerable species. The question posed above is close to what constitutes the basis for classical *theodicy*.¹³ Romans 5 claims that death came through Adam's sin. This seems to give a partial answer to question 1. However, death precedes human existence in the world of creatures; this leads to question 2:

2. Is there a connection between biological death and death as punishment for sin?

This question will deal with the obvious tension between a theological understanding of death as

¹³ *Theodicy* basically means "to justify God". *Theodicy* poses the question: "If God is benevolent and almighty, then why does evil exist?" This subject is vast and it is not clear that it is a question for a systematic theological approach. It is rather a question that belongs to the philosophy of religion area. I nevertheless maintain that isolated areas of the *theodicy* question cannot be ignored in the context of this paper. For a thorough development of *theodicy*, I refer to Atle O. Søvik's *The problem of evil and the power of God*. Especially significant is Søvik's discussion around the rationale and the problem of appropriateness in developing *theodicies* in the first place. (The evil of *theodicies*.)

caused by sin and the fall, and the understanding of death from science. The question relates to what constitutes the human in relation to death: Is the human being fundamentally different from other creatures? Was the human created immortal? What does the soul imply, and how does “created in God's image” relate humans to the rest of nature?

John 3:16 states that God's love sent the Son to give eternal life, i.e., save humanity from death. In light of question 1 and 2, it becomes relevant to investigate how God's plan of salvation relates to a theology of death:

3. *What is the relationship between the cross event, creation, and the final eschatological consummation, and how does this affect a theology of death?*

This research question interrelates with both the previous questions, in that a theological understanding of death is not complete by investigating this life's circumstances. The question is formulated in order to give the contours of a coherent presentation of a theology of death. It then becomes important to include how the aspects of salvation and new creation relate to death in this world

These research questions partially determine the method of my approach and the framework for this paper. I will now briefly show how I intend to methodologically structure this theology and also what resources I have chosen to use.

1.3 Method and Sources

1.3.1 A Systematic Theological Approach

This dissertation defines its approach as a systematic theological study “that attempts to synthesize Christian revelation in a consistent and coherent way and also to be valid in light of contemporary experience and knowledge”.¹⁴ The definition fits this dissertation's intentions well, namely to remain within the framework of internally coherent Christian theology and to strive for the largest degree of external coherence with the empirical world.¹⁵

The formulation “...to be valid in light of contemporary experience and knowledge” does not entail that this dissertation will give a methodological approach to the how science and theology can interface.¹⁶ It is intended to convey that this dissertation will interpret death theologically in view of a

¹⁴ Salvesen: 28 Building on insights from Niels Henrik Gregersen.

¹⁵ Ian Barbour identifies four types in classifying the relationship between science and theology; conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration. This paper is closest to the dialogue type, in that it attempts to integrate empirical knowledge without forfeiting the integrity of Christian revelation.

¹⁶ For this I refer to Reidar Salvesen's *The Problem with the Problem of Death*, chapter 6. Cf. also the 3 types of systematic

scientific understanding of death, and that the criteria for theology is internal coherence.¹⁷ The starting point for my approach is the metaphysical assumption¹⁸ that God created the world; God upholds the world by God's Word; and God gives the world purpose. From this starting point, theology can interpret the world and learn from science and thus perhaps gain fuller insight. It is then faith seeking understanding.¹⁹

In developing a systematic theology of death, this dissertation will be structured with respect to the traditional *loci* where the question of death surfaces as a relevant subject. The sub-research questions stated above will be related to the relevant *loci* in three chapters.

Chapter 2 – *God, Creation, and Death* – will investigate the *loci* of creation in view of sub-question 1.

Chapter 3 – *Anthropology and Death* – will investigate the *loci* of anthropology in view of sub-question 2.

Chapter 4 – *The Eschatological Man and the Vanquishing of Death* – will combine an investigation of the *loci* of Christology and eschatology in view of the comprehensive nature of sub-question 3.

Chapter 5 – *Towards a Theology of Death in Light of Evolutionary Theory* – will contain a conclusion which will draw together and sum up the insights gained through considering the three sub-research questions. This chapter will then attempt to formulate contours to a theology of death in relation to the main research question: *How should a theology of death be formulated in light of the challenge from the evolution theory?*

The section above has shown how this paper will be organized, with a view to method and disposition. I will now show which sources this paper relies on for its argument.

1.3.2 Sources

Pannenberg stands out in that he works systematically to bring together a modern worldview, as he maintains that theology must be a public discipline, with ecumenical considerations. He seeks a theological stance that includes the whole church. Pannenberg is thus conservative in his adaptation of traditional insights, yet immensely progressive, due to his theological imagination. Pannenberg's ecumenical approach will prove to be important for this dissertation; it influences Pannenberg's theology of death and it leads to a fuller trinitarian understanding of creation, incarnation, and

theology and how they relate to other sciences, p.28ff

¹⁷ Salvesen:28 Cf. Gregersen's 3 types of systematic theology and how they relate to other sciences. My approach is a second order theology, in that it entails a re-description of the semantics of Christianity. But the decisive criteria for the re-description is internal theological coherence.

¹⁸ It is clear that every estimation and interpretation of reality has a metaphysical starting point.

¹⁹ Murphy: 17

consummation.

Physicist Theologian George L. Murphy is extensively involved in the science-theology dialogue. The rationale for using Murphy as a source lies in his comprehensive adaptation of Luther's theology of the cross to the science-theology dialogue. Theology of the cross gives an incentive to a worldview that theologically incorporates suffering and death. Gerhard O. Forde is also a source, Murphy builds on Forde's work. Luther's commentary on Galatians also emphasizes Christ's participation in human suffering and death. I will draw on this and Tuomo Mannarmaa's work that magnifies Luther's participation motif.

Patristic theology is an important source, especially for the anthropology section. The rationale for investigating patristic theology is that their insights are a voice from scripture *and* theological tradition,²⁰ which were not formulated to align with modern scientific knowledge.²¹ This is important in view of my approach as outlined in section 1.3.1, where I identified internal theological coherence as a decisive criteria for this dissertation.

The use of sources will not be comprehensive. All the sources are vast and the adaptation of them has been limited due to this. This is relevant especially to my use of Pannenberg. I will not give account of his overall *prologomena* and the presentation of the Spirit's role in creation is very limited.

1.3.3 Style

This dissertation will use an Author-Page reference system in the footnotes. The details of the works cited are in the bibliography at the end of the paper. When the same author has several books listed, the footnote will refer to author and publishing date.

This dissertation will use inclusive language, e.g., God-self. When quoting sources, original wording will be used.

Bible citations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books (1989), unless otherwise noted.

This concludes the introduction and I will now begin to work towards a theology of death in light of evolutionary theory. Chapter 2 will focus on God, creation, and death.

²⁰ Cf. Wesley's *quadrilateral*; a theological question should be considered through the lens of scripture, tradition, reason and experience.

²¹ Although they were influenced by philosophy of nature.

2 God, Creation, and Death

2.1 Outline for Chapter 2

The concern of this chapter is to address research question 1: “*How can this world, so fundamentally defined by death and waste, be created by the almighty and benevolent God of the Bible?*”

In order to address this, I will first establish that creation owes its existence solely to God, section 2.2. This is the starting point for addressing God's actions towards creatures and how death plays into this picture. If God were not the sole creator, one could seek answers elsewhere, but in Christian theology God has unrestricted power. This has consequences for a theology of death in light of evolution.

Section 2.3 will show that death cannot be understood neutrally as part of the evolutionary process, somehow disconnected from God. Creation is of deep concern to God, and God's love is the fundamental cause for creation. This too has an obvious bearing on a theology of death. Death and suffering seem to be in tension with God's love.

Section 2.4 will address this tension by focusing on the unfinished nature of creation. God is creating the world toward redemption, and this places death in a different light.

Section 2.5 will address whether God created death, and if so, why?

2.2 God's Free Act of Creation

When working towards a theology of death in light of evolutionary theory, it is naturally of the utmost significance to outline a theology of creation. The latter is a necessary basis for the former. Physics and biology reveal that the world is old and that life has developed over deep time. This will be taken into account and understood as the manner of God's creation. Whether God is the world's creator will not be discussed as such. The Christian belief in a divine creator is assumed as a metaphysical starting point, and cannot be validated or dismissed from a scientific perspective. It is simply an assumption that awaits eventual confirmation. However, the assumption can be understood as being in harmony with the reality of creation and life as it is experienced—or as in disharmony with experience and therefore discredited as a reasonable assumption.²² This has happened in western thought to some degree. The

²² Cf. Introduction to Pannenberg Vol.2.

insights from an evolutionary perspective have given occasion to question whether life's circumstances are congruent with faith in the biblical Creator God.

Genesis 1 states that the world is the result of God's creative activity. This is naturally all-encompassing for an understanding of creation; the world owes its existence to God. Furthermore, the act of creation is a free act of divine willing and doing. God did not have to create to be active; God is from eternity active within the trinitarian relationship in God-self.²³ A Norwegian hymn by Petter Dass illustrates this point: "God is God if all men were dead".²⁴ God would be God whether creation existed or not. Creation does not exist out of any necessity in God. From this it can be deduced that the world with its evolutionary history is an expression of God's will; the world has come into being as God wanted it.²⁵ Herein lies a challenge to faith in the benevolent God of the Bible: creation is not random from a faith perspective and God is therefore responsible for its development.

Some theologians hold that God let the evolutionary process take its free course, so that nature has freely developed with death and suffering. Thus God is somehow disconnected from nature's free course.²⁶ However, if theology is to avoid a deistic stance²⁷ it must maintain that creation is enveloped by God's *chesed*,²⁸ God's steadfast love. God has created a world that is free and distinct from God, but God is also holding fast to creation; this expresses God's love.²⁹

Whitehead's process theology gives a different route to softening God's responsibility for the ambiguities in creation. He suggests that the world and God come into being in process with each other. In other words, God is not omnipotent Creator; God is in the process of *becoming* almighty God.³⁰ Whitehead's theology is interesting in that it highlights a God who is suffering with creation.³¹ It furthermore draws attention to the question whether God rightfully can be God if creation does not acknowledge God as such. However it is not a trinitarian theology,³² and thus does not give proper attention to God's eternal self-sufficiency.

The world exists on account of a free act of God, and the motivation for God's creative action appears to be love. The creation accounts in Genesis highlight that God created creatures, and in

²³ Pannenberg Vol.2:1ff

²⁴ My translation.

²⁵ This claim is problematic and it will be discussed further in this chapter.

²⁶ Peters and Hewlett:115ff

²⁷ Peters and Hewlett:130

²⁸ E.g. Ps.136, Ps.104

²⁹ Pannenberg Vol.2:19 This paper will not discuss further how God interacts/intervenes with the course of nature and history. For this cf. Peters and Hewlett:115ff

³⁰ Pannenberg Vol.2:15

³¹ George L. Murphy's *The Cosmos in the light of the Cross* explicates God's suffering with creation from trinitarian perspective of theology. By way of Luther's theology of the cross, Murphy shows that suffering is part of God's "alien work" in the world and God suffers with creation. I will draw on Murphy's insights in chapter 4.

