

THE IDEA OF CREATION ORDER IN WESTERN THOUGHT

Andre Troost

Introduction

The idea of a divine creation order, which until recently has been very popular in Calvinist thinking, has a long history. This idea of a divine creation order has since the middle of this century receded more and more to the background in orthodox Christian theology. Exceptions are a small number of Lutheran theologians in Germany and some Roman Catholic ethicists. In our reflection on this development it is well to consider the origin of the idea and what chief changes have come about in its history. This will give us an opportunity to explain why so much misuse could be made of this idea and why there is such an antipathy to it in our time, not only because of its misuse but also because of the spirit of our time. We shall sketch very briefly the idea of creation order in the pre-Christian pagan thought, in the early Christian era and in Protestant Christian thought.

1. Pre-Christian Thought

In paganism, in all the ancient world religions and in many tribal religions, the idea of a more or less divine order or world law was recognized. It was the idea which we in our time, in a more differentiated way, would call a physical, a biotic, social, ethical, juridical and ritual order in which divine powers were active. All that existed was therefore directed and adjudicated with reward and/or punishment. This faith gave great stability to life and every person and each community knew more or less where they stood and how they ought to live. People did not expect much from the future and had as yet no sense of an historical development. Everything remained, as was thought it should, with the old and dependable.

This world order was given names in the various cultures: Tao, Ma-at, RTA, Pravda, and darma. The name did not always make clear whether a god or something else was thereby intended. Nor was a sharp distinction

made between, or if so only incidentally, between God and the gods on the one side and the world order on the other. This world order was sometimes called a divine world order. This word "divine" then had a double meaning: It could mean having a divine origin, thus a creature of God and therefore not divine, or it could mean that it was of a divine nature and thus a part of God. This was related to the domination of one or other form of pantheism in primitive paganism. People experienced both the divine and that which was not divine, but this distinction was not always equally clear and consistent.

In primitive religions people experienced themselves, the world and the divine powers as well as the forces and activities of a world order as a rather diffuse total reality. An image of a god for example was not just a wooden or stone image but the god itself; at the same time there was no idea of identification. People naturally knew that the image of a god could be made and had to be made, but that they themselves were not gods. Also the sharp modern distinction of "symbol" or a "sign" was as yet not applicable, as we in typical mythically colored words understand the words of Christ: "This is my body."

One of the very first requirements that must be put to a truly Reformed philosophy and theology concerning the orders of creation is that one reflects primarily both philosophically and theologically on the relation of God and the creature. For also in theology, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, in all their varieties, the philosophical problematic concerning this relation plays an important role; but often it takes place as it were underground and largely unconsciously. It is a guiding thought that works irresistibly through into the concrete practice of our personal, our ecclesiastical, our political and social life.

In broad lines one can say that early Christianity rightly resisted the largely Stoic paganism of that time. However, this biblical resistance was worked out theologically and philosophically with the help of what people later would call deistic concepts. It was not done with a deistic idea of God, for in opposition to that idea people rightly derived from the Scriptures the teaching of God's providential direction. God is active in our life and is present in our reality and in our world. But people did not take up arms against a pagan deistic view of the world and reality. They saw human reality "as such" as that in which God no longer appears. We would speak about a disenchanted or a demythologized view of reality from which God has been excluded. Viewed from the history of philosophy, one could say it

was a substantialistic view of reality, a reality that exists by itself apart from God.

That this pagan demythologized view of reality found entrance among Christians is understandable when seen against the background of a necessary struggle against the dominant pantheistically colored life and thought of that era. As a reaction this deistic view was understandable, but it was fatal for a Christian scientific view of reality.

