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It is Good for Us to Be Here: Joseph Ratzinger’s Christocentric Doctrine of Creation in Response to Anti-Natalism

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Abstract

This paper sets out Joseph Ratzinger’s Christocentric theology of creation as a counter to the increasingly popular naturalist movement anti-natalism. Paradoxically, anti-natalism is parasitic on the doctrine of creation and yet, at the same time, denies creation, for, as Ratzinger argues, the doctrine of creation affirms both the human person and the natural world within which she lives; creation is necessary for self-acceptance. Furthermore, creation and redemption go together. It is with and through the human person, not without, that the natural world is brought to its proper end.

Keywords: anti-natalism; creation; Eucharist; Joseph Ratzinger; redemption

1. Introduction

‘He is “the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake”, and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life’.¹

Joseph Ratzinger’s theology is thoroughly Christocentric, and the center of his Christology is the Resurrection. He argues that the Christian faith is grounded in the experience that ‘Jesus has risen’.² This pithy sentence is the structure of faith and theology by which the Church stands or falls. Yet, often when a Catholic is asked about the core of the Gospel, the answer, derived from the Council of Chalcedon, many of the Fathers, and the theology of St Thomas, is ‘Jesus, the man, is God’.³ Ratzinger points

¹Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), par. 356.

²Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. by Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p. 184. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, trans. by Philip J. Whitmore (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2011), pp. 241–44.

³Ratzinger, *Principles*, p. 182.

out that this statement emphasizes the ontological *is*, which presumes the incarnation event and is motivated by the concern about the meaning of Christ for contemporary reality. Albeit important, he argues that this is incomplete. The *is* in the statement points to an event: Christ's anointing, which is the Resurrection. The Incarnation can only be properly understood retrospectively in view of the Resurrection. Without the Resurrection Christ would not be *the* criterion, and the Incarnation would not be a doctrine.⁴ It is apparent to Ratzinger 'that all Christian theology, if it is to be true to its origin, must be first and foremost a theology of Resurrection'.⁵ The incarnational aspect is not erased but is assumed in the Resurrection, and therefore the Resurrection is rooted in the cosmos, in creation.

By reading creation through the lens of the resurrected Christ it is clear that creation leads to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist elevates rather than elides the doctrine of creation.⁶ Accordingly, the world is radically anthropocentric. In fact, this can be extended; the cosmos, the universe, or, in one word, creation is anthropocentric. However, this is not pre-Copernican geocentrism, nor its opposite, post-Copernican heliocentrism. Albeit, it is *son* centered. The universe is Christocentric. To put it differently, the Logos is the ground of all being. All things were created through and for him and are fulfilled in him.

⁴Ratzinger, *Ibid.*, pp. 182–84. As pope he wrote, 'The Resurrection thus reveals definitively the real identity and the extraordinary stature of the Crucified One. An incomparable and towering dignity: *Jesus is God!* For St Paul, the secret identity of Jesus is revealed even more in the mystery of the Resurrection than in the Incarnation. *While the title of Christ*, that is "Messiah"; "the Anointed", in St Paul tends to become the proper name of Jesus, and that of "the Lord" indicates his personal relationship with believers, now the title "*Son of God*" comes to illustrate the intimate relationship of Jesus with God, a relationship which is fully revealed in the Paschal event. We can say, therefore, that Jesus rose again to be the Lord of the living and the dead, (cf. Rom 14:9; and 2 Cor 5:15) or in other words, our Saviour (cf. Rom 4:25)'. Benedict XVI, *I Believe in One God*, ed. by Giuliano Vigini (London: St Paul's Publishing, 2012), p. 34. See also Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, p. 242.

⁵Ratzinger, *Principles*, p. 184. 'The Resurrection teaches us a new way of seeing; it uncovers the connection between the words of the Prophets and the destiny of Jesus. It evokes "remembrance", that is, it makes it possible to enter into the interiority of the events, into the intrinsic coherence of God's speaking and acting'. Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. by Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), p. 232. The Resurrection is 'when God's former encounters with man become his definitive irruption upon earth, when the earth is torn open once and for all and drawn into God's own life'. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Baptism to Transfiguration*, p. 250.

⁶Ratzinger, writing about the pierced side of Christ, points out that we have a type of new creation opening before us. 'The open side of the new Adam repeats the mystery of the "open side" of man at creation: it is the beginning of a new definitive community of men with one another, a community symbolized here by blood and water, in which John points to the basic Christian sacraments of baptism and Eucharist and, through them, to the Church as the sign of the new community of men'. Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. by J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 241. In 'The Meaning of Sunday', Ratzinger posits that 'the Eucharist is the living and actual presence of the Risen One who permanently communicates himself in the event of the Passion and, thus, is our life. The Eucharist itself is, therefore, the "day of the Lord"'. Joseph Ratzinger, *Joseph Ratzinger in Communio*, vol. 2, ed. by David L. Schindler and Nicholas J. Healy (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2013), p. 125. The day of the Lord is the fulfilment of the Sabbath, and one aspect of the Sabbath is that 'it clearly shows that "creation" and "covenant" are in mutual relation from the very beginning'. Ratzinger, *Joseph Ratzinger*, vol. 2, p. 129. Essentially, Ratzinger argues that the Eucharist is the fulfilment of God's covenant with humanity, and therefore it is the capstone of creation.

In what follows, I will set out Ratzinger's conception of the anthropocentric cosmos, or, more aptly, the Christocentric cosmos, explicating how creation was made *through him* and *for him*. In the process I will counter the naturalist movement anti-natalism. Paradoxically, anti-natalism is parasitic on the doctrine of creation, and yet, at the same time, it must deny creation. A robust Christocentric doctrine of creation affirms both the human person and the natural world within which he lives – anti-natalism is a theological problem. Lastly, I will elucidate how we as creatures participate *in him* through the Eucharist. *In him* we are in the process of an ongoing creation. Creation and redemption go hand-in-hand.