³² As shown under sources, a trinitarian perspective was a reason for choosing Pannenberg.

particular, the human being, to be in a loving relationship with God. This stands in vast contrast to the creation myths that Genesis 1 appears to refute; several ancient myths describe creation as an effort, a battle between opposing forces, or even describe humans as created from the blood of a monster to be slaves for the gods.³³ The irony here is that these old myths sometimes seem to correspond more easily with the brutal circumstances of life than the biblical account does.

But Genesis proclaims that God created with unrestricted power. Von Rad shows how the priestly account tends to make polemical mockery of the supposed grandeur of other gods, like the sun, moon, and stars. In Genesis they are effortlessly placed as lamps in the sky to give a rhythm of day and night, festival and work. Light does not even originate from these lamps; light was created on the first day, while the lights in the sky appeared on the fourth day.³⁴

The point to this minor excursus is that God is understood as sovereign. Creation is God's sole responsibility. This understanding finally framed the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*.³⁵ God created the world out of nothing; the emphasis being that nothing is co-eternal with God. The biblical account has no trace of Plato's *demiurge*.³⁶ There is no room for dualistic interpretations.³⁷ God is the single ontological basis for all reality. And consequently there is nowhere to shift the blame, so to speak; God is responsible for reality.

The claim that God's *chesed* envelopes creation is readily discerned from the Bible's revelation of God's love. However, God is also portrayed as *Deus obsconditus*,³⁸ a hidden God. God's actions in history are furthermore sometimes felt as alien and harsh.³⁹ Nature as it presents itself is also not a clearcut expression of love; nature is ambivalent. It gives resources for life, but it also withholds them. Nature can act up and cause havoc for humans and all creaturely life. Pannenberg maintains that faith in God's steadfast love as the grounding motivation for creation cannot be easily deduced from nature or history in general. Life and creation stand before the human observer as ambivalent.⁴⁰

The Bible describes this ambivalence in several ways. In Genesis 3, there is a snake in the garden of Eden, in Romans 8 creation moans for redemption, and in Job suffering and death are caused by God's testing of Job. The ambivalence is not fully explained, although death and suffering are connected to

³³ Von Rad:49, e.g. Enuma elish.

³⁴ Von Rad:55, cf. also Hamilton:121

³⁵ Pannenberg Vol.2:13

³⁶ Pannenberg Vol.2:15 The world is not the result of God's working with another principle, as in the *demiurge* from Plato's *Timaeus*. The *demiurge*, is a craftsmen that shapes formless matter The closest comparison in the Bible might be Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8. Wisdom has been interpreted as the pre-existent Son in Christian tradition.

³⁷ Col. 1:16 is decisive, notwithstanding allusions to combat and chaos in e.g. Ps 89:11, Isaiah 51:9, these are connected to God's actions in history, i.e. the Exodus.

³⁸ Isaiah 45:15

³⁹ Isaiah 28:21

⁴⁰ Pannenberg Vol.2:162

sin and rebellion towards God in Genesis 2 and 3. But death and suffering occur for the righteous, as in Job, as well as for the unrighteous.⁴¹ Furthermore, death and suffering were a fact of life before human life appeared on earth. When Genesis 1 declares that creation is “good” and “very good,” it seems to negate this ambivalence. I will return to this in section 2.4. Now I will continue developing a trinitarian understanding of creation in order to form a basis for investigating the role of death.

2.3 Creation through the Son—Life in the Spirit

The first article of faith states that God the Father created heaven and earth. This holds true theologically as it is God's Word that gave the command.⁴² However, the NT shows that the Son, as the Word, was the agent of creation.⁴³ This is an important point, since it gives further light to the idea that love is the motivation for creation. Pannenberg says that in creation the intra-trinitarian life of God turned outward.⁴⁴ This is the momentous implication of the proclamation in the prologue to the gospel of John; all things came into being through Christ.⁴⁵

From the beginning all things were created to be taken up into Christ. The incarnation of the Word was thus hidden in the mystery of God's will awaiting to happen.⁴⁶ The incarnation is the ultimate expression of the Son's self-differentiation from the God-head. However, Pannenberg holds that the Son's self-distinction from the God-head was already in creation the basis for existence outside of God, and distinct from God. Creation is not God, nor is it in God; it is distinct from God. The Son therefore became the ontic basis for creation by moving outward from the Trinity. But the trinitarian relationship was not broken; the Son remains one with God through the Spirit that proceeds from the Father to the Son. In this, Christ becomes the model for creaturely existence distinct from God. Creatures are to live in a God-sanctioned independence, in a life-giving relationship of unity with God through the Spirit.⁴⁷

From a scientific perspective, the world and its life forms have been created through an interplay of natural physical law and chance. In this God becomes somewhat hidden to the world. *Etsi Deus non daretur*; the world is as it is as if God were not there. Pannenberg holds that life's regularity by natural law has a function that it indispensable in the human relationship to God. That the world is governed by

⁴¹ There is a strain of thought in OT that questions the connection between sin and suffering, e.g. Ps 22 “why have you forsaken me”.

⁴² Pannenberg Vol.2:29f

⁴³ E.g. John 1, Heb.1

⁴⁴ Pannenberg Vol.2:5

⁴⁵ Cf also Heb.1, Eph.1 and Col.1

⁴⁶ Eph. 1:9f

⁴⁷ Pannenberg Vol.2:30

nature's laws is a vital condition for creaturely independence *vis à vis* God.⁴⁸ And independence is necessary for the creature's free acceptance of its finite creatureliness, which in turn opens to a free participation in the Son's self-distinction from the Father, and thus giving free consent to God's Lordship.

The implications of the theological claim that creation is grounded in the person of Christ are immense. First, it implies that God's *chesed* has a firm grounding in that God's love for creation is intrinsically tied up with God's eternal love for the Son. Creatures are drawn into God's eternal turning to the Son, because the Son is manifested in the world of creatures.

The second implication is that the incarnation is not fully understood as a reaction to sin; it is the purpose of creation to be drawn into the perfect *imago Dei* that Christ manifests by his free subjection to God. Christ perfectly shows how creatures are to live in God-sanctioned independence and yet in total unity with God. This will be developed further in chapter 4.

And finally it has ramifications for how one understands the development of life on earth; no creature or line of creaturely existence can be understood as outside of God's love for the Son. Every creature that has existed, whether it prevailed as a species or not⁴⁹, was created through the Son and was given life through the Spirit, and is ultimately an object of God's love for the Son.

The Spirit is the Spirit of life; life is thereby defined as taking part in the Spirit, Gen.6:3.⁵⁰ Pannenberg shows that the duration of existence for creatures, whether it is short or long, is then seen as participation in eternity in a sense.⁵¹ Existence is participation in God's reality, God's life. Why God chose to create a world where suffering and extinction is possible is not answerable at this point, but it is probable from the considerations above that suffering and death cannot simply be deemed as waste; from a theological perspective creation awaits redemption, Rom.8:20.

⁴⁸ Pannenberg Vol. 2:73

⁴⁹ Actually as much as 98 % of all species that have existed are extinct; Peters and Hewlett:23

⁵⁰ Pannenberg Vol.2:186

⁵¹ Pannenberg Vol.3:602f

2.4 Creation Toward Redemption⁵²

The questions for chapter 2 are how we can understand a benevolent God to be the creator of this ambivalent world. The answer so far is that reality is ambivalent, but that God's love for creation is firmly grounded in God's love for the Son. We have also seen that creatures have been given independent existence so as to come to a free and full participation in the fellowship of the Son to the Father, through the Spirit. C.S. Lewis says in *The Four Loves* that “to love is to be vulnerable”. Perhaps this applies to God as well; God's love for creation stands the risk of not being answered. Pannenberg actually questions if God rightfully can be understood as the almighty Creator and Lord if God is not acknowledged as such by creation,⁵³ a consideration brought to the forefront by Whitehead's process theology.

Romans 1 states that God's power and divinity are self-evident from creation, but that humans somehow have neglected and forgotten God. According to Athanasius, this is one of the reasons for the incarnation: namely to remind humanity of God's love. However it seems to be the case that God does not want to impose God's presence directly on humans. This is a world that functions *etsi Deus non daretur*, as if God were not given.⁵⁴ Even in the incarnation Christ comes as a servant, not as a king. Philippians 2 gives words to Christ's *kenosis*, Christ's emptying himself of glory and majesty. God seems to be awaiting a free consent to God's Lordship from humanity, and this will happen by God's Spirit drawing humanity into Christ, as opposed to imposing on humanity by force. God is in God's hiddenness letting the world “come of age”,⁵⁵ but the Spirit of Christ is nevertheless slowly drawing creation towards a point where all will be gathered up in Christ. In this Pannenberg makes an important point that must be given attention in a theology of death; creation is being drawn toward redemption. In fact, one might say that creation is being created toward redemption. Creation is not an isolated event in the past. God is continuously creating the world toward redemption.

Traditional theology has sometimes viewed creation as a completed fact that occurred in the creation week of Genesis 1. However, an evolutionary perspective makes it necessary to revise this understanding; creation is *de facto* ongoing. Pannenberg shows that there are several strains of thought

⁵² The creation accounts in the Bible are not detailed descriptions of how God created; they are rather manifestly stating that God created and no creation is possible without God. The creation accounts can be understood as proclamations that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the Exodus from Egypt, is not only Redeemer, but also the almighty Creator; *Creator et Redemptor*. This is a fundamental insight from the creation theology in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). The indication that the Hebrews knew God first as Redeemer, then as Creator, is important; it might show that God is to be identified first and foremost as the God of redemption. To know God as creator is to know that God is able to redeem creation. This aspect is particularly highlighted in the prophecies related to the Jews in the post-exilic community, e.g. in Isaiah.

⁵³ Pannenberg Vol.2:390

⁵⁴ Pannenberg Vol.2:73

⁵⁵ Pannenberg Vol.2:173

both in the theological tradition and in scripture that can undergird such an approach.⁵⁶ There are resources in the theme of *creatio continua*, e.g. in Psalm 104, The biblical witness nevertheless gives testimony to God creating new things in history, Is. 43:19, and says that God “calls into existence the things that do not exist”, Rom. 4:17. Luther maintained that God was ceaselessly doing new things.⁵⁷

The implication of an evolutionary perspective is however to widen this idea of *continua* dramatically; God is not finished creating. The “good” and “very good” statements from Genesis 1 can be understood as anticipatory proclamations of what is yet to come,⁵⁸ although Pannenberg also confirms that the “good” statements endorse creation as willed and affirmed by God.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the statements proclaim that creation is useful and well-functioning for creaturely life. However, as mentioned, nature is ambivalent and it is not advisable to view nature as in a 1:1 relation to the nature of God. This creation is not yet an un-ambivalent expression of God's final will for it. The Bible gives witness to this aspect as well, in that proclamations of God's righteousness are often followed by anticipation of an eschaton where “the wolf shall live with the lamb”, Is. 11:6, 65:25.

Pannenberg addresses the question why God didn't create a finished, already redeemed, creation in the first place. The apparent answer is that creaturely existence in the ambiguity of independence *vis à vis* God is a necessary route to the free consent of the creature to partake in God's love. If God's actions were such that God's love were imposed on the creature and consent to God's Lordship were demanded, then love would lose its significance.⁶⁰

Through the evolutionary process God creates independent creatures. This makes sense from a theological perspective in that this process, over deep time, established creaturely independence in a world with time.⁶¹ According to Pannenberg, it had to be a whole world of creatures, because no single creature could bear standing in the immensity of God's presence. Only a whole world of creatures could do that.⁶²

⁵⁶ Pannenberg Vol.2:34ff, cf. especially Augustine's interpretation of time; *sed cum tempore*.

