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## RATZINGER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CREATION<sup>1</sup>

After the papal election of Joseph Ratzinger, interest in his thought arose not only among theologians. Many aspects of his theological reflections were analyzed in details, for example his mariology or ecclesiology<sup>2</sup>. Many authors also attempted to paint a general portrait of his theology<sup>3</sup>. In spite of this increased interest, Ratzinger's reflections on creation still seem to be forgotten. There might be some reasons for this oblivion. First of all, the Cardinal focused in his researches especially on ecclesiology and christology. These were the main topics of his analyses. That is why these aspects of Ratzinger's thought were commented many times, whereas his reflections on creation were mentioned only in passing<sup>4</sup>. The second reason is that the most important Ratzinger's work about creation is

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<sup>1</sup> Artykuł ten powstał na podstawie referatu, który autor wygłosił w trakcie 12th International Interdisciplinary Seminar „Charles Darwin and Evolution” w Barcelonie 5 stycznia 2010 roku.

<sup>2</sup> M. MASCIARELLI, *Il segno della Donna. Maria nella teologia di Joseph Ratzinger*, Cinisello Balsamo 2007; M.H. HEIM, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology. Fundamentals of Ecclesiology*, San Francisco 2007.

<sup>3</sup> A. NICHOLS, *The Thought of Benedict XVI: An introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, London–New York 2007; T. ROWLAND, *Ratzinger's faith. Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, New York 2008.

<sup>4</sup> J. BUJAK, *Inteligentny Projekt pomostem między neodarwinizmem a wiarą w stworzenie*, „Collectanea Theologica” 79 (2009), nr 1, s. 46–49; D. SAGAN, *Debata Benedykta XVI i jego uczniów nad stworzeniem i ewolucją*, „Filozoficzne Aspekty Genezy” 2–3 (2006–2007), s. 7–18.

not an academic dissertation or a book but just the collection of four catecheses that he prepared in the early part of 1981 in Munich<sup>5</sup>. In 1996, when the publisher planned to re-edit the sermons, the Cardinal was asked if he wanted to introduce some changes in his texts. As we know, he did not change anything apart from bibliography<sup>6</sup>.

The aim of my contribution is to present the main points of Ratzinger's creatological reflections. I would like also to find out if they are still up to date at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Of course, the cultural context has radically changed. The Cardinal chose the topic of creation for his catechesis in the Lent 1981 because in his opinion theologians at that time began to disregard the problem of creation in their research. Many of them treated the teaching of the Church about creation as a mythology that seemed to be completely unreal especially when the idea of evolution became so popular. For instance, in the work *Neues Glaubensbuch. Der gemeinsame christliche Glaube*<sup>7</sup>, published in 1973, Otto Hermann Pesch and André Dumas wrote that *creation as a cosmic plan is an idea that has seen its day*<sup>8</sup>. They claimed that *concepts like selection and mutation are intellectually much more honest than that of creation*<sup>9</sup>. Another example. In the work of French theologians *La foi des catholiques* creation is defined as follows:

Thus, in speaking of God as Creator, it is affirmed that the first and final meaning of life is to be found in God himself, most intimately present to our being.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Im Anfang schuf Gott. Vier Predigten über Schöpfung und Fall*, Donauwörth 1986. [Polskie tłumaczenie: *Na początku Bóg stworzył...*, tłum. J. MERECKI, Kraków 2006; angielskie tłumaczenie: *In the beginning... A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, tłum. B. RAMSEY, Huntington 1990]

<sup>6</sup> J. RATZINGER, *In the beginning...*, s. X.

<sup>7</sup> *Neues Glaubensbuch Der gemeinsame christliche Glaube*, red. J. FEINER, L. VISCHER, Basel-Zürich 1973.

<sup>8</sup> Tamże, s. 433. Angielskie tłumaczenie za: J. RATZINGER, *In the beginning...*, s. XI.

<sup>9</sup> Tamże.

<sup>10</sup> *La foi des catholiques. Catéchèse fondamentale*, red. B. CHENU, F. COUDREAU, P. DORNIER, Paris 1984, s. 356. Angielskie tłumaczenie za: J. RATZINGER, *In the beginning...* s. XI.

As we can see, the authors concentrate on spiritual explication of the idea of creation. God Creator does not seem to be, in their opinion, *Primum Movens*, The First Cause of the reality. The act of creation is the topic they want to omit.