2. Through him

For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col 1:16–20)

'All things were created *through him* ... in him all things hold together'. In this passage, St Paul sets out the metaphysics of creation, and this, along with the prologue in John's gospel, and the various Old Testament accounts of creation, is key for making sense of the natural world. Despite these rich metaphysical passages of Scripture, Ratzinger notes that the doctrine of creation has practically been abandoned in modern theology, and where it is addressed, it takes up a reductionist position.⁷ It is reduced to a mythical or apocalyptic formula, and, as a result, creation loses its original meaning. At best creation is re-interpreted in an existential manner, but 'with such an "existential" reduction of the creation theme there occurs a huge (if not a total) loss of the reality of the faith, whose God no longer has anything to do with matter'.⁸

Many of the ethical issues that we presently face, including environmental issues, arise out of a *Weltanschauung* that has no doctrine of creation nor its concomitant order of being. Ratzinger acutely notes that 'the human threat to all living things, which is being spoken of everywhere these days, has given a new urgency to the theme of creation. Paradoxically, however, the creation account is noticeably and nearly completely absent from catechesis, preaching, and even theology'.⁹

2.1 Without him: Anti-natalism as a rejection of creation

Examples that provide context to Ratzinger's concern about the loss of awareness of creation abound. Two years ago, Nell Frizzell published an article in *British Vogue*

⁷Joseph Ratzinger, *'In the Beginning': A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, trans. by Boniface Ramsey (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), pp. x–xii.

⁸Ratzinger, *Beginning*, p. xii.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. ix.

asking, ‘Is Having a Baby in 2021 Pure Environmental Vandalism?’¹⁰ In line with this, there is a new movement of young childless men getting vasectomies. ‘10 urologists across the United States’ told *The New York Times* that ‘they have seen a notable uptick in bookings for the procedure this summer—especially among younger, child-free men, whose resolve to not reproduce appears to have sharpened in the face of a precarious economy, worsening climate change, and a more restrictive family planning landscape’.¹¹ In Australia, ‘between 2020 and 2021, “there’s been close to a 20% increase in the number of childless men under 30 requesting vasectomies”’, a doctor in Australia told SBS News.¹² *National Review* noted that ‘A 2020 study in the journal *Climatic Change* found that 60 percent of U.S. respondents between the ages of 27 and 45 “reported being “very” or “extremely concerned” about the carbon footprint of procreation”, and 96.5 percent of respondents were “very” or “extremely concerned” about the well-being of their existing, expected, or hypothetical children in a climate-changed world’.¹³ In the same article, the author highlighted Jacques-Yves Cousteau, the French ocean explorer, who ‘called the idea that suffering and disease might be eliminated “not altogether a beneficial one”. He thought that “we must eliminate 350,000 people per day”’.¹⁴ Continuing in this vein is the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement (VHEMT). On the unabashedly quirky, VHEMT website is the following summary:

As VHEMT Volunteers know, the hopeful alternative to the extinction of millions of species of plants and animals is the voluntary extinction of one species: Homo sapiens ... us. Each time another one of us decides to not add another one of us to the burgeoning billions already squatting on this ravaged planet, another ray of hope shines through the gloom. When every human chooses to stop breeding, Earth’s biosphere will be allowed to return to its former glory, and all remaining creatures will be free to live, die, evolve¹⁵

Anti-natalism is affecting contemporary culture and the decisions that individuals are making, specifically regarding procreation. It is, at the same time, not without its philosophical proponents. The key exponent is the philosopher David Benatar,

¹⁰Nell Frizzell, ‘Is Having a Baby in 2021 Pure Environmental Vandalism?’ *British Vogue*, 25 April 2021, <<https://www.vogue.co.uk/mini-vogue/article/having-a-child-sustainable>> [accessed 13 April 2023].

¹¹Alisha Haridasani Gupta, ‘“Snip Snip Hooray”: Vasectomies Among the Young and Child-Free May Be Rising’, *The New York Times*, 12 August 2020, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/12/well/vasectomy-contraception-abortion.html>> [accessed 13 April 2023].

¹²Kate Morgan, ‘Vasectomy: The US men embracing permanent birth control’, *BBC*, 26 October 2022, <<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20221024-vasectomy-the-us-men-embracing-permanent-birth-control>> [accessed 13 April 2023].

¹³Marian L. Tupy, ‘Against Environment Anti-Humanism’, *National Review*, 14 June 2021, <<https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2021/06/14/against-environmental-anti-humanism/>> [accessed 13 April 2023].

¹⁴Tupy, ‘Against Environment Anti-Humanism’.

¹⁵VHEMT Org., <<https://www.vhemt.org/aboutvhemt.htm#vhemt>> [accessed 13 April 2023]. There are many more examples of anti-natalism making its way into popular consciousness. For example, see Geeta Pandey, ‘Indian man to sue parents for giving birth to him’, *BBC News*, 7 February 2019, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-47154287>> [accessed 13 April 2023]. See Jonathan Griffin, ‘Anti-natalists: the people who do not want you to have babies’, *BBC News*, 13 August 2019, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-49298720#share-tools>> [accessed 13 April 2023].

Director of the Bioethics Centre at the University of Cape Town.¹⁶ Aptly called ‘the world’s most pessimistic philosopher’,¹⁷ Benatar argues that ‘being brought into existence is not a benefit but always a harm’.¹⁸ He sets out three main arguments to defend this claim. First, the quality of life of all humans is terrible. Second, the existence of humans harms the world, and our extinction would end this harm. Third, he sets out what is called the asymmetry argument, which consists of the following three claims:

- (1) the presence of pain is bad,
- (2) the presence of pleasure is good,
- (3) the absence of pain is good, even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone, whereas
- (4) the absence of pleasure is not bad unless there is somebody for whom this absence is a deprivation.¹⁹

While it is Benatar’s second argument that has the most traction at the popular level, the first argument is also taken up, but typically with posterity in mind. The third argument is too philosophically dense to enter into public discourse.²⁰ Evidently, both at the popular and the philosophical level of anti-natalism, human existence is perceived negatively. Whether in terms of the environment or the individual, human existence is considered, to borrow Thomas Hobbes’ words, ‘solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short’.²¹

Gerhard Cardinal Müller writes that “‘creation” designates the universally transcendent relationship between the world and God which shines in the spiritual and free relationship between man and the world and history as both their underlying foundation and consummating goal’.²² The dogma of creation concerns statements about God, the world, and the human person. Hence, anti-natalism highlights the fittingness of Ratzinger’s concern about the importance of the doctrine of creation for our contemporary situation.

2.2 The world is logos-like

Genesis 1:1–31 provides an orderly account of creation in which everything is set out intentionally, brought forth by God and affirmed by God: ‘and it was good’. Creation reaches its climax with the creation of the human person: ‘So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them’ (Gen 1:27). Of all creation, only the human person bears God’s own image, and with

¹⁶Asheel Singh, ‘Assessing Anti-Natalism: A Philosophical Examination of the Morality of Procreation’ (diss., University of Johannesburg, 2012), p. 6.