⁵⁷ Quoted from Pannenberg Vol.2:39, fn.91. God's *Creatio continua* has, however, at times been limited to providence

⁵⁸ Pannenberg Vol.2:168

⁵⁹ Pannenberg Vol.2:171

⁶⁰ Pannenberg Vol.3:642

⁶¹ Pannenberg 1985:50

⁶² Pannenberg Vol.2:61

2.5 Is Death Part of God's Creation?⁶³

The question can be raised whether death is created by God. Romans 8:20 states that God made the world corruptible. From this a straightforward answer would be that death is part of God's creation. This is also the conclusion from the observations in section 2.2. God is the sovereign creator. Death cannot be viewed as created apart from God. One could try to address the question by saying that sin is the negation of good, it is not essential, sin is like holes in reality, as Plato might say.⁶⁴ Darkness is absence of light. Thus death is not created, it is simply the absence of life. According to Murphy that will not do; God is the creator of both darkness and light.⁶⁵ And even if death is viewed as negation of life, with no created structure behind it, it nevertheless ends life. So the question remains: did God create the world with a structure where biological life undergoes forces of destruction and dies? The answer must be affirmative. The whole structure of the universe is finite; even the sun will lose its energy at some point.

The fact that the world is created in time, with time, points to a realization that death is part of creation. In time all things die. Yesterday dies in a sense. Tomorrow is not yet born. A flower that is cut from its roots dies. It is unimaginable to fathom a universe where this were not so, because life is lived in time.⁶⁶

Creation is governed by natural laws. Pannenberg holds that the regularity of natural law is an indispensable condition for creaturely independence.⁶⁷ Evolutionary theory also reveals the importance of death to make resources available for further generations.⁶⁸ Pannenberg nevertheless maintains that death is part of God's creation only in relation to sin. Humans know finitude as death only as they live independently of God through sin. The same applies to the corruptibility of non-human life by way of analogy.⁶⁹ Humans and the rest of creation are somehow tied together in their "fate." Creation was "subjected to futility" on account of God's will, as stated in Rom. 8:20ff, and will be freed from this "bondage to decay" when the human race is redeemed.

Creatures without reflective self-consciousness cannot be conceived as turning away from God or offending the Spirit of life.⁷⁰ But as shown, the aim for creation is that creatures come to partake in the Son's relationship to God. And if creatures are to glorify God and acknowledge the Lordship of God,

⁶³ Cf. also discussion in section 3.4

⁶⁴ Murphy:87, cf. also Forde:13

⁶⁵ Murphy:85

⁶⁶ Collins and Giberson:131

⁶⁷ Pannenberg Vol.2:73

⁶⁸ Cf. section 1.1.2

⁶⁹ Pannenberg Vol.3:560

⁷⁰ Nesson 1998:443ff. It is only for the human being that sex can become destructive; that aggression becomes violence; that pain becomes suffering.

this can only be a conscious act of free consent by the creature. This is something that the cosmos cannot do consciously. God therefore designated humans to be *imago Dei*, to be God's image in creation, i.e., to be able to freely and consciously respond to God's love.⁷¹

The evolutionary process spans unimaginable stretches of time and this gives particular emphasis to the “moaning and groaning” of creation as it awaits that humans will fulfill their role and freely enter into the Son's love for the Father, Rom. 8:18ff.

2.6 Preliminary Summary of Chapter 2 and Research Question 1

This chapter has argued that God created the world of creatures and that the world owes its existence to God. God's love is the reason for creation, and this love is sure as it is based on God's eternal love for the Son. God partakes in creaturely life as it is God's Spirit that enables life. Life is a share in God's life. There is however a tension in the creaturely experience of suffering and death in creation and the claim that God's love holds fast to creation. This tension is related to the unfinished character of creation. God is creating toward redemption and consummation of the world. The reason why God did not create a world already consummated and redeemed is connected with the indispensable value of duration in creaturely existence. Without duration of independent existence, a creature cannot relate to God as distinct from God. The evolutionary process is in this respect necessary to establish a real basis for creaturely independence. It seems that God created a world with death in connection with the ultimate aim of creation; a free consent to participate in God's life in eternity. The Spirit of life gives all creatures duration in existence for a limited time, but life without death is contingent on the creature's consent to enter into God's life. This can only be done by the creature designated as *imago Dei*.

I will on this note turn to investigating the human being in relation to creation and death.

⁷¹ Bonhoeffer 1978:67f. Nature does not need to be reconciled, nature will be redeemed.

3 Anthropology and Death

3.1 Outline for Chapter 3

The concern of this chapter is to address research question 2: “*Is there a connection between biological death and death as punishment for sin?*”

In order to address this in light of evolutionary theory I will first establish that the human being comes from nature and that the human being was created mortal. I will not show this from biology, but from scripture and from patristic theology. It is significant that a contemporary theology of death can be established with reference to scripture and tradition,⁷² and not only by a reasonable adjustment to scientific knowledge.

In chapter 2 a theology of creation was a necessary basis for investigating death in creation. In this chapter, anthropology, i.e. the constitution of the human being, is a necessary basis for investigating death in relation to human existence. Section 3.2.1 will therefore show that the human is nature⁷³ from scripture. Section 3.2.2 will show the human as nature from patristic theology. I will also include an excursus on the soul as this ties in with how death affects the human person. Section 3.3 will show from patristic theology and scripture that the human was created mortal and that death is not unnatural to the human. Following this an excursus on the fall will be included to emphasize that a fall cannot be shown from human evolutionary history. Nevertheless, sin should not be understood as essential to the human; sin is contingent. Section 3.4 will then address whether theology can uphold a relationship between biological death and sin, since death has been established as natural in section 3.3. Finally section 3.5 will return to why existence for the human as a finite being with a certain duration is necessary to establish an identity as a being distinct from God, and how duration of life tends towards negating God's created order, which in turn leads to death.

3.2.1 The Human Being as Nature

A Christian anthropology needs to take into account what contemporary knowledge makes evident about the human being.⁷⁴ One aspect that is obvious with regard to evolutionary theory is that humans

⁷² Cf. the rationale for this under Sources, section 1.3

⁷³ Nature is here used as a description of the human being as an integral part of nature and its processes.

⁷⁴ Nesson 2002:85, cf. also Pannenberg 1985:15

are nature. Humans have a tendency to view themselves as something separate from nature.⁷⁵ But science shows that humans are an integral part of nature. Some scientists will also claim that the constitution of a person can be fully explained as nature. In this reductionistic interpretation of body and mind lies a challenge to theology. The challenge is however more apparent to a strain of theology tied up with a dualistic platonic interpretation of the human constitution, in contrast to an understanding rooted in Jewish biblical traditions.⁷⁶

The biblical presentation of the human is astonishingly down to earth. More precisely, it is evident that there are two strands of thought in the Bible. The first is associated with the priestly interpretation of the human, e.g. Genesis 1. The human is understood as *imago Dei* and implicitly the ruler over nature and appears to be somewhat elevated over nature. According to Conrad Hyers,⁷⁷ the priestly line of thought is connected to urban life and high culture. The other, opposite strand, is what Hyers calls the pastoral strand. This line is connected to a simpler lifestyle of herding sheep and living in accordance with nature. The Genesis 2 account reflects this concept of the human; Adam is formed from dust and is to “keep and till the garden” (Gen.2:15). The former idea sees the human as the master of nature; the latter identifies Adam as a gardener, a servant, and the human as much closer to nature.⁷⁸

One of the contributions that an evolutionary perspective gives to a theological anthropology is a deeper understanding of humans as nature.⁷⁹ Adam's earthiness is implied by the name *'adam*, which can be taken to mean earthling, in that he was formed from *'adamah*, the ground. Furthermore, only Adam, of all the creatures, is explicitly referred to as being formed from dust, *aphar*. The connotation is not one of divine loftiness, but rather a designation that shows Adam's close link to the earth.

Adam is referred to a *nephesh chayyah*,⁸⁰ a living creature, and thus designated as a creature among other living creatures.⁸¹ But Christian traditions have often stressed the discontinuity between animals

⁷⁵ Murphy:162

⁷⁶ Cf. Excursus on the soul.

⁷⁷ Professor of religion Conrad Hyers' *The Meaning of Creation – Genesis and Modern Science* emphasizes the origin from earth and the destiny of humankind. It is important for a theology of death to embrace the human earth relationship.

⁷⁸ Hyers: 139ff, cf. also Stordalen:14f

⁷⁹ If there is truth to the claim that the current eco-crisis is traceable back to a Jewish-Christian liberty to rule and exploit nature, then it is important to regain the (Yahwist) shepherd-nomadic strand in the Bible that stresses the human-earth connection.

⁸⁰ Stordalen: 18ff. Terje Stordalen in his book *Støv og Livspust (Dust and Breath of Life, my translation)* shows that the use of *nephesh* in the Hebrew Bible describes the life, soul and breath of the human. The use of *nephesh* has a tendency toward describing the human as dependent, as one with needs that must be filled. The needs can be material, such as food (Prov. 10:3) or spiritual, such as longing for “the courts of the Lord” (Ps. 84:2). Stordalen understands the designation *nephesh* as linked to the unfinished, ongoing character of creation. A *nephesh chayyah* is externally dependent. *Basar*, flesh/body, is also frequently used to designate the human as weak and mortal, a being dependent on God for continuity. Cf. also Pannenberg Vol.2:184f

⁸¹ In line with the tendency to elevate human beings over nature *nephesh chayyah* is oftentimes translated inconsistently in the Genesis accounts; Gen.1:20 reads “And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures...” (*nephesh chayyah*), while Gen.2:7 describes the human as *nephesh chayyah*, but this is translated “living being” (NRSV), or “living soul” (King James). There is no formal reason to translate differently.

and humans.⁸²

From a full biblical perspective, both the above mentioned strands are important and should be held together; the human being is “made a little lower than God, crowned...with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5) and is also *aphar*, dust; “For he knows how we are made; he remembers that we are dust. As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like the flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more”, Ps. 103:14f.

3.2.2. Artistic Nature and the Human

It is evident that the Bible has a creaturely description of the human that ties humankind closely to nature. Humans are nature, formed from the earth, alongside all of God's creatures. The Bible has more to say about the human constitution, but the human as nature is an important point for theological anthropology. This point was readily appreciated by Gregory of Nyssa in the 4th century. Gregory developed a cosmogony similar to that of Augustine's idea of simultaneity in creation, where all was brought forth in an instant in their “seminal reasons”. Gregory holds that all things were created at once in their “spermatic potency” at the beginning of time, but then unfolded in a necessary order. I will quote Gregory's *Apologetic Treatise on the Hexameron* at some length:

The commencement of this cosmogony teaches that the sources, causes and virtualities (powers, potencies) of all things were collectively sent forth in an instant, and in this first impulse of the Divine Will the essences of all things assembled together. ... But through the Power and Wisdom together sent forth for the perfecting of each of the parts of the world, there followed a certain necessary series according to a certain order ... as artistic nature required ... just as the necessary arrangement of nature required succession in the things coming into being, so each one is said to have come about, Moses thus philosophizing on physical matters in the form of a narrative.⁸³

After stating that all things were created instantly, but unfolded in a certain necessary order, Gregory explains the creation of humans:

... the legislator (Moses) says that, after inanimate matter was made as a foundation, the notion of life appeared first in the form of vegetative life in plants, and then is introduced the origin of beings governed by sensation. And because, according to the same order of succession found in those to whom life has come through the flesh, on the one hand the sensitive may exist alone, even without the intellectual nature, but on the other hand, the rational could originate in a body only by being mingled together with the sensitive— man was formed last of all, after the plants and animals, nature proceeding successively in a certain order

⁸² This is particularly apparent in the modern “Creationism” approach, in which an alleged continuity between animal and human life is deemed almost blasphemous.