To understand this we must return to the beginning of Western development of science in which philosophy, although not sharply distinguished from the other sciences, set the tone. Science and philosophy originated in Greece at about the same time as among an elite group a secularizing tendency arose within the mythical life view of the masses. In popular belief everything was controlled by divine powers and people played out their role through ritual activities, which expressed the origin as well as the continuing progress of life. It also kept life in its place in the eternal circular movement which was directed by the gods and therefore was experienced more or less as a divine world event. This all-inclusive life process was at the same time supported by and bedded in an ever recurring recital of the traditional myths. Seen in biblical light, these were derailed expressions and stories of faith; that is, they did not remain on the rails of God's revelation. They concerned the non-observable, the things which could not be proved and were not "empirically verifiable," such as the beginning of all things, the arche. They concerned the deepest ground for normativity in the eternal and ever new beginning of life.

At the same time and apparently in connection with the development of the sciences, a pagan secularization took place. The traditional pagan faith apostatized. There appeared now in the early poets of myth (Homer and especially Hesiod, 730 - 700 B.C.) a somewhat critical and poetic attitude of autonomy toward the gods. At the same time the early philosophers openly expressed criticism of the gods in the people's belief. Heraclitus (540 - 480 B.C.) should be mentioned in this regard but especially the first real theologian, Xenophanes (570 - 470 B.C.). The already weakened pagan faith was now consciously and critically undermined by the up and coming science. But the myth was not always openly rejected. At times the philosophers were accused of "atheism" but the most retained, at least at first, a somewhat detached view of a critically corrected people's faith and the ritual that was connected to it. Also, the early scholars could not divest themselves directly of the age old pantheistic traditions and myths against

which no alternative had ever been proposed.

But the alternative came. Half-consciously, scientific thinking (reason), appreciated as the highest activity of the human soul, began functionally to take the place of the mythical gods and their semi-divine relatives. The traditional faith in a divine or a divine-like world order now received a philosophical form. After Anaximander (610-546 B.C.) had made a beginning, this was done especially by Heraclitus (540 - 480 B.C.). To this all comprehensive and all penetrating and directing god-like power he gave the name "logos."

Later the Stoics, with a somewhat different interpretation, would refer to the logos and, by way of the Stoics this would influence Christianity, well before the Reformation, in its teaching concerning moral natural rights. Later, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, this was done in the Protestant "theology of creation orders." This development cannot be understood apart from the interim phase of the Sophists and the reactions to it in the classical period of Plato and Aristotle. The Sophists, viewed in hindsight, did not attribute any great significance to philosophy. However their great service undoubtedly was that they made a sharp distinction between what nature ("physis") requires of us and what human injunctions and prescriptions demand ("nomos"). These terms were given very different content even to the extreme of the anarchism of the later Sophists, but the primary concern for our topic is that they formulated that which in the medical practice of that time had been functioning for a long time: namely, the insight that human nature requires and sometimes places strict demands on human activity with threat of all kinds of punishment. This is what everyone now knows, although not all Christians will recognize that herein the will of our Creator God makes itself known and confronts us in normative directives with authority.

The key thought of the Stoic rule of life was "to live according to nature." This was not a Stoic discovery for it had been dominant from very early times in Greek life and thought in which "nature" was not yet filled with the later metaphysical content. It was originally a very practical rule of life that was oriented to concrete experience.

Alongside of and often over against the demands of nature the civil magistrates and other powers or authorities and traditions placed their demands in the "nomos." This insight also can be developed in opposing directions. One can evaluate the demands of nature higher than human injunctions as well as do the opposite. This became an especially important

point of strife when it concerned the demands that must be placed upon the mutual human activities and on the regulation of society. In this also a search was made for durable laws, regularities or necessities in order to bridle harmful anarchism and dictatorship, egoism and individualism. The time of a self-evident acceptance of law and custom was past. The need arose for a criterion to evaluate critically law and custom.

The criterion was sought in "the nature of man," with all its risks that concern the diverse interpretations of nature: the right of the strong as well as the right of the weak could be founded upon it, dictatorship as well as democracy or anarchy, private property as well as the rejection of it, monogamy as well as polygamy, slavery as well as absolute social and juridical equality, revolution as well as conservatism. It appears that the so-called right of nature could proceed in all directions. Until the present time this remains a big problem for the right-of-nature concept. In the course of time various important theories have developed concerning the content of natural rights but they have been restricted to a few basic rules or highest norms which are immediately perceivable by everyone. They were formulated as "imperatives" or "propositions" from which by logical deduction more concrete situations could be deduced.