¹⁷Joshua Rothman, ‘The Case for Not Being Born’, *The New Yorker* (2017), <<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/persons-of-interest/the-case-for-not-being-born>> [accessed 9 November 2023].

¹⁸David Benatar, ‘Why it is Better Never to Come Into Existence’, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 34 (1997), 345.

¹⁹Deke Caiñas Gould, ‘Future Minds and a New Challenge to Anti-Natalism’, *Bioethics*, 35 (2021), 795.

²⁰For more of Benatar’s arguments see David Benatar, ‘Misconceived: Why These Further Criticisms of Anti-Natalism Fail’, *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 56 (2022), 119–51.

²¹Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p. 99.

²²Gerhard Ludwig Müller, *Catholic Dogmatics: For the Study and Practice of Theology Volume 1: Doctrine of Creation, Eschatology*, trans. by William Hadfield-Burkardt (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), p. 4.

the closing of the chapter we read, 'and God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day' (Gen 1:31). The creation account given in Genesis is logos-like, and it counters what Ratzinger refers to as our 'original experience'.²³

Our 'original experience' is polytheistic: 'we see that there are forces and counter-forces, powers in conflict with one another, some of which we need to protect ourselves against, others on which we can rely for help'.²⁴ The world appears as a chaotic place that threatens us, and this is an experience we share with our forefathers as much as with our contemporaries. In contrast, the author of Genesis claims that the world is 'not a confusing jumble of powers standing in opposition to one another; rather, there is only One, from whose will all these things come, and that will is a good will'.²⁵ The story of creation liberates humanity from the fear of the gods; the world, contrary to initial appearances, is rational; it exists through Him who is the Logos.

Ironically, it is only with a framework of creation, in which the world is logos-like, that the anti-human anti-natalists can 'rationally' take up their position. On the one hand, the world must be reasonable. On the other hand, our human reason must correlate with the reason of the world. Without this, judgement cannot be made about what should and should not be done. Such judgements require two things: (1) human creatures who can understand the world and (2) a conception of what is good. In terms of the first requirement, Ratzinger writes, 'Faith is reasonable. The reasonableness that exists in creation is derived from Divine Reason; there is no other truly convincing explanation'.²⁶ Further expanded, and in more thomistic terms, Josef Pieper writes,

Reality in itself is oriented toward man's perceiving mind, without the mind's contribution, and simply by virtue of its very *being*, which man has not bestowed on it. Moreover, the human mind in turn is ordered toward the realm of existing things, also not by its own doing but by virtue of its very *being*, which, again, is not its own creation. This orientation of the human mind toward reality precedes any of the mind's own choices and decisions. A finite mind is in its essence geared toward the knowledge of reality.²⁷

The human person by his very nature is related to the world in truth. Reality itself is relational. All being is known by God; therefore, truth and being go together. Put differently, a thing cannot have being without having truth because all things are in relation

²³Ratzinger Joseph, *The Divine Project: Reflections on Creation and the Church*, trans. Chase Fauxeux (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2023), p. 19.

²⁴Ibid., p. 19.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 36. 'For only a world that is no longer full of god but is per se, as something created, merely "world"; only a world in which sun and moon are no longer divine rulers of the cosmos but merely lamps hung by the Creator (Gen 1:14-18); only a world that comes as entirely from the Logos and therefore is thoroughly "logical" could be the point of departure for an objective, scientific exploration of the world, which not accidentally developed precisely in distinctively Christian lands'. Joseph Ratzinger, 'The Christian and the Modern World', in *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, ed. by Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011), pp. 166-67.

²⁷Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth: Reality and the Good and the Truth of All Things* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), p. 62.

to a knowing mind, i.e., the mind of God, the Creator. Knowing is an act of transcending the self by incorporating the other into one's self. The world is made as knowable, for it is rooted in the Logos, and each one of us is made to participate in the knowability of the world through our own *logoi*. All knowing is recognition, recognizing, re-thinking the divine thought. My *logos* participates in the Logos as I re-think objective reality.²⁸ Arguably, 'if our mind were not by its nature already in touch with reality, it would never be able to reach reality at all'.²⁹

2.3 'And it was good': Creation and redemption

The second thing needed for judgement is a conception of the good. Like the previous point, there must be a metaphysic. The *logos*-like quality of the cosmos, in which my *logos* is attuned, opens the door to the empirical sciences, but if there is to be ethical judgement and the upholding of human dignity, metaphysics and theology, or, to put it differently, creation and redemption, must be united. Closing the door on theology would be what Ratzinger refers to as the way of Galileo, a reversion to the mathematical side of platonic thought.³⁰ With Galileo's approach God is seen as the mathematical principle in nature, expressed succinctly by Galileo as 'God does geometry'.³¹ For Galileo nature replaces creation: 'the knowledge of God is turned into the knowledge of the mathematical structures of nature'.³² As a result, God dwindles away and becomes a mere first cause, the God who satisfies a hypothesis but does not reach out to meet us.

Here subject and object are separated and the subject is irrelevant. Creation only implies an ordered material cosmos, and God, as subject, disappears into the ether of abstract thought. With the erosion of the divine subject, so too is the human subject. The human person is reduced to an object, a 'trousered ape'.³³ It is the inversion of

²⁸Ratzinger explains this in the following way: 'It follows from this traditional view that human thinking is the rethinking of being itself, rethinking of the thought that is being itself. Man can rethink the *logos*, the meaning of being, because his own *logos*, his own reason, is *logos* of the one *logos*, thought of the original thought, of the creative spirit that permeates and governs his being'. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, p. 59.

²⁹Rohner, 'Grundproblem', p. 1087 in *Living the Truth*, p. 63 n. 44.

³⁰The platonic element in the modern understanding of reason provides 'the mathematical structure of matter, its intrinsic rationality, which makes it possible to understand how matter works and use it efficiently'. Benedict XVI, 'Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections', <https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html> [accessed 13 April 2023].

³¹Ratzinger, *Beginning*, p. 84.

³²Ibid. For example, Galileo writes, 'Philosophy is written in this greatest book, which stands continually open before our eyes (I am speaking about the universe), but one cannot understand unless one learns first to understand the language and recognize the characters in which it is written. It is written in mathematical language, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures, without which means it is impossible to understand a single word of it; without these, one is vainly walking in circles through a dark labyrinth'. Galileo Galilei, 'The Assayer', in *The Controversy on the Comets of 1618: Galileo Galilei, Horatio Grassi, Mario Guiducci, Johann Kepler*, trans. by Stillman Drake and C. D. O'Malley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 1960), pp. 184–85. Found in Michael Maria Waldstein, *Glory of the Logos in the Flesh: Saint John Paul's Theology of the Body* (Ave Maria, Florida: Sapientia Press, 2021), p. 71.