Ratzinger's catecheses were intended to be a polemic with this approach. He wanted to remind the teaching of the Church and the catholic interpretation of the idea of creation.

Nowadays, the topic of creation is still not popular among theologians. They try to find out what is the relation between creationism and the evolution<sup>11</sup>. They also attempt to reflect on the creation in the context of trinitology and christology<sup>12</sup>. For Ratzinger, it was not so vital to look for a place for creatology in the system of catholic theology and to link it with other aspects of revelation. He wanted to show the reasonableness of Christian faith in creation and to point to worship of God as the main aim of creation.

### 1. The reasonableness of faith in creation.

The source of catholic faith in creation is, of course, the beginning of the Book of Genesis. Ratzinger returns to this text in order to examine what is the significance of the description that is included in its first chapter. The question is, why the author presented the origins of the world in this way. The Cardinal reminds that the first description of creation (Gen 1:1-2.4) was written during the Babylonian Exile<sup>13</sup>. Israel always believed in the God Creator. But this faith had to find its own contours, and it had to do so precisely vis-à-vis the seemingly victorious religion of Babylon,

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<sup>11</sup> *Schöpfung Und Evolution. Eine Tagung mit Papst Benedikt XVI in Castel Gandolfo*, red. S.O. HORN, S. WIEDENHOFER, Augsburg 2007.

<sup>12</sup> H.U. VON BALTHASAAR, *Trójca Święta a stworzenie*, tłum. L. BALTER [w:] *Kosmos i człowiek*. Kolekcja „Communio” 4, Warszawa 1989, s. 22–30; J.A. MARTINEZ CAMINO, *A przez Niego wszystko się stało. Stworzenie w Chrystusie*, tłum. G. OSTROWSKI, “Communio. Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny” 128 (2002), nr 2, s. 14–28.

<sup>13</sup> Zob. D.N. FREEDMAN, *The Pentateuch*, [w:] *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, red. J. DUNN, J. ROGERSON, Michigan 2003, s. 29–30.

especially vis-à-vis the Enuma Elish, the Babylonian creation myth<sup>14</sup>. It is said there that the world originated out of a struggle between opposing powers: Tiamat and Marduk. The world assumed its form when Marduk split in two the body of the primordial dragon. From this sundered body, there appeared heaven and earth. From the blood of dragon, Marduk fashioned human beings. Ratzinger emphasizes that *it is a foreboding picture of the world and of humankind (...) At the very origin of the world lurks something sinister, and in the deepest part of humankind there lies something rebellious, demonic and evil*<sup>15</sup>. In his opinion the reason for such a view on the origins of the world was the experience of war, fear and evil so common in the ancient world. In this cosmogony the reality seems to be chaotic and terrifying. It is a scene of a never-ending conflict.

The description in the Book of Genesis opposes this viewpoint. The biblical author alludes to the picture of universe that was presented in the Babylonian myth in the words: *the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep* (Gen 1:2). But God of Israel is above this demonic power. He gives the origin to the light, the nature, animals and human beings. What is more, he does not create the world by means of the body and blood of the dangerous dragon. Therefore, the universe is not full of evil and chaos. The world created by God of Israel is full of peace and harmony. *God saw that it was good* (Gen 1:12). Every part of the universe is planned and important. God seems to be a great architect whose work is perfect in every detail. The inhabitants of this world do not have to be afraid. God takes care of them. As we can see, the biblical author argues that at the origin of the world there was not chaos but a reasonable project. Ratzinger concludes his reflection on the biblical description of the origins:

We must not in our own day conceal our faith in creation. We may not conceal it, for only if it is true that the universe comes from

<sup>14</sup> G. HASEL, *The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology*, "Evangelical Quarterly" 46 (1974), s. 81–102; Tenze, *The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels*, "Andrews University Seminary Studies" 10 (1972), s. 1–20.

<sup>15</sup> J. RATZINGER. *In the beginning...*, s. 12.

freedom, love and reason, and that these are the real underlying powers, can we trust one another, go forward into the future, and live as human beings.<sup>16</sup>