⁸³ Messenger:25

towards the perfect.⁸⁴

Gregory is plainly teaching that the human body is nature. According to Gregory, humans did not come into existence without a pre-history. Humans are comprised of and envelope developments in “artistic nature” that have unfolded from the “spermatocytic potency” that God had laid down in nature. Again, modern Creationism will stress that the human was created immediately by God. Gregory gives help to a theological understanding of evolution as mediated creation. This is also in concert with “Let the earth bring forth” in Gen. 1.

However, the creation accounts do give special attention to the creation of humans. There is a consideration in the narrative before the creation of humankind; God has simply commanded in the previous creations, now God admonishes; “Let us make humankind” Gen. 1:26.⁸⁵ The particularity of human creation does not escape Gregory's attention, which is already evident in that he sees creation as moving toward “the perfect”, namely the creation of the rational soul.

Gregory teaches that the vital force was manifested in the world, first in plant life, then in animals, and then finally “ascended” to human life. This order of succession was necessary because the rational soul, intellectual life, could only be embodied in sentient beings. He talks about three stages of the soul:⁸⁶ first, the vegetative soul, wherefrom the human has acquired its vegetative functions. Second, the animal soul, from which the human has its sentient organization. Finally the rational, spiritual soul, which is a peculiar gift to human nature.⁸⁷

In conclusion, the human is to be considered as nature, with a possible exception of the spiritual soul. But the human is nature to the extent that a human brings together all stages of nature in the human body.

Excursus on the soul and *imago Dei*

Modern science tends to be reductionistic when approaching the question of consciousness. The general trend is to view human psychology as a bodily, material function. Advances in knowledge of the mutual interrelations of the physical and psychological understand the body and soul as being a psychosomatic unity. This is in concert with the general understanding in the OT. The human is

⁸⁴ Messenger:133, quoted from Gregory's *Treatise on Man*.

⁸⁵ Genesis 1:26 uses *asah* not *bara* to describe creation of humankind. The word choice leans towards the idea of mediated creation.

⁸⁶ Cf. Nesson 1998:443ff for a theological interpretation of the brain's biological inheritance from our animal ancestors; the three portions of the brain, i.e. the reptilian, the mammalian, and finally “The third portion of the triune human brain is the neocortex”. “The neocortex in its complex functioning gives rise to the search for the meaning of life and the question of God”.

⁸⁷ Messenger:137ff, 143, cf also Pannenberg Vol.2:138f

understood as an ensouled body, i.e. *nephesh chayyah*.

In the Bible, the soul is not the life-giving principle in the body; the soul, or *nephesh*, is the ensouled body itself. It is the Spirit of God, the *ruach* that God blows into Adam's nostrils in Gen.2:7, that is the life-giving principle. However, some theologians became somewhat influenced by Plato's understanding of a dualism of mortal body and immortal soul.⁸⁸

For the present discussion of a theology of death, it is important to maintain that the soul is not an immortal essence distinct from the body.⁸⁹ It is the Spirit of God that gives life, and the whole human, body and soul, dies when it withdraws, cf. Gen.6:3, Job 34:14f, and Eccl. 12:7.⁹⁰ Nowhere does the OT make the life-giving *ruach* an essential creaturely element, or a divine part of the human soul.⁹¹

Animals are also ranked as *nephesh chayya*, and live because they have the spirit of life in them. What distinguishes humans from other creatures is the designation of *imago Dei* and their destiny of fellowship with God, and the placing of humans to guard and rule over creation.⁹² In conclusion, there is nothing inherently divine in the human being apart from the spirit of life that humans share with all creatures for an allotted time.⁹³

3.3 Was The Human Created Mortal?

It may seem self-evident from the description of the human as nature and from the excursus on the soul that the human is mortal. However, it is of theological significance to decide whether the human was created mortal initially. There has been some controversy over this issue in the theological tradition.

Several Church Fathers, among them Athanasius, held that Adam and Eve were created mortal, but nonetheless in a different sense from the other creatures:

He made all things out of nothing through His own Word, our Lord Jesus Christ and of all His earthly creatures He reserved especial mercy for the race of men. Upon them, therefore, upon men who, as animals, were essentially impermanent, He bestowed a grace which other creatures lacked—namely the impress of His own Image, a share in the reasonable being of the very Word Himself, so that, reflecting

⁸⁸ Pannenberg Vol.3:571, e.g. Ireneus and Tertullian

⁸⁹ Pannenberg 1985:523 and Vol.3:571

⁹⁰ This approach becomes problematic in view of the Lazarus parable in Luke 16:19ff and the spirits in captivity in 1Peter 3:19. However, I believe that every person “lives” in the memory of God after death, analogous to uploading data from a computer to “the cloud”. The computer and data are lost when it “dies”, but a new computer, or the resurrection body will retrieve its initial data. There is no need for an immortal soul to guarantee continuity between the person here and the resurrection person.

⁹¹ Pannenberg Vol.2:181ff, cf. also discussion on Paul's view p.187f

⁹² Pannenberg Vol.2:189f

⁹³ Pannenberg 1985:522f

Him and themselves becoming reasonable and expressing the Mind of God even as He does, though in limited degree they might continue forever in the blessed and only true life of the saints in paradise. But since the will of man could turn either way, God secured this grace that He had given by making it conditional from the first upon two things—namely, a law and a place. He set them in His own paradise, and laid upon them a single prohibition. If they guarded the grace and retained the loveliness of their original innocence, then the life of paradise should be theirs, without sorrow, pain or care, *and after it the assurance of immortality in heaven*. But if they went astray and became vile, throwing away their birthright of beauty, *then they would come under the natural law of death* and no longer live in paradise”.⁹⁴ (Italics mine).

Athanasius teaches that the actuality of death stems from being cut off from participation in the *Logos*, because of sin. But as shown in the quote above, not even life in paradise was intended to be eternal, since immortality was first to be attained in heaven afterwards. In addition, it is evident that human creatureliness is under the “natural law of death” in and of itself. Gregory of Nyssa had a similar approach.⁹⁵

Augustine taught that Adam and Eve were only immortal in the sense that they had access to the Tree of Life (Gen.2:9).⁹⁶ However, after Augustine's controversy with Pelagius, the Church Synod in Carthage (417/18 A.D.) decided that whoever holds that Adam would have died even if he had not sinned is under an *anathema*.⁹⁷ This forced a move from understanding humans as being created mortal, in and of themselves, to a stance that held humans were created immortal.⁹⁸ Western theological tradition held that the first human was created immortal, and that death was a result of sin, up to the 18th century.

Excursus on the fall

An evolutionary perspective on life decisively denies that the Fall led to death or the struggle for limited resources.⁹⁹ Everything in the universe is limited and finite. The theory of uniformitarianism, as opposed to any idea of catastrophic change in the basic laws of nature, is a fundamental assumption in the natural sciences. There are no clues in physics, geology, or biology that the universe has undergone

⁹⁴ Athanasius:16f

⁹⁵ Pannenberg Vol. 2:266f

⁹⁶ An approach similar to Athanasius in that the life source lay outside of the human. Cf. Pannenberg Vol.2:266ff

⁹⁷ Salvesen:15

⁹⁸ In retrospect it seems likely that the Pelagius affair forced this movement, as a way to uphold that the consequences of sin are severe. But the myth of Adam's perfection and the blissful state before the fall also play into this. Paul Ricoeur has shown that “the myth of the exiled soul” has been told in many varieties appealing to religious aspirations. The story of the fall has tended to become a variation of the theme of the exiled soul. Salvation is then tied to an awakening or a return to an initial state. It is evident that this ties in with the one strand of biblical anthropology; the priestly high anthropology. The myth of the immortal soul severed from its former greatness does not go well with a designation implying that “you are dust, and to dust you shall return”. Cf. Forde:5ff

⁹⁹ Nesson 2002:85

any revolution of its laws.¹⁰⁰ Pannenberg acknowledges this insight from science; for him, *imago Dei* does not refer to a lost state. *Imago Dei* is fully realized in Christ and is thus fully realized in humans when humans become like Christ. For Pannenberg, this “becoming” is already now, but its full realization lies in the final consummation.¹⁰¹

Gregory of Nyssa speculates that humans were physically created to live in a “fallen world”. His speculation is grounded in a discussion of human nature as sexual beings, which is a rather peculiar read, but his point is interesting. Gregory believes that the perfect “angelic” human is a hypothetical creature.¹⁰² God knew that humankind would fall, so they were created with reproductive organs which would enable them to “multiply and fill the earth” also in a fallen state. If they had not fallen, i.e., if they had remained in an “angelic” state, they would have reproduced in a more angelic manner, so to speak. Thus it follows that the anatomical structure of humans has to do with the Fall, but they were created with that very anatomical structure before the Fall. To take his point further, it would be logical to claim that the structure of the world is as it is because of the inevitability of sin, not because sin changed the fundamental structure of the world and natural laws.¹⁰³

Gregory's musings are cited here because it seems likely that the emergence of the human with a reflective self-consciousness and the fall are more or less simultaneous.¹⁰⁴ It will probably be impossible for science ever to probe into the psychological aspects surrounding the transition from pre-human to human existence; we can therefore not know decisively whether God gave the first human/group of humans a “grace contingent on a place and a law”, as Athanasius stated.¹⁰⁵

However, a historical fall is unlikely. Thus a theology of death in light of the evolutionary theory should take into consideration that the fall story is mythological.¹⁰⁶ How the fall story is understood¹⁰⁷ has a bearing on a theology of death because Paul so clearly relates death to Adam's sin: “... sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned”, Rom.5:12f.¹⁰⁸

Paul Ricoeur interprets the fall story as a myth with a profound universal function. Adam is a

¹⁰⁰ Peters and Hewlett:206

¹⁰¹ Pannenberg 1985:43ff

¹⁰² Tillich: 2:20-44 Tillich describes the pre-fall state as “dreaming innocence”, i.e. a hypothetical state.

¹⁰³ Messenger:134ff

¹⁰⁴ Henriksen:166

¹⁰⁵ Cf. C.J. Collins in *Did Adam and Eve really exist?* for discussion on the importance of Adam and Eve's historicity for the coherence of the overall biblical narrative.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Nesson 2002:85ff. Nesson claims that theological anthropology must take into account that historically speaking the fall never happened. He then moves to interpreting the human condition in dialogue with evolutionary biology.