³³C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man or Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (Quebec: Samizdat University Press, 2014), p. 4.

Gaudium et spes paragraph 22: 'Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear'.³⁴ To remove Christ – the God who acts, loves, and reveals – is to diminish the human person.

Galileo curtails God to the geometric. On the other side of the fence is Martin Luther's approach, an inversion of Galileo. Luther holds tight to the God of Jesus Christ but curses creation. In puritanical zeal, Luther exorcised Greek thought from Christianity. Metaphysics, he argues, are the product of the human intellect, not the divine intellect. Radically corrupted and depraved because of the Fall, the human intellect cannot proceed toward truth.³⁵ Metaphysics is human ignorance breathed through silver.

For Luther, the doctrine of creation is where the influence of Greek thought made its way into Christianity: the language of being, of cosmic order, and so forth. Ratzinger writes,

For Luther, the cosmos, or, more correctly, being as such, is an expression of everything that is proper to human beings, the burden of their past, their shackles and chains, their damnation: Law. Redemption can take place only when humankind is liberated from the chains of the past, from the shackles of being. Redemption sets humans free from the curse of the existing creation, which Luther feels is the characteristic burden of humankind.³⁶

Grace, in Luther's framework, is in radical opposition to creation, and, as Ratzinger insightfully points out, 'it implies an attempt to get behind creation'.³⁷ Within Galileo's framework, the human person loses her dignity; with Luther, the world loses its dignity. We can take this one step further. Ratzinger is clear that salvation is not an individualistic affair. The human person is not a solitary creature. Rather, she is a creature who, as person, is a relation of I-Thou-We. Part of the 'We' of the I-Thou-We is

³⁴Vatican Council, 'Gaudium Et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World' (1965), <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html> [accessed 17 November 2014].

³⁵Luther wrote, for example, 'the false metaphysics of Aristotle and the traditional human philosophy have deceived our theologians', and this 'foolish opinion has led to the most injurious deceptions'. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 25, ed. by Hilton C. Oswald (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House: 1999), p. 338. The Luther scholar Hans-Peter Grosshans notes that for Luther 'reason is woefully inadequate, even stubbornly sinful, in religious and spiritual matters. For Luther, reason deployed in religion always misses the true God and ends up constructing idols of its own fabrication. Luther's sharp criticism of reason as it relates to true religion and the true God is behind his famous condemnation of reason as a "whore" who sells itself to anyone—and every religious endeavor—that pays well'. Hans-Peter Grosshans, 'Luther on Faith and Reason', in *The Global Luther: A Theologian for Modern Times*, ed. by Christine Helmer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), p. 175. See also Benedict XVI, 'Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections', <https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html> [accessed 13 April 2023]. Here Benedict points to the dehellenization that took place during the Reformation at large, not just with Luther: 'the reformers thought they were confronted with a faith system totally conditioned by philosophy, that is to say an articulation of the faith based on an alien system of thought Metaphysics appeared as a premise derived from another source'.

³⁶Ratzinger, *Beginning*, p. 87.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 88.

creation, which includes history and culture.³⁸ The human person cannot be removed from these contextual aspects and still be a human person. Hence, Ratzinger argues that ‘redemption cannot happen without or against creation’.³⁹ That is, our humanness is redeemed. We are not saved *from* our humanness. In stripping away creation, Luther inadvertently strips away the human person.

Working within the framework established by Galileo and Luther is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, but for the sake of brevity we will turn to Karl Marx, Hegel’s most famous interpreter. Marx continues the assault upon the human subject by similarly rejecting creation. Like Luther, Marx separates redemption from creation. ‘Redemption is now construed strictly as the “praxis” of man, as the denial of creation, indeed as the total antithesis to faith in creation’.⁴⁰ According to Marx, we should not inquire into our origin.⁴¹ Our origin is of no significance because Marx exchanges orthodoxy for orthopraxis.⁴² What matters has no relation to what *is*. Rather, what matters is *feasibility*. Truth is progress.⁴³ For Marx, our origin, because of its logos-like structure, implies dependence (contingency) and limits and thereby shackles progress. Marx shifts the focus from the past to the future and conceives of a totally malleable reality; nature is to be bent and conformed to the future we create for ourselves.

Returning to the human person, in Marxism, the individual person is robbed of her personal reality and reduced to an aggregate within the species. What matters is not the forming of persons toward a given personal *telos* but the molding of the species toward an invented end (an end not informed by nature, nor by metaphysics). Individual persons are either part of the plan and fitting within the aggregate, or they are a hindrance. Ratzinger asserts, ‘the decisive option underlying all the thought of

³⁸A key part of the ‘We’ is the Church. Arguably, a Christian anthropology is an ecclesial anthropology. Ratzinger writes, ‘Thus, praying in church and in the vicinity of the Eucharistic sacrament means that we are situating our relationship to God in the mystery of the Church as the concrete locus where God meets us. And this is ultimately the meaning of going to church: situating myself in God’s history with humankind, where alone I have my true human existence as a human being, and which therefore opens up for the true space for my encounter with God’s eternal love’. Joseph Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey*, ed. by Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion (London: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 78.

³⁹Ratzinger, *Beginning*, p. 81.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴¹Joseph, *Divine Project*, p. 60.

⁴²For example, Marx writes, ‘Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life’. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. by R. Pascal (New York: International Publishers, 1939), p. 7.

⁴³See Ratzinger, *Introduction*, pp. 63–66. Marx writes, ‘It is therefore in his fashioning of the objective that man really proves himself to be a, species-being. Such production is his active species-life. Through it nature appears as his work and his reality. The object of labor is therefore the objectification of the species-life of man: for man reproduces himself not only intellectually, in his consciousness, but actively and actually, and he can therefore contemplate himself in a world he himself has created’. Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, ed. by Hoare (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 329 found in Thomas E. Wartenberg, ‘“Species-Being” and “Human Nature” in Marx’, *Human Studies*, 5 (1982), p. 79. Wartenberg explain the quotation: ‘The central point that Marx makes is that it is through productive activity that human beings actualize themselves as human beings. This means that it is not thought *per se* or a contemplative life that constitutes the good for human beings. Rather, it is our ability to structure the material world in accordance with our own purposes that is distinctive about human beings’. Wartenberg, ‘Species-Being’, p. 79.

