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Divine Action in the World – No Problem? Religious Claims – Ontological Implications – Theological Perspectives

HANS-JOACHIM HÖHN (Cologne)

In general, the assumption of a concrete divine intervention in the course of the world, which can be located in place and time, seems to be unproblematic for religious people. At first sight, there seem to be no argumentative obstacles for those who believe in an almighty God concerning the assumption that such a being can do anything it wants to do – and, this ability would apply to this being's relation to something, whose creator it is: Why should God not act and be active in a creation, which owes its very existence to his initiative and his action? However, what seems to be only evident to faith is by no means self-evident for reason. The problems do already start with questions like: Who or what really and truly deserves to be named "God"? What makes thinking about such a God part of our thoughts? Is it necessary or does it even make sense to draw a connection between divine existence and certain events in the world? The possibility of drawing this connection is up for debate.¹

The assumption that statements about the relation between God and the world can be made by using a presupposed necessity of God for coping with world-immanent problems and challenges has proved itself as unfounded in modern science and philosophy. Neither for human reasoning nor for human action the idea of God seems to designate something, which must be addressed as "conditio sine qua non". For a justification of moral norms, for legitimizing political power, or for the application of a certain method in technology and science to have to refer to God is no longer indispensable, necessary or without any alternative, but not needed any more. In all these areas, one could act "etsi deus non daretur" and orientate oneself to the measure of autonomous reason.² Furthermore, the actual course of the modern world continually justifies the assumption of a non-necessity of God for an explanation of world-immanent chains of events and facts. If the world "functions" without divine intervention, the idea of divine necessity as a solution for world-immanent problems would

¹ For further discussion cf. H.-J. HÖHN, *Der fremde Gott. Glaube in postsäkularer Kultur*, Würzburg 2008.

² For an understanding of the notion of autonomy, which is indicated here, cf. J. CHRISTMAN, Art. "Autonomie", in: S. GOSEPATH et al. (Eds.), *Handbuch der Politischen Philosophie und Sozialphilosophie*, Berlin 2008, 96–102.

reveal itself as a highly problematic premise for statements about God.³ However, justified talking about God then means: To combine thinking about God and about a world, whose constitution and self-understanding make it necessary to think about the world without God.

Interestingly enough, it is a consequence from the notion of God in Catholic dogmatic that statements about divine action in the world are connected with a problem emerging from theology itself. According to its understanding, God is

“the one, true, and living creator of heaven and earth, ... He is really and essentially different from the world, in himself and out of himself entirely beatific and unspeakably exalted above everything, which is and can be thought outside him”⁴

Therefore, only that particular instance, which is not part of world-immanent entities, “truly” deserves it to be named God. God is not “something” or “somebody”. But he is not also “nothing”. Much more, the word “God” marks the difference between being and non-being, without which nothing could be. That God is “essentially and really” different from his creation implies that there is no similarity between creator and creature, which is not encompassed by an always greater dissimilarity (cf. Lateranum IV/DH 806). Who wants to talk about God has to talk about divine alterity and transcendence. From that, another serious problem of the interventionist approach on divine action evolves: How can any interaction between the creator and his creatures be possible regarding divine alterity and transcendence? How could a God be present in a world, which is essentially different from his own being?

In its attempt to answer these questions, theology has to take measure in a twofold way. What Christians believe is only then rationally justified, if it can be thought without any contradictions at the same time. More exactly: The content of belief must justify itself as consistent and coherent *ad extra* as well as *ad intra*. Statements of belief are consistent, if they are free from logical contradictions and mutually related to each other in a way, which is free from contradictions as well. Such a system of statements of belief is coherent, if it can be connected to statements of reason, which are proved to be justified by their logical consistency without any contradiction.

³ Regarding theoretical approaches and facts from natural sciences, not only the non-necessity of divine action for the course of events and the explanation of world-immanent events has to be stated, but also the impossibility to explain such interventions (from the viewpoint of natural sciences). For further discussion cf. J. SCHNAKENBERG, *Gottesbilder: Soll Gott von außen auf uns und unsere Welt einwirken können?* in: G. SOUVIGNIER et. al. (Eds.), *Gottesbilder an der Grenze zwischen Naturwissenschaft und Theologie*, Darmstadt 2009, 71–82.