It is therefore understandable that the diverse traditions of the doctrine of natural (human) rights was always opposed by the so-called "positivists" (although the term as such did not yet exist). The positivists thought that they could find a definite certainty in "positive," expressly written, proclaimed or at least generally accepted laws or customs. Some of the Sophists were clearly and perhaps even extremely like what we would presently call positivists. This stood in direct connection with the Greek intellectualism in ethics. From clearly formulated rules as "givens" you could deduce a healthy reason (*recta ratio*).

The problem of the positivists, however, was that they lacked a criterion to judge concrete positive justice and concrete positive customs and patterns of behavior in regard to their correctness, their value and their rightness. The last word was in practice often experienced as an intuition and as that which one considers healthy and valuable or as making one happy. Or it was based on what a majority in society in a particular time considered as such. Objective marks or standards were lacking. In revolutionary times or in Hitler's Germany when this idea led to a notorious devastation, an appeal was made to a supra arbitrary, objective and critical norm. And therefore a German philosopher of law wrote a

book of which the title was *Die ewige Wiederkehr des Naturrechts*, H. A. Roman, 1934. Jurists tended to speak of the diverse revivals or rebirths or renewals or reconstructions of the right of nature. Less known is the publication that appeared with the title *Die ewige Wiederkehr des Positivismus*. In the ongoing wave of historical changes in the domination of juridical natural right and juridical positivism, the so-called moral normativity in the theoretical interpretation participated in the science of ethics. Thus in our time the idea of human rights has sometimes been seen as the basic ethical rule of our times and acclaimed as a late fruit of the earlier thinking on natural rights.

2. Early Christian Thought

The idea of a divine world order was taken over by Christianity from the pre-Christian pagan position. This was in part justified. The contents of the original mythological and later philosophical presentations of a divine world order were unacceptable because of their Pantheistic character. However, it was in any case an idea of faith which did not live just like that by chance in practically all world religions. In the light of the Scriptures we may speak of a derailed answer of faith to God's revelation. God reveals himself in the works of His hands.

The Christian idea of God's providential control and world plan was therefore a better answer than the pagan mythology with its stories of gods and creation. But neither were these stories complete nonsense. For there were too many partial, fragmentary agreements between the pagan faith and biblical belief. Behind all human faith life, also behind the through and through pagan life of faith, God's revelation was active. God continues to call his creatures to a communion of faith with him. It is a call which is grounded in the structure of existence, in the "building plan" of the creature as a leading aspect of faith. This call could not remain unanswered in principle because man was structurally "created for God." But the actual response of man was usually far from being in agreement with what God revealed. "Although they knew God they have not glorified him as God nor were thankful" (Rom. 1:21).

Human believing is an "increated" aptitude similar to loving, to being just, to thinking. Because of creation it was "naturally" directed to God. But in its realization it derailed through the fall into sin into a blindness of heart through apostasy from the one true God. Thereby there arose the

false gods which in the Bible are yet considered significant because they lead away from God. They are caricature gods which like all caricatures, contain a kernel of truth which through misconstruction become lies. Thus idols continue to function as "gods" that is, they become the sure ground on which people place their deepest trust and to which they surrender themselves. They draw people away from God.

And so the thought which was in principle correct concerning the divine world order as it was current in our century in southern Europe in the popularized philosophy of Stoicism was recognized by Christians on the one hand as the truth, and on the other hand as in large part corrected and rebuilt. Pagan Pantheism was eliminated, at least in large part. The Christian faith in creation became one of the important weapons in the struggle Christians undertook against the current pagan views of their contemporaries.