Karl Marx is ultimately a protest against the dependence that creation signifies: the hatred of life as we encounter it'.⁴⁴ Again, the loss of the sense of creation along with its concomitant the divine Subject, the Creator, inevitably leads to a reality in which human dignity and personhood are eroded.

The Marxist notion of truth as feasibility fits within our present *Weltanschauung*, i.e., scientism and the technological paradigm. Within the natural sciences, nature is only a category. Notions of human rights and human nature are overlooked or downright rejected. We exist within a morally ambiguous society because physicochemical structures do not show us *how* we ought to live. The only thing that such structures reveal are the limits of feasibility. 'Henceforth the moral and the feasible are identical'⁴⁵ – the continuation of Marxism. Nature simply provides an explanatory framework for behavioral research. This approach has profoundly influenced contemporary culture. For example, several years ago, BBC Earth published an article (that is no longer housed on the website) titled 'Why we do not sleep around all that much anymore',⁴⁶ in which the author provides a naturalistic evolutionary explanation. The author never mentions morality. A second example, published in BBC Future, is an article titled 'The reasons humans started kissing'.⁴⁷ The writer answers the title of the piece with the simple response, so that women could get close enough to smell their potential sex mates' pheromones and thus ensure the health and fitness of the children that may be conceived.

While such reductive narratives may contain elements of truth in terms of secondary causation, the determinism of these naturalistic explanations as absolute is incompatible with our own experiences. Most of one's social life is taken up in decision-making. In nervous trepidation, I *chose*, out of love, to kiss my bride-to-be, and I am fairly certain that her affirmative response was not merely an instinctual smelling of my pheromones.

Behavioral research refers to human decision-making as 'artificiality', an alternative to what is natural. The ambiguity of the term says much. Artificiality is the quality of being made by humans rather than occurring naturally, or it is defined as the quality of being contrived or false.⁴⁸ If decision-making follows the first definition, it requires a theology of creation. Without the doctrine of creation, there is only impersonal matter. Deprived of a theology of creation, we succumb to the latter definition. Ratzinger points to Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy as the paragon of the latter position. According to Sartre, we are damned by our own freedom, a freedom in which there is utterly no reason to make one decision over another – all decisions are

⁴⁴Ratzinger, *Beginning*, p. 91.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴⁶Melissa Hogenboom, 'Why we do not sleep around all that much anymore', *BBC Earth*, 12 April 2016, <<http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20160412-sexually-transmitted-infections-may-have-reshaped-our-lives?ocid=fbert>> [accessed 13 April 2016].

⁴⁷William Park, 'The reason humans started kissing', *BBC Future*, 15 August 2021, <<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210813-the-reasons-humans-started-kissing>> [accessed 21 August 2021].

⁴⁸*New American Oxford Dictionary*, 3rd edn, s.v. 'artificiality', <https://www-oxfordreference-com.twu.idm.oclc.org/display/10.1093/acref/9780195392883.001.0001/m_en_us1446735?rsk=PIOxA&result=2> [accessed 23 November 2023].

contrived.⁴⁹ With great precision, Ratzinger claims, ‘if creation cannot be recognized as the metaphysical middle term between nature and artificiality, then the plunge into nothingness is unavoidable’.⁵⁰ The doctrine of creation provides the storyboard within which each person’s narrative can be written. It provides a direction, an ought, to the context of life. Without it the human person is either a mere bundle of instincts in which there is no ‘I’, or the person is sickened with Sartrean nausea by the abyss of meaninglessness.

From Galileo to Luther to Marx, we have seen that the divorce of metaphysics and theology, or, to put it differently, redemption separated from creation, denigrates the human person. These thinkers provide the genealogical backstory to anti-natalism. Unlike its predecessors, anti-natalism is an intentional and clear rejection of the goodness of human existence. Paradoxically, it is a claim that depends on the recognition of some type of good, i.e., the good of the environment or the good of not-suffering (a negative good). Both goods require a real given or recognized good that transcends both the environment and the human person. The anti-natalist movement collapses in on itself because it does not have a theology of creation. If there is no grain to the universe, then there is nothing to go against; everything is nature; therefore nothing is natural.⁵¹ While the anti-natalist movement needs a theology of creation in order to make a judgement about what is good, i.e., the moral claim that the world is better off without humans or that it is better to not exist than to suffer, it is the very doctrine of creation that elevates the human person and stands athwart anti-natalism.

2.4 Creation and self-acceptance

Written almost forty years ago, Ratzinger summarized the anti-human position, which anti-natalism fits within, in the following way: ‘This would be the attitude that sees mankind as a disruptive agent that wrecks everything and says that human beings are the true pest, the true disease of nature’.⁵² He argues that this is feigned humility. The anti-natalists are going against creation by positioning themselves above the Creator, as if they know better than omniscience. ‘And in turn, rather than healing the world we end up destroying both ourselves and creation. We deprive it of the hope that lies within it and the greatness to which it is called, for it awaits the revealing of the children of God, as Romans 8 tells us’.⁵³

Effectively, the anti-natalist considers humans to be unnatural. Thus, ‘humans must be healed of being human’⁵⁴ – they must be bereft of mind and freedom – if they

⁴⁹For a powerful depiction of this in novel-form see Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Age of Reason* (New York: Modern Library, 1947).

⁵⁰Ratzinger, *Beginning*, p. 93.

⁵¹I have taken and modified John Howard Yoder’s expression ‘the grain of the universe’. If a person runs his hand along a piece of wood but against the direction of the grain of wood, he will get a sliver. Similarly, we can move *with* or *against* ‘the grain of the universe’. If we move against it, we harm ourselves. John H. Yoder, ‘Armaments and Eschatology’, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 1 (1988), p. 58. For more on what nature is see Joseph Ratzinger, ‘Gratia Praesupponit Naturam—Grace Presupposes Nature’, in *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, ed. by Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011), pp. 155–58.

⁵²Joseph, *Divine Project*, p. 63.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ratzinger, *Beginning*, p. 94.

are to fit within nature and their existence is to be justified. According to Ratzinger, what motivates this extreme view is the inability to accept the self. With great insight, Ratzinger posits that the root of human happiness is self-acceptance, and the human person can only accept herself if she is first accepted by another. He writes, 'Only when life is accepted and found accepted does it become acceptable. Man is that remarkable creature who needs not only physical birth but approval in order to exist'.⁵⁵ Each human person must be told that it is good that she exists, the primary affirmation given by the lover. The affirmation, however, must be based on truth otherwise the beloved will curse the love that keeps her in place through a lie. Ratzinger concludes, 'the apparently simple act, to like the self, to be okay with the self, actually raises the question of the whole universe'.⁵⁶ Creation is necessary for our own self-acceptance!