⁴ H. DENZINGER/P. HÜNERMANN, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum: Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen. Lateinisch – Deutsch*, Freiburg 2015, nr. 3001.

If it is right that it is logically consistent and coherent to say about the world that its constitution and its self-concept make it possible and, for its autonomy's sake, even necessary to conceive the world *etsi deus non daretur*, then every further speech of God does not only have the task to talk of God's reality without referring to the category of a "world-immanent necessity". It must also develop a wholesome concept of God and his world-immanent non-necessity, from which must not result divine "nothingness" for the human self-concept and the practice of faith.

In the following, I am going to reflect the ontological implications and complications, which follow from the assumption of a God-world relation (1).⁵ In doing so, the so far not very widely used potential of a relational ontology will be stressed, which tries to do justice to the religious claim of a divine relation to the world as well as to the philosophical dispute on its world-immanent perception and relevance (2). The plea for the potentiality of this way of thinking will be continued in examinations of appropriate contemporary conditions and possibilities of an analogue speech about God's existence (3) and divine attributes (4).

1. Metaphysical Complications: God and the Difference between Being and Nothingness

Who wants to talk about God in an adequate way, always has to talk about divine alterity and transcendence towards the world. However, if such an attempt wants to avoid missing the scripture's testimony and the Christian credo, it must also enable us to make statements about the relation between God and the world. According to the view of Christian theology, both conditions can be fulfilled, if one adopts the conviction of the world as being-created. Namely, the notion "being-created" implies the world's radical dependency on God as well as its radical difference from God. Nevertheless, if the modern world view does not have any use for the category of "being-created" any more, this term does not help much for talking about God in modern times. Therefore, a new effort is needed to talk about the world's dependency on God combined with the world's difference from

⁵ During the last years, the willingness to reflect the "ontological commitments" of religious speech has very much increased. Apparently, there seems to be a broad consensus about the premise: Who claims that a statement is true must assume that that exists, what makes this statement true. However, for the justification of this claim and its application for the speech about God, many strikingly different accounts compete with each other. Cf. e.g. H. V. SASS, *Gott als Ereignis des Seins. Versuch einer hermeneutischen Onto-Theologie*, Tübingen 2013, 19–27; I.U. DALFERTH/A. HUNZIKER (Eds.), *Gott denken – ohne Metaphysik?* Tübingen 2014.

God in a way compatible with modern times. Moreover, the ontological commitments of the meaning of the word “God” have to be made clear at the same time.

The approach of a *relational ontology*, which operates with the categories of “relation” and “constellation” (instead of “substance”) as guiding notions, suggests that such efforts could be executed successfully. Such an account stands in continuity with traditional attempts aiming at a notional coverage of common, i.e. basic and indispensable structures of reality and fundamental properties of entities, which can be encountered therein. The question is: What makes something being this very being? On what does the essence of one thing being depend? Which conditions must be met so that something can be assumed as “existent” and can be experienced “as” something?⁶ The constitutive thesis of relational ontology – the concept argued for below – is that everything in the world can be essentially defined with regard to its relations in which it exists. Everything being stands in a relation of interdependence to other things, which are in the world. In turn, a complete loss of relation defines non-being. This thesis is justified by an existential-pragmatic callback concerning elementary constellations and dynamic forms of being-in-the-world. The focus lies on the examination of existential constellations and the determination of forms of being alive, which enable things to exist in the world and which appear in the actions of subjects, which have the ability to talk and to act as their enabling conditions.⁷

These constellations and forms can no longer be described in the terminology and the paradigm of substance metaphysics in an adequate way.⁸ This paradigm operates with a primacy of the category “substance” over the category “relation”: Each existing things has its being “in itself” and, above all, exists “for itself” before it is related to other existing things. “Essence” and “substance” of an existing thing remain something standing “behind” these relations, i.e. they determine these relations and make them possible, but they remain real-distinct from them.