The biblical description, in the Cardinal's opinion, does not lose its significance in the context of modern thought. Ratzinger mentions the book *Chance and Necessity*<sup>17</sup> that was written by Jacques Monod – a French biologist who was awarded Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1965. While interpreting the laws of evolution, Monod shows that life is a result of chance. He claims that the entire ensemble of nature has arisen out of errors and dissonances. Therefore, in his opinion, life and human being might have appeared but did not have to. *Man at last knows he is alone in the unfeeling immensity of the universe, out of which he has emerged only by chance*<sup>18</sup> – wrote Monod. The biologist believed that we are merely chemical 'extras' in a cosmic drama—an irrelevant, unintended sideshow. Of course Monod declared his atheism. His attitude to religion is an example of materialist worldview. *According to him, the scientific method demands that a question not be permitted to which the answer would have to be God*<sup>19</sup> In this point of view, theism is virtually the last holdout, and theologians are forced repeatedly into a strategic retreat. Reductionist science tries to bring more and more phenomena under theology's sway, rendering God more and more an extravagant hypothesis, of which we have no need<sup>20</sup>. As a result, we have a similar viewpoint to that typical of the Babylonian culture. In Monod's opinion, the world was originated out of an interplay of chance and necessity. In the Babylonian myth, the world originated out of a struggle between gods. In both cosmogonies, the universe is an effect of unreasonable and chaotic process.

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<sup>16</sup> Tamže, s. 18.

<sup>17</sup> J. MONOD, *Chance and necessity; an essay on the natural philosophy of modern biology*, tłum. A. WAINHOUSE, New York 1971.

<sup>18</sup> Tamže.

<sup>19</sup> J. RATZINGER, *In the beginning...*, p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> R.C. KOONS, *Science and theism: concord not conflict*, [w:] *The Rationality of Theism*, red. P. COPAN, P. MOSER, New York 2003, s. 77.

Ratzinger shows that catholic faith in creation opposes this point of view. *The universe is not the product of darkness and unreason. It comes from intelligence, freedom and the beauty that is identical with love*<sup>21</sup>, writes the Cardinal. Either the world of heavenly bodies or the structure of even the smallest elements of nature, such as a cell, reveals a powerful Reason that holds the universe together. The reasonableness of creation derives from God's Reason. *And there is no other really convincing explanation*<sup>22</sup>, claims the Cardinal. He concludes his reflection with the words of Albert Einstein who said that *in laws of nature there is revealed such a superior Reason that everything significant which has arisen out of human thought and arrangement is, in comparison with it, the merest empty reflection*<sup>23</sup>

Although the catecheses concerning creation were written thirty years ago, Joseph Ratzinger did not change his opinion and still, also after his papal election, claims that the reasonableness is the most vital aspect of catholic faith in creation. During the Holy Mass in Regensburg in 2006, Benedict XVI said:

What came first? Creative Reason, the Creator Spirit who makes all things and gives them growth, or Unreason, which, lacking any meaning, yet somehow brings forth a mathematically ordered cosmos, as well as man and his reason. (...) As Christians, we say: "I believe in God the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth" -I believe in the Creator Spirit. We believe that at the beginning of everything is the eternal Word, with Reason and not Unreason<sup>24</sup>.

As we can see, Ratzinger still treats faith in creation as a defense of reasonableness of nature.

<sup>21</sup> J. RATZINGER, *In the beginning...*, s. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Tamże, s. 17.

<sup>23</sup> A. EINSTEIN, *Mein Weltbild*, Stuttgart-Zürich-Wien 1953, s. 21. Angielskie tłumaczenie za: J. RATZINGER, *In the beginning...*, s. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Angielskie tłumaczenie za: [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/homilies/2006/documents/hf\\_benxvi\\_hom\\_20060912\\_regenzburg\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2006/documents/hf_benxvi_hom_20060912_regenzburg_en.html) (8.12.2009)

But the reasonableness of creation does not have to be understood in the biblical way. In the system of Georg Hegel, the world is, likewise, a scene of a logical process<sup>25</sup>. In his idea, the mind of God becomes actual only via its particularization in the minds of finite creatures. In the history of humankind God, the Absolute Spirit, develops thanks to consciousness of human beings, and he aims at its self-consciousness and self-actualization. In this viewpoint, the whole universe and the history of culture are parts of the logical changes, in which unreasonable events in the context of the whole project occur to be reasonable<sup>26</sup>. For instance, in this system the death of Jesus is necessary; it is the element of a logical scheme. The scheme is: after being defeated you always rise again, and as a result of it you become more conscious of yourself<sup>27</sup>. Ratzinger shows that this idea is contradictory to Christian faith. In this viewpoint, the general plan is more important than life of individuals. Species seem to be more crucial than an individual, necessity seems to be stronger than free will. Sin is not longer a human decision, but it is an element of a "providence"<sup>28</sup>. *The universe comes from freedom, love and reason, and these are the real underlying powers*<sup>29</sup>, emphasizes the Cardinal. Therefore, catholic faith in creation and Hegel's system are mutually exclusive.