Unless the anti-natalist recognizes creation she will be incapable of loving herself, incapable of affirming her own being. Anti-natalism is an expression of self-hate. It is incomparable to GK Chesterton's conception of suicide but the inverse. Chesterton writes, 'The man who kills himself kills all men. As far as he is concerned, he wipes out the world',⁵⁷ whereas the anti-natalist seeks to wipe out the world to kill himself.

2.5 Grace presupposes nature

Anti-natalism is fundamentally a theological claim, for it involves the cosmos and the historical person.⁵⁸ Ratzinger contends that 'there is also, however, a theological concealment of the concept of creation ... here nature is undermined for the sake of grace; it is robbed of its belongings and gives way, so to speak, before grace'.⁵⁹ For example, according to certain Reform Protestant streams of theology, to be human is to be sinful.⁶⁰ According to Catholic teaching, sin concerns specific acts committed against God, reason, truth, and right conscience⁶¹, whereas Reform theology maintains that

⁵⁵My translation. 'Erst indem das Leben angenommen wird und sich als angenommenes vorfindet, wird es annehmbar. Der Mensch ist das merkwürdige Wesen, das nicht nur der physischen Geburt, sondern der Gutheissung bedarf, um bestehen zu können'. Joseph Ratzinger, 'Ist Der Glaube Wirklich "Frohe Botschaft"?', in *In Libertatem Vocati Estis: Miscellanea Bernhard Häring Zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. by H. Boelaars and R. Tremblay (Rome: StMor 15, 1977), p. 528.

⁵⁶'Der scheinbar so einfache Akt, sich selber zu mögen, mit sich selber einverstanden zu sein, wirft tatsächlich die Frage nach dem ganzen Weltall auf'. Ratzinger, 'Frohe Botschaft?', p. 529.

⁵⁷G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), p. 276.

⁵⁸Andrew Willard Jones writes, 'Christianity is about everything in the cosmos'. Andrew Willard Jones, *The Two Cities: A History of Christian Politics* (Steubenville: Emmaus Road, 2021), p. xiv. In addition, 'the Church is not a player on the field of history, a contender in the game of human order; the Church is the field, and human history is Church history'. Jones, *Two Cities*, p. xvi. Ratzinger asks if 'humanity is subordinated to the cosmic process ... is it that there is a God who is greater than the cosmos and before whom one single person is greater than the whole silent cosmos? Clearly all of this presses the God question upon us. The questions about time, about its endlessness, and about its end merge with the question about God'. Johann Baptist Metz, et al., *The End of Time? The Provocation of Talking About God* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), p. 15. Anti-natalism is raising questions about the end of earth, a question that merges 'with the question about God'.

⁵⁹Ratzinger, *Beginning*, p. 94.

⁶⁰This stems out of Jean Calvin's notion of total depravity and Martin Luther's notion of the bondage of the will. Ratzinger points out something similar with the great 20th century reform theologian Karl Barth. See Ratzinger, 'Gratia Praesupponit', p. 147.

⁶¹See *Catechism*, par. 1849 and 1868.

‘the individual acts of trespass are only symptoms of an underlying general condition. In every instance, these transgressions express the *real* sin that precedes them’.⁶² To be human is to be selfish, to be depraved, and salvation, then, is to be rescued from our humanness. Something akin to human depravity, minus the hope of imputed righteousness, undergirds anti-natalism.

In contrast, Ratzinger calls attention to 1 Corinthians 15:46: ‘It is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual’. Creation and redemption are intertwined. Ratzinger pithily states, ‘The doctrine of redemption is based on the doctrine of creation, on an irrevocable Yes to creation’.⁶³ The essential reason is that ‘only if the being of creation is good, only if trust in being is fundamentally justified, are humans at all redeemable. Only if the Redeemer is also Creator can he really be Redeemer. That is why the question of what we do is decided by the ground of what we are’.⁶⁴ The higher only stands with the lower.

3. For him

Man is the creature who is capable of being an expression of God himself. Man is so made that God can enter into union with him. Man who seems at first sight to be a kind of unfortunate monster produced by evolution, at the same time represents the highest possibility the created order can attain.⁶⁵

Anti-natalism perceives the human person as a plague, as a foreign virus, that has infiltrated the natural world – the *telos* of the human person is the destruction of the world. Counter to this, Christ, the human person fully realized, reveals that our true end is deification not destruction. We were created *for him*, for God. The human person does not completely find herself except in Christ, except in becoming an *alter Christus*, or in C. S. Lewis words, a ‘little Christ’.⁶⁶ The human person is the ‘highest possibility the created order can attain’ because she can pray, she can self-consciously, purposely commune with God. In philosophical prose Ratzinger writes, ‘Matter is what is “*das auf sich Geworfene*” (that which is thrown upon itself), and ‘spirit is “*das sich selbst Entwerfende*” (that which throws itself forth, guides itself or designs itself) ... is itself in transcending itself’.⁶⁷ We transcend ourselves in our acts of selflessness, in love, and in worship, and are never more ourselves than when we do.⁶⁸ In fact, all proper relationships require the transcending of the self. Yet, what we are created for extends beyond our wildest imaginings: ‘God became man so that we may become God’.⁶⁹ Our humanness, which the anti-natalist wants to abolish in the name of ‘nature’, can, in love and

⁶²Ratzinger, ‘*Gratia Praesupponit*’, p. 148.

⁶³Ratzinger, *Beginning*, p. 99.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁶⁵Joseph Ratzinger, ‘What Does Jesus Christ Mean to Me?’, in *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, ed. by Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011), p. 121.

⁶⁶C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 177.

⁶⁷Ratzinger, *Joseph Ratzinger in Communio*, vol 2, p. 115. The German phrases that Ratzinger quotes are from H. Conrad-Martius, *Das Sein* (Munich: Kösel, 1957), p. 133.

⁶⁸I am paraphrasing a line from C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 141.