⁶ For primary information cf. e.g. M. KUHLMANN, *Ontologie*, in: H.D. BRANDT (Ed.), *Disziplinen der Philosophie*, Hamburg 2014, 390–435.

⁷ For further information cf. H.-J. HÖHN, *Von der Bewusstseinsphilosophie zur Existentialpragmatik*, in: H.-J. HÖHN, *Zeit und Sinn. Religionsphilosophie postsäkular*, Paderborn 2010, 73–148.

⁸ For a history of the theory and a systematic evaluation of the following considerations concerning relational ontology cf. M. ERLER et al., Art. “Relation”, in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie VIII*, 578–611; C. v. WOLZOGEN, *Die autonome Relation. Zum Problem der Beziehung im Spätwerk Paul Natorps. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Theorien der Relation*, Würzburg 1984; K. BOHRMANN, *Die Welt als Verhältnis. Untersuchung zu einem Grundgedanken in den späten Schriften Martin Heideggers*, Frankfurt 1983; R.-P. HORSTMANN, *Ontologie und Relationen. Hegel, Bradley, Russell und die Kontroverse über interne und externe Beziehungen*, Königstein 1984; R. SCHULTHESS, *Relation und Funktion. Eine systematische und entwicklungsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur theoretischen Philosophie Kants*, Berlin 1981.

These relations may change, whereas the essence or the substantial remains. Relations signify something, which might happen to a substance – it is something accidental in the true meaning of the word –, but they can also be dispensed or omitted in order to be replaced by another accident. The relations are determined by the substance, but the substance is not defined by the relations. As a consequence, the visible appearance of an existing thing or the relations it builds up with other things, are alterable additions or amendments. Its very substance, however, stands for an unchangeable “core essence” or for a self-relation, which does not need any reference to something else.⁹ Therefore, true “being” can only be attributed to things standing-in-themselves, which exist on their own and rest in themselves. Only those things have persistence and can become bearer of identity because of this persistence.

From an existential-pragmatic point of view, such assumptions are untenable – especially in cases which cover the very characteristics of human existence: Human being is not determined by a “self” without any relation, which is only afterwards connected with relations. Much more, it is defined as relational from the very inside of its self, because of its being-related to material-natural, individual-personal, and social-medial otherness, which can be located in place and time. As soon as the relational structures are removed from its basic situations, no human “self” can be identified any more.¹⁰ However, not only the basic existential situation of human being is constituted by relations, but also every practical execution

⁹ At first sight, such a view may claim a certain “every day evidence” for itself. Everybody knows from experience that something, which is, always is “something” and not “something else”. The identity of something (and the ability to identify it) depends on the fact that this thing is really distinguishable from something else. Hence, the identity of something depends on the fact that it remains the very thing itself, with which it could always be identified. Moreover, the identity of something depends on the fact that it exists for itself, i.e. as something on its own, as something circumscribed and identical with itself. Everything existing in that way must possess something, which makes it to something distinguishable (i.e. something to be identified in place and time). That, which underlies every existing thing regarding its existence and its being-as-such and which is the very content of its existence as a concrete being (i.e. which is its essence), is its “substance”. From that, the accidents, which (afterwards) may join the substance, have to be distinguished and the relations belong to that group. Cf. G. KRIEGER, *Selbständigkeit und Identität. Die Substanz als Gegenstand der Metaphysik*, in: L. HONNEFELDER/G. KRIEGER (Eds.), *Philosophische Propädeutik III*, Paderborn 2001, 119–212; B. WEISSMAHR, *Ontologie*, Stuttgart ²1991, 158–169.