At one important point however Christian thinking went fundamentally awry. Originally unintended but later more consciously, people took over the pagan view of nature. Nature, taken in the broadest sense of everything that has been created and those things in the creation that are a product of human activity. Nature becomes a "creature." People interpreted the natural world order, inclusive of the moral order and the order of law, in an anti-pantheistic way as functioning as a created order that came from God. But at the same time and without realizing what they were doing people fell into an equally pagan view of nature. For the true confession of faith that reality was created by God was not yet accompanied with the insight that the philosophical view of this reality was thereby not yet automatically christianized. People sought to solve a universally human problem of normativity not only from the Christian faith but also in a strictly theological way.

Most important, it was recognized that God is the Creator of all cosmic reality, including human life and its normativity. But that recognition should have resulted in breaking with the pagan philosophical view of reality. In the non-pantheistic philosophies of that era this view had been secularized, rather de-mythologized, and thus desacralized and became self existent. The various philosophers of that time, even while they were faithful in their pagan worship, had banned the mythical stories from their scientific thought. Science as such had no message about myth. In philosophy people thought of reality as if there were no God or gods. This caused a break between the gods and daily existence.

In pagan philosophical theology (which was thought to be the epitome of metaphysics) scholars reflected theoretically on God, the gods, and divinity without regard for the world, and about the world without reference to the divine. The theoretical cleavage between God and reality produced a world-less theology and a god-less natural science. God was reasoned out of concrete created reality.

Later one stream of this tendency which was very consistently (and very unnaturally) applied in the so-called natural theology was called deism. Therefore, many centuries before the word deism was put into use, one can speak of a pre-Christian "deism" not in the view concerning God but concerning created reality. Even as deism was later a typical phenomenon of secularization so in pre-Christian philosophy there was pagan secularization. This manifested itself philosophically in a so-called neutral philosophical view of reality in which reality itself was considered neutral: separated from God - self existent.

This the Christian theologians of the early centuries did not clearly see. In their struggle against the pagan pantheistic spirit they thought in their philosophical view of reality to have found a partner in those philosophers who were also against pantheism. But that was a great misunderstanding that had disastrous results, in first instance for the development of a Christian theology. All sorts of typical pagan, mostly Stoic, terms which in part were given a biblical content, were incorporated into theology, and have never since disappeared. Especially in theological ethics this has worked through with great spiritual damage, particularly in the religiously dualistic scheme of the "two kingdoms": nature and grace.

The good intention of the adapted Christian tradition of natural right to recognize that God had placed normative directions for activity in the inner structures of reality and that God had given to humankind the wisdom often to see intuitively the correct insight into the situations in which the decisions had to be made, as time went by were greatly hindered and handicapped in that God was no longer present in reality itself nor active in the relatively constant and normative structural principals of reality. The confession of God's "immanence" was theologically almost exclusively recognized in the doctrine concerning God's providence.

Thus, there arose in the circle of the early Christian theologians a naive acceptance of pagan, primarily Stoic, ethics. The first Christian ethics was written by Bishop Ambrose who played a role in the conversion experience of Augustine. Ambrose naively and openly said that he had based his

ethics for a large part on the pagan philosopher Cicero who lived about 400 years earlier.

So also the writings of the stoic Seneca were exploited by the leaders of the church and the fathers in theology. Here the name of Lactantius should be mentioned. The most striking example was Bishop Martin of Bracara, who lived in the second half of the sixth century, and who for good reason was called, "Cicero come to life again." All of his publications were paraphrases and quotations of Seneca's philosophical ethics. About some of his writings historians speak openly of plagiarism.

Stoic ethics and Christian theology found their main connection in the "logos" idea. The Stoics, following Heraclitus, saw the divinely thought world order as a logical order, as a wise, rational, but full-of-tension coherent whole, normative for human life and society. The correction or reconstruction of this thought by the Christian theologians consisted primarily only in their interpretation of this world order as a creation order.