## 2. The Sabbatical Structure of Creation

Ratzinger points out also to another important aspect of the biblical description of creation. After the act of fashioning the world, God *blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation* (Gen 2:3). This sentence is an obvious allusion

<sup>25</sup> T. WARTENBERG, *Hegel's idealism. The logic of conceptuality*, [w:] *Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, red. F. BEISER, New York 1993, s. 102–129.

<sup>26</sup> R. STERN, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*, New York 2002, s. 135–182.

<sup>27</sup> J. RATZINGER, *In the beginning...*, s. 89.

<sup>28</sup> R. BUTTIGLIONE, A. SCOLA, *Rozważania o problematyce stworzenia w myśli współczesnej*, tłum. A. KAZANOWSKI, "Communio. Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny" 10 (1982), nr 4, s. 70; J. RATZINGER, *In the beginning...*, s. 90.

<sup>29</sup> J. RATZINGER, *In the beginning...*, s. 18.

to the Sabbath. According to Ratzinger, such an ending of the description shows that creation is oriented to the Sabbath<sup>30</sup>. It means that creation is designed in such a way that it is oriented to adoration and worship. The Cardinal even claims that *creation exists for the sake of worship*<sup>31</sup>. The true center and the main power of the universe is to adore God and praise him.

This is not the expression of an otherworldly piety but a clear and sober translation of the creation account and of message that it bears for our lives. (...) Our life's rhythm moves in proper measure when it is caught up in worship<sup>32</sup>.

Ratzinger notices that this logic was a vital element of the mentality of Israel. What is more, the idea of the Sabbath was present not only in the weekly cycle. Every seventh year, Jews celebrated the Sabbatical year, during which earth and human beings could rest<sup>33</sup>. During that year all debts were remitted and all purchases and sales were annulled. The significance of this custom was clear: *The earth is to be received back from the creating hands of God, and everyone is to begin anew*<sup>34</sup>. Cardinal reminds that according to the author of the Second Book of Chronicles the Babylonian Exile was a punishment for disregarding the Sabbath: *until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths: [for] as long as it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years (2 Chronicles 36:21)*. Rejection of the Sabbath was equal to rejection of God's rest, its worship and its peace. Without adoration of God a human being falls into slavery of activity<sup>35</sup>. That is way, Ratzinger reminds, saint Benedict said in his Rule: *Opera Dei nihil praeponatur – Nothing must be put before the service of God*<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Tamże, s. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Tamże, s. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Tamże.

<sup>33</sup> E. HAAG, *Sabbat*, [w:] *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, t. XIV, red. G.J. BOTTERWECK, H. RINGGREN, H.J. FABRY, Michigan 2004, s. 395.

<sup>34</sup> J. RATZINGER, *In the beginning...*, s. 31.

<sup>35</sup> Tamże, s. 34.

<sup>36</sup> Tamże, s. 28.



In our times, the Sabbatical structure of creation, in Ratzinger's opinion, has been forgotten. Nowadays, worship and adoration are not more treated as the aims of creation. This oblivion, according to the Cardinal, is the root of the culture of exploitation<sup>37</sup>

Joseph Ratzinger emphasized that activity and the subduing of the earth are not the most important elements of Christian faith in creation because at the time he wrote his catecheses some philosophers claimed that Christianity was responsible for exploitation of the earth<sup>38</sup>. After the report of the Club of Rome about unlimited resource consumption<sup>39</sup> it became extremely popular to blame Christianity for this process. According to it, the directive given to humankind to subdue the earth has opened the way fatefully to that bitter state of resource depletion.

Christianity is said to have transformed all the powers of the universe, which were once our brothers and sisters, into utilitarian objects for human beings, and in so doing it has led them to misuse plants, and animals and in fact all the world's powers for the sake of an ideology of progress.<sup>40</sup>

To show how false this idea is Ratzinger reminds the Sabbath structure of creation presented in the Book of Genesis. Not a God's will to subdue the earth is responsible for exploitation of the earth. We are witnesses of the unlimited resource consumption and the process of destroying the nature because we have forgotten that the basic aim of creation is to worship God. The Saint Benedict's words: *Operi Dei nihil praeponatur* are disregarded. Now progress and modernity are the only gods worshipped in our culture<sup>41</sup>. Consequently the harmony of the universe has been destroyed.