¹⁰ Whoever still wants to adopt the vocabulary of substance metaphysic, would have to say: Human beings are “substances” in a way, which ensures that their relations to material and personal otherness are not only “accidental”, but characterize their very “essences”. It is constitutive for them that they cannot be a self without any such relations. From that point of view, the ontologically correct basic definition of a human being would be “subsistent relation”, i.e. a substance which can only exist in and as relation. Man does not betake

of existence. In these executions, one refers to that which characterizes one's existence, i.e. one refers to one's elementary world-relations. Therefore, for human beings existence always means to relate to nature, society/fellow human beings, time, and language. And, existence also means to be able to refer again to these relations.¹¹

What has exemplarily been sketched for the description of human being, does also mark a further basic thesis of an "ontology of existential relations": Relations are not only correlations, which are only executed in thought and language (e.g. by stating relations of time, place, or situation between different objects with the help of prepositions). Relations are not solely and primarily *produced*, but *introduced* and presented in thought and language. They are constitutive for existence and identity as well as regulative for perception.¹² Moreover, relations are not only an expression of the fact that and how different beings get involved with each other, but they also designate that in which all being coincides: "omne ens est relatum – esse est relatio". As constituents of the reality of the "condition humana", relations are not only organizing principles of reason. They possess an own ontological dignity, insofar as relations and constellations are constitutive for existence, i.e. that it "happens" in them and that it "appears" in them, what is named existence and life, i.e. Existence (Dasein) and life go on and shine 'through' them. It does also apply for non-human entities that they only appear in the context of those constellations, which make existence possible. These existential relations are constitutive for existence and identity, instead of merely following existence and identity, as it is assumed by classical substance metaphysics. Hence, the first sentences of a "tractatus relatio-ontologicus" are:

1. The world is everything being in relation.
- 1.1. Relations as a whole, not of things, facts, or events as a whole are the word.

himself in circumstances or builds up relations, but "subsists" in his being-related and this being-related characterizes his very existence.

¹¹ For an elaborated version of this insight not only in ontology, but also in anthropology and ethics cf. H.-J. HÖHN, *Das Leben in Form bringen. Konturen einer neuen Tugendethik*, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2014.

¹² This is an elementary insight for human self-understanding. Within the context of essentialism or substance metaphysics, man could not say "I am changing" about himself. He could only formulate: "I change something, which depends on me". Strictly speaking, this would also apply for self-reflective relations to otherness, which could not be articulated in an adequate way within this framework. "I have fallen in love with you" would have to be replaced by "I direct my love onto you" and it would have to remain an open question whether a human being relates its "I" or its "self" to something else and what it learns about itself through this relation: that he *himself* or she *herself* has fallen in love. Furthermore, regarding himself man would have to say *about* himself that the appropriate way for his essence to exist as person, i.e. to be alive in a relational way, would consist in being an "attachment figure" *for* himself and for others.

- 1.2. The totality of relations determines what is the world as whole.
- 1.3. Relations and constellations determine what is the case.
2. Constellations are real through which relates to each other within them.
3. Relations are primary forms of realisation of that which relates, i.e. of that which can be called real an real, truly real und really true.

Tying in with plausible facts from particular sciences with regard to the relational structure of human existence in a consistent and coherent way and – what can only be sketched in brief theses in the following – opening up a perspective, which makes speaking about God applicable for a world, which wants to be thought “without God”, both can be achieved within a relational ontology:¹³

Insisting on the own autonomy and the insight in its own contingency is vital for the self-understanding of the modern world.¹⁴ It is not necessary that the world is. Even more: That there is something at all and not nothing is neither a necessity nor is the very fact, that there is something, self-explicable at all.¹⁵ The only natural fact is that everything, which is, points to the nothingness of itself, because of its contingency, from which it is only separated through time. Therefore, a “being-saved from the nothingness (of itself)” and a “being-hold into the nothingness (of itself)” has to be ascribed to the contingent at the same time. Hence, the only way to talk about contingent being in the world in a comprehensive and adequate way is to talk about it by indicating these two dimensions of its relation to the nothingness of itself: On the one hand, the world is wholly distinguished from the nothingness of itself. On the other hand, it wholly evolves from that nothingness and continually points to the nothingness of itself. And, at the same time, it is only insofar and so long separated from nothingness as it comes out of it and goes on towards it.