The constant institutions and structures in human society both as such and in their concreteness were considered divine and therefore holy ordinances of creation. God's plan and thoughts, God's will and purpose were said to exist behind them, and because God is an eternal God the entire creation order is the expression in time of what Cicero had already called the *lex aeterna*, the eternal divine law, God's decree and providential order. Augustine first somewhat systematically developed this into an adapted Christian philosophical theological doctrine of order and natural rights. In reality that was a semi-Christian philosophy of the creation ordinances: a mixture of Stoic and neo-platonic philosophy Christianized with externally added confessions and theological concepts. This, however, was not a Christianizing of paganism but a Hellenizing of Christianity.

The knowledge of this law was thought to be intuitive. Man participated by his reason in the cosmic reason. The stoic logos was a logos spermatikos, a reason which had been wafted out and was spread over the entirety of reality. Because man was created in God's image human reason was the image of God, according to Philo, Augustine, Boethius, and Thomas. As such it participated in the rationality of the creation order. The creation order was then called a natural law or a natural right. It was an expression and a reprint of the divine eternal law, the *lex eterna*. The *lex Christi* was thought to establish this *lex naturalis* by way of identification with the decalogue. A special feature was to amplify the decalogue. The biblical

vision of the concentrated unity of the entire creation law in Christ (Col 1:16), and in the central love command had not yet penetrated the thought of the early theologians. Their theologically constructed (in itself not incorrect) thought of a unity of the law of nature, the law of Moses, and the law of Christ intended to express their faith in the inner spiritual harmony of God's will. They could, however, not eliminate the philosophical contradictions which existed in the combination of the already tension-filled Stoic natural law, that was thought to have been a unified coherent whole, with the biblical idea of unity "in Christ."

This line of thought was strengthened by the leaning of the Christian thinkers upon the logos speculation of the Jewish hellenistic philosopher Philo of Alexandria. He in turn leaned upon the Stoics but interpreted the Stoic logos as a kind of midway entity or connecting link between God and the creature. On the one hand, so he said, the logos is the Creator's wisdom; on the other hand this logos is not only divine rationality but also human insight into God's wisdom. God was said to give people wisdom by allowing them to "participate" in the rationality and orderliness of the cosmos God created.

And so one can find a clear line from Heraclitus to the stoics and from them via Philo into Christian theology. In this Christology one could connect with the many biblical expressions of Christ as the incarnate word, or logos of God. The sophia, the philosophical wisdom, was clearly remade into the wisdom (logos) of God who was "in the beginning" in the creation, by the Word. This was done with an appeal, for instance, to Proverbs 8:22 and later to the incarnation of the divine logos who was also "in the beginning" with God and was God. It was especially Justin Martyr who laid this connection, but one can find it as well in Clement of Alexandria, and even in Irenaeus and Tertullian.

It was not accidental that at this historical junction, where the Jewish and the Greek thinking about law collided with the Pauline gospel of Christian freedom, that these three different traditions regarding the norms of life found agreement. Finally, the intellectualizing and the juridicizing of morality which gradually assumed a position of control in present day Roman Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy finds here one of its historical roots.

But the internal tensions in pagan rational teaching regarding natural right will not allow themselves to be resolved, nor to be driven out. Neither in the semi-Christian versions nor in the scholastic thought on natural

right, nor in the Protestant variance in the "theology of creation ordinances." After Thomas the theological tradition regarding the creation order (under the name of rational natural right) received an additional impulse from an Aristotelian teleological component, by which the accent was no longer on the rational content of creation but on natural rights. Then came nominalism and the great Reformation.

3. Protestant Christian Thought

In spite of important different tendencies in scholastic thought, such as nominalism and realism, Platonism and Aristotelian thought, one can, at least until very recently, speak in broad lines of a rational Roman Catholic doctrine of natural law. In Protestantism this was different. It occurred indirectly after the rise of the deistic rational thinking of the so called natural theology and natural ethics. Especially in the first half of this century there arose a multitude of theological conceptions regarding creation ordinances. Here we would name the following persons: P. Althaus, G. Waensch, W. Wiesner, W. Kunneth, E. Brenner, W. Elert, F. Lace, R. Gebhardt.