¹⁰⁷ Forde:6f According to Forde, an unbiblical understanding of the fall leads to myths about the original glory of humans, e.g. exemplified in Ricoeur's “myth of the exiled soul”.

¹⁰⁸ Whether the fall story is mythological or not, has no bearing on Pannenberg's understanding of the relation between sin and death, cf. section 3.4. This must also be seen in the light of Pannenberg's emphasis on the human becoming fully human through Christ.

generic term that signifies humankind.¹⁰⁹ The myth is contained in the biblical revelation to convey that the ambiguity of life.¹¹⁰ The sense of being alienated from God, self, and fellow beings is not in harmony with God's good creation.¹¹¹ Chapter 4 will return to this point. Ricouer holds that the story means to “set up a *radical* origin of evil distinct from the more *primordial* origin of the goodness of things”.¹¹²

Thus, the Bible maintains that humans are not inherently evil; sin is not essential to the human. Even if the fall was simultaneous with humans coming into existence, the story maintains that sin is contingent.¹¹³ And finally the myth conveys that evil is already in the world, the snake is in the garden, and its origin is unknown: “There is an anteriority of evil to itself, as if evil were that which always precedes itself, that which each man finds and continues while beginning it, but beginning it in his turn. That is why in the garden of Eden the serpent is already there; he is on the other side of that which begins”.¹¹⁴

As mentioned in chapter 2, there is an ambiguity in creation that is difficult to understand in light of God being the sole creator of all that is. In the OT, the prophets described both good and evil as coming from the hand of God; they would rather do that than allow for any power that could rival God.¹¹⁵

In the following section I will investigate natural death as a result of sin. In this respect it is significant to maintain that sin is contingent, as stated above. The historicity of the fall story probably needs to be dismissed from an evolutionary perspective. I will nevertheless continue referring to Adam¹¹⁶ and the fall as real, since it is part of the biblical revelation that conveys that sin is contingent.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁹ This is somewhat analogous to the Apostle Paul's use of Adam in 1.Cor.15:45 “The first man, Adam, became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit”. Here the use of Adam seems to be a universal designation.

¹¹⁰ Cf. chapter 2

¹¹¹ Cf. fn. 107 and in general Pannenberg Vol.2: 231ff, “Sin and Original Sin”. Pannenberg refers to Ricouer on p.239. I bring in Ricouer's perspective as he interprets the fall without referring to a previous state of bliss. Cf. also Forde:5ff for discussion of Ricouer's “the myth of the exiled soul” and how Forde relates this to a theology of the cross.

¹¹² Ricouer, P. *The Symbolism of Evil*. Quoted from Henriksen:166

¹¹³ Cf. Nesson 1998:443ff for an analysis of sociobiological implications for theological anthropology, p.446f: “Whereas other animals naturally survive by acting upon their instincts and drives, to an unprecedented degree the human animal is confronted with an intense moral problem by knowing how such actions will affect others. There is an innocence about earlier animal behaviour that no more belongs to humankind”.

¹¹⁴ Ricouer, P. *The Symbolism of Evil*. Quoted from Henriksen:167

¹¹⁵ Pannenberg Vol.3:632, fn.311

¹¹⁶ Adam as a generic term for humans as they were created.

¹¹⁷ Again the ambiguity is striking; sin is contingent but always “precedes itself”; when this is seen in light of Pannenberg's “becoming what we are to be” and that creation always has been directed toward redemption, the tension seems unsolvable. This I believe is precisely the strength of Ricouer's analysis of the fall story; the tension stands, but yet it points toward God's primordial goodness.

3.4 Is Death Natural or a Result of Sin?¹¹⁸

When discussing if physical death should be understood as simply a biological necessity or if it must be maintained that death is caused by sin, I will be building on what has already been said in section 3.2 and 3.3: Human beings are nature and they are mortal in and of themselves. This was apparent in the passage from Athanasius where he stated that humans die under a “natural law” of death, like all other creatures outside the garden. Again, the framework of a world created with time—past, present, and future—led Athanasius to suggest that not even in Eden would life be eternal. He imagined immortality as something transcendent, something belonging to heaven. So already Athanasius allowed for an interpretation of physical death in humans that involved natural causation.

Athanasius, and with him also Luther, seem to understand *imago Dei* as a power that deprives nature of its power. As long as the humans mirrored God and lived in God's presence, participating in the *Logos*, they would not die. But this had to do with the special place of humans in creation, and did not reflect on natural causation as such. In summary: physical death is due to natural law, unless overruled by a higher law.

As mentioned, western theological tradition after Augustine held that humans were created immortal. However, enlightenment theologians started questioning this assumption, and death came to be viewed as part of the finitude of human nature. The subjective experience of death became dominant for the theological understanding of death; it was only for the sinner that death was an expression of God's wrath.¹¹⁹

Death as a biological phenomenon was thus severed from its tie to sin; the psychological experience of death became what “the wages of sin” entailed. Luther did not sever the tie; he maintained that God imposed physical death on humans because of sin.¹²⁰ He nevertheless also gave a psychological interpretation of death. According to Luther, biological death, lying in your bed dying, is “childish death”—for him, not much of a challenge. The sting of death was the wrath of God. Without a sense of wrath, death was not a punishment at all.¹²¹

Following this train of thought, many protestant theologians have connected death with sin only in a non-physical sense. The Norwegian theologian S. Osberg held that the Pauline emphasis on physical death as punishment for sin must be abandoned. He was convinced that if Christian anthropology was to avoid being disconnected from an evolutionary biological understanding of human life, it would

¹¹⁸ Cf. also section 2.5

¹¹⁹ Pannenberg Vol.2:267

¹²⁰ Book of Concord: 208.161

¹²¹ Forde:100ff, cf. also Book of Concord: 206.153

have to reinterpret Paul's theology of death. Death, for Osberg, would have to be understood as part of God's good plan for creation.

Osberg suggested that when Paul talked about death as punishment for sin, it had to be understood as referring to spiritual, or eternal, death. An analysis of Osberg's approach by Henriksen, also a Norwegian theologian, shows that Osberg runs into difficulty in light of the fact that Christ suffered a physical death on the cross due to sin. Christ's physical death atones for humanities' sin. Paul's linking of sin and physical death should therefore not be reinterpreted as Osberg does.¹²² Furthermore, understanding physical death as part of God's good plan for creation stands in clear tension with death being an enemy that Christ conquered. I will return to this in chapter 4; there is a paradox in that sin, death, the law, and the devil seem to be both agents of God's judgment and at the same time enemies of God.

An important issue is nevertheless to maintain that nothing is created outside of God. Osberg is an example from a Norwegian context, but he stands in a line of 20th century theologians who view the link between sin and death as referring to the death of judgment, and not to natural death.¹²³

Pannenberg moves to maintain the Pauline connection between sin and physical death along similar lines as Athanasius; God is the fountain of life, life does not exist apart from God. Sin leads to a separating from God, and death follows as a result of that separation from God. Separated from the source of life, "the law of nature, that leads from sin to death takes place without any special divine intervention".¹²⁴ Therefore the statement to Adam and Eve that transgressing the law will lead to death, Gen. 2:17, is to be understood as a warning of what will consequently take place.¹²⁵

Sin has consequences that are not imposed from without; they follow as cause and effect. Sin leads to disruption of human relationships, as well as the fundamental relationship to God. Sin tears down trust, and furthermore sin potentially leads to physical and emotional illness. Paul Tillich emphasizes that sin naturally impairs life and leads to disease. Tillich did however follow the above-mentioned general trend of psychologizing Paul's connection between sin and death; Tillich writes that "sin is the sting of death, not its cause".¹²⁶ He nevertheless saw that sin led to "self-destruction" in the sense that sin leads to a moving away from God as the center of existence, to which human existence essentially belongs; this leads to disintegration and estrangement. There is in the field of psychosomatic medicine

¹²² Henriksen:250

¹²³ Pannenberg Vol.2:268. One can argue that the main use of the word death relates to spiritual death; however, it seems evident that the Bible, and especially Paul, holds that physical death is also caused by sin, 1.Cor.15:21. I will therefore focus mainly on the point at question, namely whether physical death is related to sin.

¹²⁴ Pannenberg Vol.2: 270

¹²⁵ Pannenberg Vol.2:270

¹²⁶ Tillich Vol.2:67f

a growing awareness of how illness can be related to precisely “a kind of estrangement from oneself”.¹²⁷

However, the objection remains that death seems to be an inescapable result of the finite constitution of a human. According to science, all multi-cellular life forms die. Karl Barth stated that “Finitude means mortality”. He maintained that our finitude in time is an inherent part of human nature as creatures; humans therefore die by nature.

Pannenberg argues that finitude cannot be the conclusive reason why humans must die; the Christian hope is of a coming life without death and there are no theological grounds to hold that an existence in the eschaton will be as infinite beings. Humans will stand before God as finite creatures, and immortality will flow from participation in God, not from creaturely infiniteness.¹²⁸

Pannenberg’s point is illustrated in the Book of Concord concerning the person of Christ; according to his divine nature, Christ is infinite. This infinite quality of the divine nature never becomes a property of the human nature.¹²⁹ The attributes of Christ’s human nature are to be a corporeal, finite creature of flesh and blood, to suffer, and to die. Both natures are united personally in Christ.¹³⁰ When Christ was resurrected from the dead and ascended to heaven, he did not lay aside his human nature of creaturely finiteness. Christ sits at the right hand of God, finite according to human nature, but infinite according to divine nature, which never becomes part of his human nature.¹³¹

Therefore a theological perspective on death must maintain that finitude does not make death inevitable; it is separation from God through sin that leads back to nothingness. Finitude is not equivalent to sin. Finitude is, as we have seen from the Book of Concord, an inherent part of human nature and will remain so in the eschaton.

3.5 Human Existence as a Finite Being

The finite nature of humans is in accordance with God’s creative will, as shown above. Similarly human creatureliness, as brought forth by the evolution process, is not unworthy of fellowship with God. Death is not imposed on humans because of any fault in their constitution. Death is the result of the “impossible transition” to autonomy from God.¹³² As shown in chapter 2, God is hidden for the

¹²⁷ Quoted from Pannenberg 1985:141f

¹²⁸ Pannenberg Vol.2:271f

¹²⁹ Book of Concord:487.7

¹³⁰ Book of Concord:487.8f

¹³¹ Book of Concord:488.14ff

¹³² Pannenberg Vol.3:642. The quote “impossible transition” is from Karl Barth, cf. fn. 338 in Pannenberg.

creatures. Pannenberg believes God's hiddenness is an essential condition for creaturely life in achieving independence, and thus true distinction *vis à vis* God. The creative will to allow such independence is an expression of God's love. This independence, i.e. self-distinction from God and also all other creaturely life, has reached its highest expression in human beings.¹³³

A duration in creaturely existence is, as first noted in section 2.6, necessary to become an independent being. The human being needs to live and grow to form his or her own particular existence. Humanity is destined to participate in the Son's relation to God. However, Pannenberg also holds that the identity of the individual person in relation to God is contingent on that person having his or her own center of identity, fashioned in time.¹³⁴

All this is according to God's will. But through this God risks being perceived as non-essential and even non-existent; God's Lordship in creation is in the balance, and with it the destiny of humanity.¹³⁵

Humanity is therefore addressed by way of revelation. The ultimate revelation was the incarnation of Christ. But even the incarnation of the Word that created the world, Pannenberg says, came in a way that respected human independence.¹³⁶ God addresses humanity and lays before them the free gift of life. Of all creatures, God addresses the creature designated as *imago Dei*, because God sees the Son manifested in creaturely life, and humanity in particular, and loves the world accordingly (John 3:16).