But how can something be understood in its persistence precisely via its relationship to nothingness? The ‘nullity of nothingness’ consists in the very fact that it does not come into question as a possible point of reference for understanding. Even in every-day language it is quite clear: Nothing ventured, nothing gained! Ex nihilo nihil fit! Only “something” lets us do something. In nothingness, everything comes to an end – even understanding and explanation. Indeed, the reference to nothingness is *necessary* in order to understand the *contingency* of the

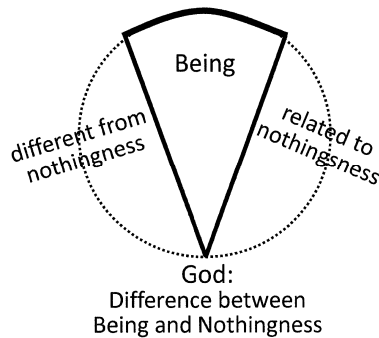
¹³ For an extensive discussion of this account cf. H.-J. HÖHN, *Gott – Offenbarung – Heilswege. Fundamentaltheologie*, Würzburg 2011, 64–99.

¹⁴ Cf. also K. WUCHTERL, *Kontingenz oder das Andere der Vernunft. Zum Verhältnis von Philosophie, Naturwissenschaft und Religion*, Stuttgart 2011.

¹⁵ For a closer discussion of this basic question of thinking and being cf. D. SCHUBBE et al. (Eds.), *Warum ist überhaupt etwas und nicht vielmehr nichts? Wandel und Variationen einer Frage*, Hamburg 2013.

world's existence. But it is *not sufficient* in order to understand the world's *existence* in its contingency. Nothingness cannot explain or justify anything, it does not make anything understandable or reasonable.

Therefore, we need a sufficient reason, whose indication helps us to distinguish between a description of the world with reference to nothingness and an epistemically incomplete, hermeneutically deficient, and ontologically precarious description. The wanted reason aims at a hermeneutic condition for the possibility of an interpretation of a state of affair without any contradiction, which is characterized by mutually conflicting determinations from an ontological point of view ("saved from nothingness/being-hold into nothingness"). The attempt to mark the wanted reason for the contingency of the world in an ontological way can neither lead to "something" or the totality of being nor to nothing or nothingness. If it was "something" or the totality of being, then one would have to look for it on the side of mundane reality. But then the questionable would be asked for an answer to its very question. However, the wanted reason also cannot be nothingness, which makes impossible any kind of explication. Hence, it can only be determined by saying that it is neither something nor nothing, i.e. must be beyond the distinction between "something" and "nothing" or it must constitute the very difference between Being and Nothingness.

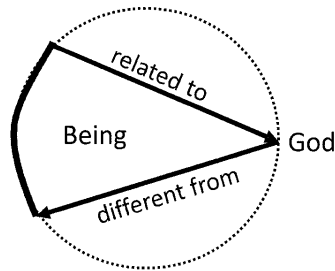


From the attempt to examine the ontological conditions of significance for the content and the use of the word "God" within this context, one receives the following thesis: The word "God" stands for the difference between Being ("Sein") and nothingness ("Nichts"). Or rather: It marks that instance, which constitutes the difference between Being and nothingness in favour of being. "God" means this difference between being and "non-being" ("Nicht-sein") without which nothing would be.

This notion saves divine transcendence and incomprehensibility, which have always been stressed in Christian theology: Only this instance truly deserves to be

named “God”, which does not belong to the world-immanent inventory, but is really distinguished from it by its very essence. God is not “something” or “somebody”, since then he would not be different from everything, which is “something” or “somebody”, because of his very essence. But he is also not “nothing”. From the world’s perspective, God’s being-divine consists in the fact that he constitutes the difference between being and nothingness in favour of the world. As such he is “creator of heaven and earth” – but neither a “supreme being” nor Being itself or its manifestation. That God is “creator of heaven and earth” and, at the same time, “essentially and really” distinguished from his creation, implies that a relation between the world and God can be explicated, which includes a difference that cannot be conceived of in a superior way. Nevertheless, this radical difference between creator and creation is a “creative” difference, i.e. a difference, which constitutes existence, identity and freedom. Only because of his radical being-different from everything, which is “something” or “somebody”, God is able to constitute the reason that something or somebody is at all – and not rather nothing.