⁶⁹St Athanasius, *De inc.*, 54, 3: PG 25, 1926.

freedom, participate in the life of God. *Theosis* is not the destruction of our human nature but its elevation. Ratzinger presses the point by using evolutionary language to speak of the Resurrection and its implications:

Jesus' Resurrection was about breaking out into an entirely new form of life, into a life that is no longer subject to the law of dying and becoming, but lies beyond it—a life that opens up a new dimension of human existence. Therefore the Resurrection of Jesus is not an isolated event that we could set aside as something limited to the past, but it constitutes an 'evolutionary leap'.⁷⁰

The evolutionary leap occurs on another level of existence 'on which love was no longer subject to *bios* but made use of it'.⁷¹ Grace perfects nature, extends nature.

What is human nature? How does the human person image God? As previously set out, the human person is matter and spirit, is one who transcends herself, and this is tied to relationships. This is the core of Trinitarian theology: God himself is relation – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father transcends himself, so to speak, by giving everything to the Son, and the Son, through the Spirit, gives everything back to the Father. The human person as the *imago Dei* images God not simply in her rationality and her freedom, but in her relationality. The human person only fully comes to herself in relation. Ratzinger rhetorically asks, 'Is not creation actually waiting for this last and highest "evolutionary leap", for the union of the finite with the infinite, for the union of man and God, for the conquest of death?'⁷² By being united with God, who is infinite relation, the human person becomes *über* relational and thereby becomes fully herself:

The Rubicon of becoming man, of 'hominization', was first crossed by the step from animal to *logos*, from mere life to mind. Man came into existence out of the 'clay' at the moment when a creature was no longer merely 'there' but, over and above just being there and filling his needs, was aware of the whole. But this step, through which *logos*, understanding, mind, first came into this world, is only completed when the *Logos* itself, the whole creative meaning, and man merge into each other. Man's full 'hominization' presupposes God's becoming man It is openness to the whole, to the infinite, that makes man complete. Man is man by reaching out infinitely beyond himself, and he is consequently more of a man the less enclosed he is in himself, the less 'limited' he is. For—let me repeat—that man is most fully man, indeed the true man, who is most unlimited, who not only has contact with the infinite—the Infinite Being!—but is one with him: Jesus Christ. In him 'hominization' has truly reached its goal.⁷³

⁷⁰Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, p. 244.

⁷¹Ratzinger, *Introduction*, p. 304.

⁷²Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, p. 247.

⁷³Ratzinger, *Introduction*, p. 235. This is a repeated theme in Ratzinger's work. For example: 'And that is what redemption means: this stepping beyond the limits of human nature, which had been there as a possibility and an expectation in man, God's image and likeness, since the moment of creation'. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Baptism to Transfiguration*, p. 8.

The human person was made for God, to be completed in Christ. In the resurrected Christ, the human person is deified. In Christ, the true *übermensch* is formed; the human person is taken beyond natural biological ends to live within the life of God himself.

While it is a ‘natural’ extension, it is not an extension that our nature can reach on its own. ‘Hominization’ reaches its goal only in and through Christ. Along with the language of ‘an evolutionary leap’, Ratzinger suggests that in Christ’s resurrection ‘an ontological leap occurred, one that touches being as such, opening up a dimension that affects us all, creating for all of us a new space of life, a new space of being in union with God’.⁷⁴ The ontological leap, while fitting for our relational nature, is nonetheless a leap so great that only one who is fully God and fully human can complete it.

4. In him

Here [the Last Supper] the new worship is established that brings the Temple sacrifices to an end: God is glorified in word, but in a Word that took flesh in Jesus, a Word that, by means of this body which has now passed through death, is able to draw in the whole man, the whole of mankind—thus heralding the beginning of the new creation.⁷⁵

The God-man leaped the abyss that we, in our finitude, cannot. He leaped it for us, uniting humanity with God. We join into this by sacramentally participating in the life of Christ, which transforms us into new creation. The Eucharist is the way of communion with God and with and for all creation.

In the Eucharist, we consume the *person* of Christ, the Resurrected Christ. ‘We all “eat” the same person, not only the same thing; we all are in this way taken out of our closed individual persons and placed inside another, greater one. We all are assimilated into Christ and so by means of communion with Christ, united among ourselves, rendered the same, one sole thing in him, members of one another’.⁷⁶ Christ redeems us through matter, by human means (i.e., a feast), and in a human way: we must freely partake and open ourselves to the ‘Thou’ that presents himself through the ‘We’ of the Church in the Blessed Sacrament. Grace presupposes nature.

Ratzinger writes, ‘the Eucharistic mystery is fulfilled as follows: not only the transformation of bread and wine, but our transformation and the transformation of the world into a living host’.⁷⁷ How is the world transformed into a living host? ‘By means of us, the transformed, who have become one body, one spirit which gives life, the entire creation must be transformed’.⁷⁸ The Eucharist has cosmic dimensions that are fulfilled through each of us becoming *eucharistia*. In this way, the world is brought into its proper state of thanksgiving. In light of the Eucharist, we can see that the human

⁷⁴Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, p. 274.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁷⁶Joseph Ratzinger, ‘Eucharist, Communion and Solidarity’, (2020), <https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020602_ratzinger-eucharistic-congress_en.html> [accessed 23 March 2023].

⁷⁷Joseph Ratzinger, *Teaching and Learning the Love of God: Being a Priest Today*, trans. by Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2017), p. 123.

⁷⁸Ratzinger, ‘Eucharist, Communion and Solidarity’.

person is the crown of creation as both the apogee and as the one who will draw the cosmos into the divine life. The cosmos is anthropocentric. It finds the fulfilment of 'itself' through the human person, and the human person through Christ, the true human. The cosmos is Christocentric. 'To man belongs not only his fellowman; to man belongs also the "world". Hence, if man as such and as a whole is to be brought into salvation, then the delightful mystery of things must also be preserved for him; all the instruments that God has created must join in, as it were, to the symphony of joy if there is to be full harmony'.⁷⁹ The human person cannot be saved without the cosmos. Likewise, the cosmos cannot be saved without the human person.