The God-willed independence given to the finite human creature brings freedom. But as the Fall story illustrates, the use of this freedom has through sin brought about a loss of independence and an enslavement to the forces of sin and death (Hebr. 2:15). Thus, finite existence comes to be a struggle to overcome finiteness, which in turn is contrary to God's intentions.¹³⁷

In conclusion of this section, the finite nature of human beings and their independence *vis à vis* God are part of God's created order. However sin, especially *causa sui*¹³⁸ aspirations, separates humans from fellowship with God and the source of life. This seems to be the inevitable, yet nevertheless contingent, result of God's hiddenness, which allows humans to form an identity through time.¹³⁹ God knew this in God's eternal present, and therefore God's love ordained the incarnation of Christ even before the world

¹³³ Pannenberg Vol.2:138, cf. also section 4.3

¹³⁴ Pannenberg Vol.3:639ff, cf. also section 4.6

¹³⁵ Pannenberg Vol.2:390

¹³⁶ Pannenberg Vol.3:

¹³⁷ Cf. Pannenberg's discussion of the self relating to self, Vol.2:247ff, cf also fn. 139

¹³⁸ Cf. fn. 139

¹³⁹ Pannenberg Vol.2:247ff. Pannenberg follows Kierkegaard (*Sickness unto Death*) in describing the human subjectivity as a relation that relates itself to itself. However, the identity and existence of the self is posited by the eternal and a relation to the eternal. Pannenberg states: "the subjectivity that seeks its own self-actualization cannot escape the tie to its finitude". Self-fulfillment, or *causa sui*, i.e. becoming one's own grounding is impossible, it contradicts the true grounding of our existence in the eternal.

of creatures was established. The world is being created toward redemption.¹⁴⁰

In this there is a deep connection between all life on earth. Life has developed and brought forth human existence. Humanity is in a special way ordained to receive the incarnation of Christ. Christ in turn redeems all creation. Thus humanity stands in a debt of gratitude to all creation for suffering the cost of bringing forth humanity, which became Christ's incarnated nature. The rest of creation in turn is now on the verge of being released from its bondage to death and decay, as the world is being redeemed¹⁴¹ through Christ.

3.6 Preliminary Summary of Chapter 3 and Research Question 2

Chapter 3 has primarily been concerned with identifying the connection between sin and physical death. As this dissertation is working towards a theology of death in light of evolutionary theory, I found it necessary first to establish that humans are an integral part of nature. A theological appreciation of the evolutionary process that brought human beings into existence illuminates how natural law and death concern human existence, alongside all creaturely existence. Furthermore, the human soul does not escape death; it is indivisibly tied to the human body as nature. The human has a special designation among creatures as *imago Dei*, but humans were nevertheless created mortal. As finite beings, humans die as all multi-cellular life dies. However, the fall story in Biblical revelation maintains that sin and the ambiguity of life and death is “distinct from the more *primordial* origin of the goodness of things”.¹⁴² Romans attributes death to Adam, suggesting a link between sin and death, as cause and effect. According to biology, this link is nonexistent.

Contemporary theologians have to a large degree severed the tie between sin and physical death. However, Pannenberg moves to maintain the tie; he does this mainly from an understanding of what constitutes life. Life is participation in the Spirit of life, sin separates from the Spirit, and thus leads to death. Death follows as a result of natural law, but the deep cause of death is separation from the Spirit.

Pannenberg furthermore shows that death cannot be equated with the finite structure of human nature, since immortal human existence in the eschaton will remain finite. Independent finite existence in time is necessary to form an identity as a being distinct from God. However, the freedom which this entails relentlessly leads to “the impossible transition” toward autonomy *vis à vis* God. The apostle Paul gives word to the predicament: “death spread to all, because all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12), “Who

¹⁴⁰ Cf. section 2.4

¹⁴¹ Bonhoeffer 1978:67f. Cf. also section 4.3

¹⁴² Ricouer, P. *The Symbolism of Evil*. Quoted from Henriksen:166

will rescue me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24).

I will on this note begin investigating what bearing Christ and the coming eschaton will have for a theology of death in light of evolutionary theory.

4 The Eschatological Man and the Vanquishing of Death

4.1 Outline Chapter 4

This concern of this chapter is to address research question 3: “*What is the relationship between the cross event, creation, and the final eschatological consummation, and how does this affect a theology of death?*”

In order to address this question I will begin by drawing attention to the precedence of the cross event in the research question. In a sense, the incarnation precedes the *loci* of creation in importance for understanding creation and death. I have stated in chapter 2 and 3 that creation is being created toward redemption, i.e., the final eschatological consummation. The incarnation is the proleptic occurrence of God's kingdom, where God will reign undisputed, and death will be no more. There is a deep connection and *continua* from the beginning of creation to the final consummation of all creation.

The cross event becomes a lens that gives a new perspective on reality in general. Section 4.2 will show that Christ's death on the cross reveals that God suffers with creaturely suffering. Pannenberg has some attention to this aspect,¹⁴³ but Murphy explicates a theology of the cross and calls it the “the trademark of God”. He says the world is structured in a “cruciform” way; the significance of death and suffering cannot simply be labeled as evil.

Section 4.3 will show that Christ, the ontological basis for creation, now enters creation and thus unifies creation with Christ-self. The mortal and perishable, becomes united to Christ.

Section 4.4 will show that as Christ assumes human nature with all its corruption and distortion, Christ dies on the cross. Christ overcomes death, and as the “collective person,” this has universal importance. Death receives new significance.

Section 4.5 will show how Christ's resurrection makes death pen-ultimate; the unity that Christ established with humanity will not break in death.

¹⁴³ Pannenberg Vol.1:314. Pannenberg also draws attention to the strength in Whitehead's process theology in that it brings to the forefront God's suffering with creation, Vol.2:16. Cf. also fn.169

Section 4.6 will show that death is not ultimately part of the human essence. When creation reaches its completion, death will be no more.

Thus this chapter will begin with Christ, the suffering servant.

4.2 The Suffering Servant

The preceding chapters have several times bordered on questions that have to do with *theodicy*. I have not dealt extensively with human sin and evil and how this produces suffering. I have been more concerned with the ambivalence that defines creaturely reality,¹⁴⁴ especially the fact that death and suffering seem to be built into the very fabric of life.

This reality is, as Ricouer said, primordially defined by God's good will. But this life is still experientially, one would hope only partially, defined by fear, suffering, and eventually death¹⁴⁵ that severs all possibility. Beyond death there is nothing; the human body and soul are from nature mortal in and of themselves. It is only by a share in the *ruach* of life that creatures have an allotted time on this earth. By the Spirit, the human has an "ecstatic" desire to transcend the limits of this existence. Humans feel immortal with a striving to transcend nature, yet they are hopelessly in nature.¹⁴⁶

Humans have a special destiny to be in relationship with God; this is very likely what the *imago Dei* designation in Genesis 1 implies. But the most fundamental aspect of sin, namely seeking life apart from God, has alienated humans from the very source of life. Humans are alienated from, and perhaps longing for, what they are created to be.¹⁴⁷ Thus humans understand from science that they are animals, but they still bear the designation *imago Dei* in their person. "It places a trembling animal at the mercy of the entire cosmos and the problem of the meaning of it".¹⁴⁸

According to Forde's theology of the cross, Christ's passion, his suffering, makes it evident that the meaning of suffering is not exhausted by calling it evil. Evil can definitively cause suffering, but not all suffering is evil. The suffering of Christ was from God,¹⁴⁹ and its ultimate effect was good. Suffering and even death cannot from a biblical perspective simply be deemed as evil.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ Such as "natural evil" and the inescapable circumstance of death.

¹⁴⁵ Hebr.2:15

¹⁴⁶ Becker:26, cf. also Pannenberg Vol.3:562f

¹⁴⁷ Pannenberg Vol.3:640 i.e. destined to be.

¹⁴⁸ Becker:60

¹⁴⁹ Murphy:29, The apostle Paul emphasizes God's involvement in Christ's crucifixion, over and above the role of Jewish and Roman authorities.

¹⁵⁰ Forde: 84ff. I realize that this approach is open to severe criticism, such as suffering being redemptive and that this glorifies suffering and even abuse. This is especially apparent from feminist critique. It is not my intention to glorify suffering, but suffering is not simply evil.

The God of Jeremiah is one who goes against human presumptions with the hammer of God's Word (Jer.23:29). Suffering can be part of God's "alien work" as Isaiah describes it in Is.28:21. Luther said, "Although He is the God of life and salvation and this is His proper work, yet, in order to accomplish this, He kills and destroys. These works are alien to Him, but through them He accomplishes His proper work. For He kills our will that His may be established in us. He subdues the flesh and its lusts that the spirit and its desires may come to life".¹⁵¹

This is an important perspective for a theology of death; suffering and the perspective of death are also venues that bring to realization that human *causa sui* projects are bound to fail. It brings human creatureliness to the forefront. Ultimately death can in a sense be grace in that death ends life lived in sinful self-expansion. God gives a limit to life and in this respect reveals what humans are.

These life circumstances, i.e., mortality and *etsi Deus non daretur*, are perhaps God's alien work and are, as mentioned in section 3.5, necessary for the independent creatures' free consent to God's Lordship. However, God's *chesed* indicates that God does not let go of creation. It was created toward redemption. Thus we see God's proper work in the coming of Christ. Christ becomes the suffering servant of Is. 53; he takes all suffering, even death, onto himself, so that humankind may be brought into the life-giving fellowship of God. The cross gives a crystal-clear focus to how God's alien work, i.e. death, is suffered so God's proper work, i.e. life, can be attained.

According to Murphy, a survey of the biblical story discloses a "cruciform" pattern: Creation of creatures from dust, the birth of Isaac from Sara's dead womb, the Exodus bringing life to a dead people,¹⁵² and then centuries later Israel experienced death again in Babylonian exile, but God raised up the "dry bones" as Ezekiel's vision foreshadowed.¹⁵³ All share the cruciform pattern that "God gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist", Rom. 4:17.¹⁵⁴

Murphy continues to say that the cross pattern is the "trademark of God" in history, and it profoundly reveals the character of God. God is to be discerned in weakness and suffering. Drawing on Gordon Fee's insights, Murphy explains how Phil. 2:3ff reveals what "kind of a deity God is": "As God he Emptied Himself" (vv. 5-7) and "As Man he humbled Himself" (v. 8). Christ took "the form of a slave". Christ's cry of abandonment from the cross in the words of Ps. 22:1 shows how Christ suffered in a deep connection with the whole of Israel's history. Acts 8:26-40 can see Jesus as the suffering servant of Is. 52:13-53:12. And Rev. 13:8 can speak of "the Lamb that was slaughtered from the foundation of the world", (alt. translation fn.1 in NRSV).¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Luther's Works 14.335. Quoted from Forde:88

¹⁵² Murphy:31, this theme is frequently emphasized by Latin American liberation theologians.