The ontological signature of the theological concept of “being-created” does not only consist in a mere qualification of existence (“Dasein”), but also in a reference and relation of the world to God, which constitutes existence and which is radically linked with a being-different from God. On the basis of a relational ontology, the basic situation of the world as being “autonomous” can now also be recognized from a theological perspective, i.e. as handed over to itself in freedom, being-on-its-own, and being-for-its-own by God. This implies that everything, which happens *in* the world, can always also be explained and understood without God (“etsi deus non daretur”). This is true from an epistemological as well as from a life-practical point of view. What exists on its own, free, and identical with itself does not depend on any other instance in its freedom and autonomy. However, at the same time, it must be stated: If there is a reason for the difference between being and nothingness, it must indeed be different from everything that is, but at the same time everything that is must be related to this reason with regard to the fact that it is.



If the world cannot be without God in this respect (but God can very well exist without the world), then it can be said in the terminology of a relational ontology: The world is totally related to God, from whom it is radically different. The “being-related-to-God” is *constitutive for the existence* of the world. The “being-different from God” is *constitutive for the autonomy* of the world. As radically different from God, the world is something on its own exactly in its reference to God, i.e. it is for its own and given to its own. However, the being-related-to-God does not relativize the autonomy of the world, which is based on its being-different-from-God. In the way, in which man is totally related to God, he is also free before God in a way, which cannot be relativized. At the same time, this fact constitutes the divine hiddenness in the world and the non-necessity of God for coping with world-immanent affairs.

2. A Relational-Ontological View on the Relation between God and World – A Problem Solving generating New Problems?

Under the relational-ontological designation the relation between creator and creation always goes along with a hermeneutic of posing a distinct relation between God and the world and a radical distinction between God, world, and nothingness is implied: (1) A radical distinction must be drawn between God and world. God himself is neither the finite nor the totality of the finite nor does he epitomize it. (2) God and nothingness must be distinguished in the same radical way. God is this kind of reality “beyond” which there is nothing. God himself is neither something nor somebody nor nothing. (3) The world’s relation to God is the reason to distinguish it from nothingness: The world can neither constitute the difference between being and nothingness nor preserve it on its own. It owes the fact of its existence to this difference and, therefore, is neither “nothing” nor “divine” itself.

However, a closer examination reveals the relational-ontological reconstruction of the category “being-created” as ambivalent for the question concerning the relationship between God and the world. Apparently, while solving problems new problems are generated. It solves problems, because the notion of God, formulated this way, opens up the possibility to think God along with a world, which wants and can be understood without God. Theologically it is possible to speak about the world’s relatedness to God and to recognise the autonomy of the world at the same time. However, the relational-ontological account also has a problem-generating impact on theology: Every further talk about an immediate experience

of God in the world appears to be highly problematic – be it a special divine intervention in the world, a miracle, the answering of a petitionary prayer, or a historical divine self-revelation.¹⁶

Last but not least, these consequential problems follow from the logic and structure of the world as being-created. The total dependency on God without any exception correlates its one-sided relation to God. It follows from this fact that no interdependency, no mutual influence, or exchange can be claimed for the relationship between creature and creator. The insufficiency of such attempts follows from the radical, essential difference between creator and creature: If everything, which is (in the world or which is mundane), radically points to this instance, which constitutes the difference between Being and nothingness that is fundamental for existence, how could there be anything next to it or beyond it that would bear a “greater” character of reference or could install a “direct contact” with that instance? Can anything be excluded from this difference and stand for a direct “encounter” with God in a world, which is thought to be radically distinguished from God? Apparently, theology would have to use one of these two possibilities, if it wants to keep the claim that God intervenes in the course of the world.