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<sup>37</sup> Tamže, s. 33.

<sup>38</sup> H.-P. DÜRR, D. DAHM, R. PRINZ ZUR LIPPE, *Potsdam "Denkschrift" 2005*, Berlin – München 2005, s. 6.

<sup>39</sup> D.H. MEADOWS, D.L. MEADOWS, J. RANDERS, W. W. BEHRENS, *The Limits to Growth*, New York 1972.

<sup>40</sup> J. RATZINGER, *In the beginning...*, s. 34.

<sup>41</sup> Tamže, s. 39–40.

### 3. Still up to date?

I have analyzed two most crucial elements of Ratzinger's creatology: the reasonableness of creation and the worship of God as the aim of creation. As we have seen, these two aspects were underlined by the Cardinal in the context of various philosophical viewpoints (J. Monod, G. Hegel, pro-ecological movements). These ideas, which are contradictory to Christianity, are still present nowadays<sup>42</sup>. So the reflections of Ratzinger seem to be still up to date. But we cannot forget also about the context, not mentioned by the Cardinal – the postmodernism. The main elements of this viewpoint are the negation of logocentrism and antirationalism<sup>43</sup>. In opinion of Zygmunt Bauman, rationalism and ambivalence of modern sciences are mutually exclusive<sup>44</sup>. Existential and social experience of instability shows that emotions and not the reason stimulate people. The world is not directed by the reasonable Person. Radical naturalism, which is popular among postmodernists, opposes rational explanations of the reality and its origins. As we can see, Ratzinger's postulate of returning to reasonableness does not lose its significance. In the context of postmodernism, this problem seems to be even more urgent. That is why, theology of creation has to focus, in cooperation with science, on explaining the reasonable structure of the world. This is the task that is given by the Cardinal Ratzinger to us.

### Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie najważniejszych elementów kreologicznej myśli Josepha Ratzingera. Główną podstawę źródłową stanowi cykl katechez, które autor wygłosił w katedrze w Monachium w 1981 roku. Ratzinger podjął w nich polemikę z występującą wówczas

<sup>42</sup> J. BUJAK, *Inteligentny Projekt pomostem...*, s. 34–46.

<sup>43</sup> S. KOWALCZYK, *Idee filozoficzne postmodernizmu*, Radom 2004, s. 46–48, 53–56.

<sup>44</sup> Z. BAUMAN, *Wieloznaczność nowoczesna i nowoczesność wieloznaczna*, Warszawa 1995, s. 258–260.

wśród teologów tendencją do traktowania prawdy o stworzeniu jako elementu mitycznego w doktrynie chrześcijańskiej.

Zdaniem kardynała, główną cechą katolickiej wiary w stworzenie jest przekonanie o racjonalności stworzonego świata, obecne już w pierwszym rozdziale Księgi Rodzaju. Harmonia i porządek stworzenia ukazane przez autora biblijnego miały kontrastować z rozpowszechnionym w kulturze babilońskiej obrazem początków świata jako wyniku chaotycznej, krwawej i pełnej bólu walki bogów (tak zagadnienie protologii ujmował mezopotamski mit *Enuma Elisz*). Ratzinger podkreśla, że we współczesnej kulturze także należy przypominać o racjonalnej strukturze stworzenia, gdyż niejednokrotnie pojawiają się głosy jakoby świat wyłonił się z przypadku i konieczności (np. J. Monod). Rozumność stworzenia jest także elementem nauczania Ratzingera po wyborze na papieża (np. homilia podczas Mszy w Ratybonie w trakcie pielgrzymki do Bawarii w 2006 roku).

Drugą istotną cechą katolickiej kreatologii, także zawartą w opisie z Księgi Rodzaju, jest, zdaniem kardynała, sabbatyczna struktura stworzenia. Ratzinger uważa, że zwieńczenie dzieła kreacji świata szabatem pokazuje, iż celem stworzenia jest oddawanie chwały Bogu, a nie doszczętna eksploatacja środowiska naturalnego, co – jak zarzucano chrześcijaństwu – miałyby wynikać z nakazu, aby czynić sobie ziemię poddaną.

Podsumowując, autor artykułu zaznacza, że choć refleksje Ratzingera na temat kreatologii powstały prawie 30 lat temu, to jednak pozostają nadal aktualne, szczególnie w kontekście nadal popularnej myśli postmodernistycznej, charakteryzującej się anty-logocentryzmem i anty-racjonalizmem.