In this article, the argument is set out chronologically, beginning with Creation and ending with the Eucharist, which 'is the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection'.⁸⁰ Yet, it is only in thinking back eucharistically, in light of the Resurrection, that we can understand creation. The Eucharist reveals that creation is a move toward the Sabbath, and 'the Sabbath is the sign of the covenant between God and man; it sums up the inward essence of the covenant. If this is so ... creation exists to be a place for the covenant that God wants to make with man. The goal of creation is the covenant, the love story of God and man'.⁸¹ A covenant is a love story, a relationship. 'This relationship is two-sided, and, from our side, it means worshipping God. What exactly is worship? Worship is the surrendering of the self to God, which consists of the union of humankind and creation with God'.⁸² Sacrifice, Ratzinger insists, is our surrender, not a move toward nonbeing but toward new-being. The state of new-being is the state of oneness with God, separation overcome'.⁸³ It is with this in mind that Ratzinger makes sense of why 'St. Augustine could say that the true "sacrifice" is the *civitas Dei*, that is, love-transformed mankind, the divinization of creation and the surrender of all things to God: God all in all (cf. I Cor 15:28) That is the purpose of the world. That is the essence of sacrifice and worship'.⁸⁴ Creation moves toward covenant, and this is fulfilled when we become worshipping creatures, when we are deified. 'Covenant does not stand opposed to creation, and man's deification does not involve his destruction (a la Luther) but his fulfillment—in other words, as the Good Shepherd Christ enters into the historical fray of creation and pushes the ontological process, initiated with creation, further along toward the goal: deification, or the spiritualization of matter'.⁸⁵

Jesus Christ unites all things in the Eucharist. As fully God and fully human he is the ultimate affirmation of the natural world and its final end. In him and through him we are made royal priests who, as fellow creatures, gather and offer all creation to the

⁷⁹Joseph Ratzinger, 'Resurrection and Life Everlasting', in *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, ed. by Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011), p. 269.

⁸⁰*Catechism*, par. 1524.

⁸¹Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. by John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), p. 26.

⁸²Ratzinger, *Beginning*, p. 85.

⁸³Andrew T. J. Kaethler, *The Eschatological Person: Alexander Schmemmann and Joseph Ratzinger in Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022), p. 90.

⁸⁴Ratzinger, *Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 28.

⁸⁵Kaethler, *Eschatological Person*, p. 90. Ratzinger argues that 'only when creation and covenant come together can either creation or covenant be realistically discussed—one presupposes the other'. Ratzinger, *Beginning*, p. 85.

Father, enabling creation to become *eucharistia*. That is, creation is brought up into divine thanksgiving through our deification. Creation and redemption go together. This is the total counter narrative to anti-natalism. In a twisted way, anti-natalism is correct that it is only in death that creation will be preserved and be beautiful. However, it is not death in terms of human extinction that is the answer. Rather, it is to die and rise in Christ, an extension not an extinction of life.⁸⁶

5. Conclusion

Anti-natalism is a disturbing reminder of the importance of the doctrine of creation. Its fundamental assertions are at odds with the doctrine of creation, and yet ironically, to be rationally grounded, it requires a doctrine of creation. Ratzinger provides a nuanced Christocentric theology of creation that weaves together creation and redemption (metaphysics and theology). In so doing, he makes clear that humans are not a foreign plague within the cosmos but are the means of creation's fulfilment. Creation is for covenant. The cosmos ceases to be a cosmos without human persons, and it is through humans that the cosmos reaches its final eucharistic end. Likewise, humans will only reach their final end *with* the cosmos to which they are intimately related.

It is fitting to conclude an article that is on the doctrine of creation with a final image that relates to the creation narrative found in Genesis. In its historical context, the Genesis creation account is written as a foil to the Babylonian creation narrative, the *Enuma Elish*. According to the *Enuma Elish*, the world arose out of a struggle between opposing forces and found its final form when the god of light, Marduk, split in two the body of the primordial dragon. One half of the dragon's corpse became the heavens and the other the earth, and from the blood of the slain dragon, Marduk created humankind. Ratzinger writes, 'these were not all just fantastic tales, but experiences in the form of images—images that depicted man's experience of the world; namely, that the world is actually the body of a dragon, and man has dragon's blood in him. There is something sinister lurking at the bottom of the world; deep inside man lies something rebellious, something demonic, something evil'.⁸⁷ Israelite religion countered, the world comes from the mind of God who is good and whose creation reflects his goodness. Humans are formed from the dust of the earth and given life through the breath of God. The human person is only herself in relation (*communio personarum*): Eve is taken from the side of Adam. Communion is what marks the human person, not killing. The human person is created *from* and *for* relationship. She comes, so to speak, from the side of another human creature. This is elevated to new heights with the pierced side of the crucified Christ. Echoing Genesis, Ratzinger writes,

the open side [the pierced side] of the new Adam repeats the mystery of the 'open side' of man at creation: it is the beginning of a new definitive community of men with one another, a community symbolized here by blood and water, in

⁸⁶This Christocentric doctrine of creation is not only the response to anti-natalism but to all anti-life claims. Furthermore, it is this approach that can provide an adequate response to trans-humanism in its various manifestations.

⁸⁷Joseph, *Divine Project*, p. 29.

which John points to the basic Christian sacraments of baptism and Eucharist and, through them, to the Church as the sign of the new community of men.⁸⁸

This new human person, the divinized person, does not have dragon's blood coursing through her veins. Rather, she has Christ's blood!⁸⁹ Because of creation, perfected, and extended in Christ, we can take up St Peter's words at the transfiguration, which echo anew that of Genesis, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here' (Matt 17:4)!⁹⁰

⁸⁸Ratzinger, *Introduction*, p. 241.

⁸⁹Here we are told that by means of the sacrament we enter in a certain way into a communion with the blood of Jesus Christ, where blood according to the Hebrew perspective stands for "life". Thus, what is being affirmed is a commingling of Christ's life with our own'. Ratzinger, 'Eucharist, Communion and Solidarity'.

⁹⁰Ratzinger profoundly argues that the Cross is the endorsement of our existence: 'Das Kreuz ist die Guttheißung unsere Existenz ... wer bis in den Tod geliebt wird, der weiß sich wirklich geliebt. Wenn aber Gott uns so liebt, dann sind wir in Wahrheit geliebt. Dann ist die Liebe Wahrheit and die Wahrheit Liebe'. Ratzinger, 'Frohe Botschaft?', pp. 529–30. I am grateful to Mary McCaughey for inviting me to present a paper on Ratzinger's doctrine of creation and the Eucharist at St Mary's College, Oscott, for the symposium: 'Reading the Book of Creation: Reclaiming a Sacramental Worldview'. This paper is a developed version of that original presentation. Likewise, I am thankful for Michaela Christine Hastetter and Ephräm Givi Lomidze at STEP Wissenschaftliches Zentrum für Orient & Okzident-Studien for inviting me to present a version of this paper for the opening of their 2023–24 academic year. Finally, I want to thank D. Vincent Twomey, Tracey Rowland, and David Henderson for reading and commenting on the initial draft of this article.

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