Neither Luther or Calvin had essentially distanced themselves from the theoretical tradition of natural law. Of course, neither were they entirely uncritical of it. Especially their biblical teaching regarding sin and grace made them remove every consideration of natural law. For them the accent came to lie entirely on "the law of Christ," the new commandment of which Christ spoke in his departing word in John 13:34.

This brought numerous problems into theology, such as the relationship of the love commandment to the so called natural orders of life which were believed to be divine creation ordinances, the relationship of so-called general and special revelation, or the relation of nature and grace, or of law and freedom. A systematically built and developed doctrine regarding natural law or creation ordinances could not quickly be erected. Only in the so-called orthodoxy of the second half of the 17th and 18th century could a beginning come to pass. Melanchthon with his appeal to Aristotle was the pioneer. An attempt has been made, even in our time, to subsume the normativity for life logically under the Ten Commandments, but this incredible and artificial theological acrobatics was able to persuade only small groups of Protestant Christians. In the praxis of life of the unschooled

Christians the norming of their life became increasingly more dependent upon the experts, that is the preachers, whom one could not always follow in what Brunner once called, *das logisch-juristisches Subsumtionsverfahren*. Also in Protestantism there arose and flourished the phenomenon of casuistics together with modern reactions to it in historical relativism and personalism.

One reaction in the beginning of the 20th century was the development of various sharply diverging theologies regarding creation ordinances. The reactions were similar to what in jurisprudence happened in the repeated revival or revision of natural law that was strongly discredited by the temporal overpowering of the spirit of positivism and historicism, which were followed by existentialism and personalism.

All the old arguments against the idea of a moral natural law have been and still are being polished. The so called creation ordinances are no longer what they were before the fall into sin. They are not clearly knowable and therefore offer no primarily intellectual certainty. They are fixed because they do not take account of history. They are not verifiable and lead to an intuitionism that offers no generally valid normativity. They are not concrete but very general, and in the application one can make all sorts of applications conservative or revolutionary even if there are middle axioms as bridges to the questions of praxis. What are called creation ordinances only reflect the subjective experiences of a particular time. For example, Voetius defended slavery on the basis of natural law with arguments from Aristotle. They suggest that the so-called *recta ratio*, well used understanding, is not basically affected by sin. It is said that which is called nature is nothing else than that which man has projected in his view of nature, so that every reasoning from the creation ordinances is a kind of reasoning in a circle.

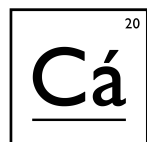
As for the Lutherans, the discussion has been primarily conducted from one or other theological version of Luther's two kingdom teaching, in which in the middle of this century a conception of the royal sovereignty of Christ was set against creation orders. We cannot now consider the many variant positions in this discussion. Our critique must be limited to a few chief points.

All variants of (and every critique upon) one or other theological conception of creation ordinances, in theories of natural law and the doctrine of ordinances, contain an element of truth. They, however, do not penetrate through to a philosophical critique on a necessarily philosophical

basis of all of those theories that have been conceived. An inner theological or an inner jurisprudence solution of the problem of normativity cannot be found. Current non-Christian juridical thinking does not break free from a dualistic view of law, out of which a dualistic anthropology and cosmology has arisen.

The average Christian theological thinking does not escape its dualistic philosophical basis in anthropology and cosmology. To the extent that one is aware that cosmology and anthropology always necessarily play a role in the theological problematic of normativity, one thinks that this problem can be solved in a purely theological way.

In contrast, Reformational philosophy takes the view by means of the approach of a special science, that is, from an external theological prolegomena of theology, it can offer a Reformational support to theology, in particular to theological ethics. Without this, conservative orthodoxy remains enmeshed in the scholastic synthesis of biblical thought and ancient philosophy and the less conservative theology enmeshed in its contemporary synthesis of biblical thoughts with present day philosophical trends. One could call that a Protestant Neo-scholasticism.



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