¹⁵³ Ezekiel 37:1ff

¹⁵⁴ Murphy:28ff

¹⁵⁵ Murphy:30ff

The cross is in this light not a singular event of suffering. God has continuously suffered with creation through the whole of its evolutionary history.¹⁵⁶ In connection with this, Forde shows that only in suffering has God truly revealed God-self to the world. Thus we cannot properly comprehend God's character from nature or in God's majesty as Creator. God reveals his love in weakness and in suffering.¹⁵⁷

This gives a particular emphasis to Pannenberg's understanding of creation as being based in Christ's (suffering) self-distinction from the Trinity, and thus suffering with creation in the process of evolution up to the point where Christ entered creation as the Incarnate One to fulfill creation.

4.3 What is Assumed is Redeemed

Pannenberg holds that creation, and in particular the creation of the human, is fulfilled proleptically in the incarnation.¹⁵⁸ Creation's destiny of sharing in the Son's eternal fellowship with God through the Spirit awaited the human stage in the sequence of creation.¹⁵⁹ Only with the rise of human consciousness did the distinction between God and creaturely reality become evident. Without this distinction, creatures could not participate in the Son's self-distinction from God. "Hence in Romans (8:21f.) all creation is waiting for the manifestation of sonship (8:15) in us, by which all creatures themselves will also be "sons" (8:19; cf. Gal. 4:4f.)".¹⁶⁰ Pannenberg maintains that if creatures were to enter into fellowship with God as something distinct from God, a prehistory of growing independence was needed. This is what is evident in the evolutionary history of life. However, creation does not stop at the present stage, i.e. the first Adam; it is not the Adam of the earth that will attain the fellowship of the Son with God.¹⁶¹ It is the "eschatological man", Jesus Christ, who fulfills the human destiny of

¹⁵⁶ Murphy:41: The Japanese theologian Kazoh Kitamori's *Theology of the Pain of God* was written in Japan during WWII. Kitamori writes about "pain as the essence of God" and asserts that "the cross is in no sense an external act of God, but an act within himself".

¹⁵⁷ Forde:89

¹⁵⁸ Pannenberg Vol.2:163,293, Pannenberg 1985:50f, cf also Grenz:116

¹⁵⁹ Cf. section 3.2.2; Gregory of Nyssa's stages of the soul.

¹⁶⁰ Pannenberg Vol.2:138

¹⁶¹ When the evolutionary ascent of human life is seen in light of God as creator and the reconciling work of Christ, it is reasonable to conclude that humans are the crown of evolution. From a theological standpoint it is difficult to imagine that God intends any further evolutionary development beyond the human stage, since Christ manifested himself as a human person, cf. Pannenberg Vol.2:293. For this reason I will carefully suggest that evolution from the "spermatic potency" that God laid down in "artistic nature", cf. section 3.1, has brought creation to a preliminary completion with the rise of human life, cf. section 4.3. However it is preliminary as creation is yet awaiting the final consummation, and the emergence of a new heaven and a new earth. This stands in some tension with my previous statements that "creation is *de facto* ongoing" in section 2.4. The claim here is not that evolution somehow has ceased, but that humans will not evolve to something beyond the human person of the incarnate Christ.

fellowship with God, cf. 1 Cor.15:45f.¹⁶²

Gregory of Nazianzus stated the soteriological axiom: “That which He has not assumed He has not healed”.¹⁶³ The evolutionary perspective that Pannenberg outlines above deepens the cosmological significance of Gregory's statement; Christ assumes all creation in the incarnation. In this Christ unites the perishable with the imperishable. By Christ's assuming human nature, he redeems this nature in his own body. C.S. Lewis illustrates this point beautifully: “He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity; down further still, if embryologists are right, to recapitulate in the womb ancient and pre-human phases of life; down to the very roots and sea-bed of Nature He had created”.¹⁶⁴

Pannenberg adds that the incarnation does not introduce a foreign element to the created reality, but rather reveals the true model for independence inherent in the created order. Thus the incarnation was not only a solution to the problem of sin, but also the fundamental reason for there being a universe.¹⁶⁵ Humans were in a special sense “ordained for the incarnation”,¹⁶⁶ the creation of the world carries with it the incarnation. Through Christ's subjection to God as a creature, God's Lordship becomes actualized in the world of creatures. As mentioned in chapter 2, God does not become truly God for his creation, before God is acknowledged as Lord by creation.¹⁶⁷

This indicates the relation between the Son's self-distinction from God that began creation, to the incarnation and the cross, and further to the final consummation. In order to explicate this I will now turn to the cross event.

4.4 Death Redefined on the Cross

For Paul, Adam was the first to sin and consequently the first to die. From an evolutionary perspective, this may not be accurate. However, Pannenberg shows, cf. section 3.5, that the connection between sin and death is valid from a theological perspective in that sin separates a person from God, the source of life. Christ's death on the cross is understood as the death of the one who took all sin upon himself.¹⁶⁸ Humanity is through Christ's death “entreated to be reconciled to God”, 2. Cor.5:20f, as God “for our sake made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God”.

¹⁶² Pannenberg Vol.2:138f

¹⁶³ Quoted from Murphy:128

¹⁶⁴ Lewis:115. Lewis' understanding of embryology is outdated, but his point still stands, Murphy:129

¹⁶⁵ Grenz:113f

¹⁶⁶ Pannenberg Vol.2:385f, cf also section 3.5

¹⁶⁷ Pannenberg Vol.2:389f

¹⁶⁸ John 1:29, alluding to Lev. 3:16

Christ has shown the world that God is not indifferent to the suffering and death of God's creatures. God incarnate takes the suffering and death onto God-self.¹⁶⁹ Luther shows to what extent Christ participates in all that holds humanity captive to death. Christ swallowed up sin, death, and the devil in what Luther called a *mirabile duellum*; the great duel that took place within the person of Christ when Christ died.¹⁷⁰ Christ "the collective person", or *maxima persona*, died for all as *maximus peccator et peccator peccatorum*, the greatest sinner, because all corruption was gathered up in him.

Christ died, but physical death could not hold him. The incorruptible divine nature in Christ could not be conquered by death. Christ died, but was brought to life again through a physical resurrection because Christ's human nature was personally united with the divine nature. From the vantage point of the cross, death is an enemy that Christ conquers on behalf of humankind.¹⁷¹

Athanasius, Augustine, and Anselm understood that Christ thus restored something of an original state. However, it seems to be more profound than a restoration of something lost. As mentioned, Adam's life was contingent on being upheld externally, by means of the tree of life, or keeping to "the place and the law", as Athanasius said. With Christ, there is more than this; humankind is invited to participate in divine life through faith in Christ.

Mannermaa, building on Luther's view of justification, claims that life becomes internalized through faith; Christ is not merely an object of faith. Christ himself becomes internalized. Luther says *In ipsa fide Christus adest*; Christ is really present in faith itself. Christ truly present amounts to an ontological change in the person of faith; in that person, a personal unity between human nature and Christ's nature is established.¹⁷² The unity is analogous to the personal unity of natures within Christ himself.¹⁷³ There is no mixing of attributes; human nature remains finite, but partakes in divine nature.

Only by participation with divine nature does the human gain life that is incorruptible. It seems plausible that this is at the core of what will be ontologically different with existence in the eschaton, as opposed to the corruptible life in this age; what was an external relation to God and life has become internal.

The personal unity with the eternal is perhaps also what will make it possible for humans to remain

¹⁶⁹The book of Concord:600 holds that in Christ human and divine nature were united in one person indivisible; so that it is admissible to say that "God died". Cf. also Pannenberg Vol.1:314. The statement "God died" is not dogmatically correct: "To speak directly of the death of God in the Son is a reverse monophysitism". Nevertheless Pannenberg confirms that the whole person of Christ, i.e. eternal Son, was affected by suffering and death. Thus the whole Trinity is in "sym-pathly with the passion".

¹⁷⁰ LW26:Gal.3:13

¹⁷¹ This is the paradox that I referred to in ch.3.3, namely that death and the law are agents of God's judgment, but also enemies that Christ conquers. Cf. Gustav Aulen's *Christus Victor* for study of this paradox.

¹⁷² Mannermaa:15

¹⁷³ Cf. section 3.3

grounded in a relation to the eternal, as opposed to grounding being in self.

Pannenberg shows that new life, i.e. resurrection life, is no longer separated from the Spirit of life; it is permeated by this Spirit (1 Cor.15:44f), and thus life becomes internal. That presence constitutes a unity of the human body with “the life-giving spirit” in the future resurrection.¹⁷⁴ Only the future life of the resurrected state will be so united to the divine spirit as the source of all life that it will be immortal.¹⁷⁵ Pannenberg also shows how the NT uses Spirit and Christ interchangeably to describe the presence in the believer; having the Spirit is having Christ.¹⁷⁶ Thus it is plausible that Pannenberg can say *In ipsa fide Christus adest*. The participation motif in Luther's commentary on Galatians is in many respects analogous to Pannenberg's concept of being drawn into participation with the Trinity.

Thus the meaning of death becomes redefined; death is no longer seen as the end of the human person that severs the relationship to God.¹⁷⁷ Pannenberg points to a new view of death in light of the gospel. Death is no longer seen exclusively as punishment, under the law. Death viewed through the gospel can be seen as gain, since it is to be with Christ, Phil. 1:21.¹⁷⁸ Death can now be defined as grace; through Christ, the suffering servant, death becomes an end to this life's circumstances, so that new life can be brought to resurrection.¹⁷⁹

The hope of resurrection from death was already part of Jewish eschatological expectations, and Christ's resurrection is in Christian theology seen as a proleptic foretaste of the coming resurrection. Christ assumed all humanity. As the last Adam, or the eschatological man, he obeyed God and thus overcame death. In this Christ has universal relevance and expands the hope of resurrection to all humankind.¹⁸⁰

4.5 The Resurrection Promise—Death No More

I have stated that there will be an ontological change in the constitution of human life after the resurrection, and that this change is already present in the person by faith, i.e. Christ. The Spirit is referred to as the token, the guarantee of the coming inheritance. The inheritance of immortal life is by the Spirit proleptically present in faith.

¹⁷⁴ Pannenberg 1985:532

¹⁷⁵ Pannenberg 1985:522

¹⁷⁶ Pannenberg Vol.2:450f

¹⁷⁷ Pannenberg Vol.2:270

¹⁷⁸ Pannenberg Vol.2:269

¹⁷⁹ Henriksen:236

¹⁸⁰ Pannenberg Vol.2:297

However, this does not do away with death in this lifetime. Humans with and without faith in Christ still die. The Book of Concord explains that this is to mortify remaining sin in the person.¹⁸¹ But it appears to be the case, in light of chapter 2 and 3, that human nature is mortal and that our nature does not change by faith. The ontological change suggested above does not undo human nature. Human nature will still be engulfed in sin, always seeking life from other sources than God, always seeking distorted independence, as opposed to God-given independence.¹⁸²

This led to death for the first Adam, as it leads to death for every human, Rom. 5:12. Humans die, and as they die they are freed from sin; Paul holds that in baptism the person is baptized into Christ's death. Rom. 6:3. Death of the old and the entrance into new life begins already now in this life, even though the resurrection is still future, Rom. 6:5.¹⁸³ The same applies to every person as it did to Christ; all die, as all have human nature.

But through the ontological presence of Christ, i.e. the Spirit, death cannot ultimately overcome the person who has entered into the Son's fellowship with the Father, through the Spirit. The resurrection of Christ gives faith the assurance that death is pen-ultimate. Christ has shown on the cross and through the resurrection that "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Christ really present in faith is for the human being an unbreakable unification with the Spirit of life, and a promise of death no more.

4.6 The Completion of Creation

Christ represents an in-breaking of the eschatological future already now, in the history of the world. Christ is a revelation of God's love for the world (John 3:16), as was the act of creation. But only the consummation of the world will bring creation to finality and demonstrate un-ambiguously God's glory and deity. It will prove God's love for God's creatures.¹⁸⁴ It will bring about definite acknowledgement of creation as "very good".¹⁸⁵

Pannenberg suggests that the reality of creation is ontologically constituted in the eschatological future.¹⁸⁶ In this sense, creatures are on their way to becoming what they already are in God's eternal present. The essence of a human being is thus something the human is becoming. Pannenberg discusses

¹⁸¹ Pannenberg Vol.3:617ff, cf. discussion of purgatory, especially Christ as the devouring flame that burns away the rubble in every human.

¹⁸² This condition is described by Luther's *simul justus et peccator*, righteous and sinful.

¹⁸³ Pannenberg Vol.3:604f. This is the "already, not yet" structure with Paul.

¹⁸⁴ Pannenberg Vol.3:631f

¹⁸⁵ Pannenberg Vol.3:645f

¹⁸⁶ This is connected with Pannenberg's understanding of the Spirit.

essence with Tillich, in that Tillich holds that essence is pre-temporal and that existence will add to this essence in the consummation. Pannenberg denies this and states that essence is post-temporal, something humans are becoming. The human identity in time participates proleptically in its eternal identity, in its essence. The duration of a person is similarly a participation in eternity. The lasting essence of each creature has its basis in the eschatological future. "... What we will be has not yet been revealed", 1 John 3:2.¹⁸⁷

In light of the above consideration, one could add that death is not created as part of the creaturely essence. Death is the limit to duration in time, but death does not devour the human essence. This essence is kept in the eternal present of God.¹⁸⁸ And when it is revealed what the creature is to become essentially, in the presence of God, death will be no more (Rev. 21.3f).¹⁸⁹

4.7 Preliminary Summary of Chapter 4 and Research Question 3

This chapter has investigated how death relates to God's economy, God's full plan of salvation, which in turn illuminates the interrelationship between the incarnation, creation, and the final consummation. The cross reveals God's intentions and what "kind of deity God is". Suffering and death are part of God's "cruciform" dealing with humanity. God is hidden in the suffering, and thus bringing humanity towards redemption. The cross above all shows that God suffers with creation. Creation has its basis in Christ and was created toward the incarnation. Christ assumed human nature, and implicitly all of creation. Thus Christ united the perishable with the un-perishable.

Christ's death on the cross reveals the paradox that death is an enemy, counter to God's intentions for humanity, despite the fact that both death and life come from God. In a sense Christ dies under the sign of that ambiguity and thus reveals God's true intention; God wills to set humankind free from the bondage to sin and death. Faith in Christ, which is equivalent to grounding life in God, as opposed to self, sets humanity free. Life becomes internalized through faith. Although humans still die, they die under the gospel of hope; death has become redefined.

Human nature has not changed, but it has through faith been united to divine nature. Humanity can

¹⁸⁷ Pannenberg Vol.3:602f

¹⁸⁸ This stands in apparent tension with the excursus on the soul, section 3.2.2. However the excursus and chapter 3 in general shows that humans do not attain to life on their own. Life is not integral to the human body or soul, they are one indivisible entity. Only in relation to the eternal to humans have a secure ontological basis. This basis is the human essence that is in God's presence. The essence that we are becoming, which will have its identity from our existence in time. 1Cor.15 states that we will have a spiritual body, different from our earthly body. Our identity will be retained, but will nevertheless be immersed in a new identity of being as Christ, the true *imago Dei*. Cf. 1.John 3:2.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. also Pannenberg's discussion on continuity of identity, Vol.3:639ff

therefore look forward to a resurrection like that of Christ. The bond to Christ, or the Spirit indwelling, will not be broken in death.

Death thereby becomes pen-ultimate. It is already in “God's eternal present” what humans are to become, when Christ becomes realized in them. The essence of a human being lies with God and humans are being drawn toward that realization. Death will have no bearing on the true human essence, as it will be partaking in the fellowship of the Trinity.

Through the incarnation, creation is being fulfilled and drawn toward the final consummation. In faith and suffering humans can already now believe that creation is “very good”, but the consummation will be the ultimate verification of God's Lordship and the goodness of creation.

On that note I will now turn to the final chapter.

5 Towards a Theology of Death in Light of Evolutionary Theory

5.1 Introductory remarks

The main research question for this dissertation has been: *How should a theology of death be formulated in light of the challenge from evolutionary theory?* The goal has been to investigate resources from tradition and modern theology which could give impulses towards such formulations.

This chapter will conclude this dissertation by drawing together the aspects that have been suggested as considerations and thus outline a limited contour of a theology of death in light of evolutionary theory. This contour will be formulated as 6 suggestions for a theology of death, section 5.2. I also refer back to the preliminary summaries after chapters 2 – 4. Section 5.2 will be followed by a brief personal afterthought, section 5.3.

5.2 Contours of a theology of death – 6 Suggestions

1. A theology of death should be based on what constitutes life

The theological claim that life is created by God leads to an understanding that creatures owe their existence to God. God is understood as the sole creator of this world; thus, death cannot be attributed to any opposing power that fundamentally challenges God's unrestricted power. Death must therefore be

understood as part of God's creation.

The life of a creature is theologically understood as a share in God's *ruach*, God's Spirit. Thus life is upheld by the Spirit moment by moment (Ps. 104:29f). The "moment by moment" should however not be understood as fleeting and inconsistent. God has given the world of creatures independent duration in time and space as an expression of *chesed*, God's steadfast love. Creatures can therefore rely on God's creation for sustenance, as God has created a world that is governed by consistent natural laws.

Pannenberg shows that the Son's movement outward from the Trinity is the basis for creation that is distinct from God. This gives existence a secure ontological grounding. Independent existence is given out of love, and all creaturely life becomes an object of God's eternal turning to the Son. God has given life to creatures out of love in order that creatures may enter into the love of the Trinity. The theological meaning of life thus becomes to participate in the Son's relationship with God, through the Spirit.

2. A theology of death should consider the relationship between independence and death

Pannenberg maintains that consciousness and independence are necessary to enter into participation with the Son freely. The evolutionary history then becomes a history of growing creaturely independence. The human being is in this sense the crown of creation.

Independent existence in time is the framework for forming an identity as distinct from God. Human life lived in independence builds a distinct identity by relating to past, present, and future; actions in the past relate to the present, and also affect how one interprets the future. It seems to be the case that authentic identity-building presupposes the possibility of evil and the limitation implied by death.

The ability to decide between good and evil constitutes independent life, but this is also what is implied by the fall and the tree of knowledge. Thus the fall and the emergence of human self-reflective consciousness seem to be simultaneous. The ability to decide between various courses of action is ambiguous in that it easily can lead to a loss of God-given independence. This in turn implies a turning away from God and an enslavement to sin, fear and death.

3. A theology of death should maintain the connection between sin and death, and avoid equating finitude with death

The theological claim that sin leads to death should be maintained in that sin separates creatures from

God; this ultimately leads to the Spirit of life's withdrawal from the creature. Thus the deepest reason for death is sin. The human being is created from the earth, alongside all creation. The body and soul that constitutes the human should be understood as mortal. Separated from God's *ruach*, the human will die due to natural law. There is no part of the human being that escapes death. Theology should therefore maintain the seriousness of death.

This understanding implies an acknowledgment of the biological explanation of death due to natural processes. Death in creaturely life in general is due to the natural processes that take place, but also the death of animals should be related to sin by way of analogy. All creation waits with groaning for humanity to enter into “sonship” with God; creation will then be released from its bondage to decay.

Creation is created finite, and finitude should not be equated with mortality. Creation will remain finite also in the eschaton. Finitude leads to death only in relation to sin. When creation enters into full participation with the Son, it will attain immortality, but will remain finite. Finitude should be understood as a distinction between God and creation.

4. A theology of death should distinguish between God's alien work and God's proper work

A theology of death should acknowledge the tension between death as an agent of God's judgment and death as an enemy of God's will for humankind. Death is built into the structure of creation and creation suffers under it. This is an aspect of God's “alien work” that is hard to understand. Luther said that a theologian of the cross speaks the truth and sees reality as it is. God uses death to mortify sin and to bring humanity to the mature realization that life without glorifying the creator, and thus entering into the Son's relationship to God, through the Spirit, ultimately has no ontological base.¹⁹⁰ The Cross also reveals that God's “proper work” is to give life and future to creation. The cross reveals that Christ, and implicitly the Trinity, suffers with humanity and creation.

5. A theology of death should point to the completion of creation

The creation of the human being as *imago Dei* becomes complete only in Christ.¹⁹¹

In 1. Cor. 15:45ff, Paul states: “Thus it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual.” Then Paul goes on to say: “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven ... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” This passage of scripture implies that the first Adam, i.e.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Pannenberg Vol.2:247. The finite being trying to ground existence in itself, cf. fn.139.

¹⁹¹ Pannenberg 1985:43f.

humanity, is not completed creation.¹⁹²

A theology of death should maintain that creation is ongoing and that death is not part of complete creation. Thus death is not part of God's "proper" will for humanity.

6. A theology of death should point to the hope of resurrection

A theology of death should ultimately point back to Christ as the ontological basis for creation and the Redeemer of creation. In the incarnation, Christ moves into creation and thus realizes creation's goal: In the person of Christ creation truly participates in the Son's relationship to God, through the Spirit. In Christ divine and human nature are united. Thus Christ overcomes mortality in the resurrection.

This redefines the meaning of death. Humanity can through faith now understand death as penultimate. The resurrection of Christ gives the hope that death will be followed by resurrection. Christ reveals God's steadfast love for creation. The cross shows that God stands by creation.

The eschatological hope points to a consummation of creation where Christ will gather up all things and finally bring creation into full participation in the eternal love of the Trinity.

These 6 suggestions to a contour of a theology of death in light of evolutionary theory conclude the work of this dissertation. I will end this final chapter with a brief personal statement.

¹⁹² This furthermore implies that any perfection ascribed to Adam in the Garden must be dismissed; Adam was a creature of dust, i.e. old creation.

5.3 Personal afterthought

This dissertation has been a process of working toward a theology of death in light of evolutionary theory. My investigation has been very limited; the resources are vast. The work of this dissertation and the formulations in this concluding chapter are to be regarded as provisional expressions. My research questions brought me into deep water. It has been difficult, both intellectually and emotionally, to grasp the depths of the question of death. I found a fundamental ambiguity in creation. The question of death remains ambiguous and multifaceted. I do not think that the problem of death has been explained through this dissertation. But the process has given me a way of viewing creation as profoundly grounded in the love of the Trinity. This gives reason for hope. I therefore refer again to a vision first quoted in the introduction.

See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

*Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.*

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."

Revelation 21:3ff

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