Both possibilities appear as highly problematic with regard to their philosophic or scientific plausibility as well as concerning the sketched logic of the theological concept of “being-created”. If theology makes use of them, it is in danger of being criticized as inconsistent and incoherent because of the named claims. Nevertheless, various attempts have continuously appeared in modern theology to bring exceptional facts into play, by whose help the alleged verdict of a divine intervention in the world could be overturned.¹⁷ Not a few authors mention many reasons at first, which argue against an interventionist approach to divine intervention from a philosophical or scientific point of view or which deny it as a pure myth from the perspective of a historical-critical exegesis of the bible. Nevertheless, afterwards they make the attempt to postulate a sort of divine action with the help of God’s power over history as presented in the bible and a

¹⁶ The following considerations refer to and complement H.-J. HÖHN, *Gottes Weltverhältnis. Thesen zu problem erzeugenden Problemlösungen*, in: S. ERNST/G. GADE (Hg.), *Glaubensverantwortung in Theologie, Pastoral und Ethik* (FS P. Knauer), Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2015, 172–196.

¹⁷ For primary information concerning the actual debate cf. C. BÖTTIGHEIMER, *Wie handelt Gott in der Welt? Reflexionen im Spannungsfeld von Theologie und Naturwissenschaft*, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2013; R.A. SIEBENROCK/C.J. AMOR (Eds.), *Handeln Gottes. Beiträge zur aktuellen Debatte*, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2014, 132–172; K. v. STOSCH, *Gott – Macht – Geschichte*, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2006; H. KESSLER, *Den verborgenen Gott suchen*, Paderborn 2006, 90–102; R. KÖGERLER/G. SCHÖRGHOFER (Eds.), *Wie wirkt Gott in der Welt? Theologische Zugänge zu naturwissenschaftlichen Sichtweisen*, Linz 2005.

divine causation and action contrary to all human expectations.¹⁸ Some theologians also question the interpretational primacy or the competence of reason and accuse it of a narrow-mindedness or reductionism, which is seen as an obstacle for an integral interpretation of the world. Sometimes, this habit is presented as an expression of a reasonable critique of reason, and it is seen as the very expression of a reasoning, which keeps itself open for “everything”. Allegedly, it does not regard anything, which religious fantasy claims to be possible, as impossible because of the principal incompleteness of scientific interpretational models. On that basis, some authors even make the attempt to shake at the basic axioms of physics or they search for a field for divine action in speculations about quantum physics.¹⁹ However, not equal thought is spent on the question, by which criteria a manifest scepticism concerning reason or an “open theism”²⁰ in a quantum-physical version can be distinguished from arbitrariness or unreasonableness. Would it not be much more consequent in both cases to search for gaps not only in the “natural laws”, but also in the laws of logic and to try to find a possible field for divine action there? Should one not also search for exception concerning the validity of the (ontological) principle of non-contradiction in order to find possibilities for a divine intervention there? In such a case God would have to be able to care for the fact that fathers could be younger than their sons...

Not every theologian is aware of the irrationality of such a maneuver. Again and again, the category of “divine omnipotence” is used as joker for its justification. In turn, theologians who react with scepticism on such arguments are not only confronted with the accusation of religious faintheartedness. Furthermore they are objected with the assumption that theological tradition has particularly discussed the question, which instance truly deserved it in reality to be named “God” and how the relation between God and world was formatted, with the help of the predicate “omnipotence”.²¹ It could be stated in favour of this claim that,

¹⁸ Cf. e.g. J. NEGEL, Weil die Welt nicht ganz dicht ist... Eine philosophisch-theologische Erörterung der Frage nach dem Wirken Gottes in der Welt, in: W. EISELE (Ed.), Gott bitten? Theologische Zugänge zum Bittgebet, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2013, 102–185.

¹⁹ Cf. for this way of arguing K. WARD, Divine Action. Examining God’s role in an open and emergent universe, Philadelphia 2007.

²⁰ Cf. for that D. SCHMELTER, Gottes Handeln und die Risikologik der Liebe. Zur rationalen Vertretbarkeit des Glaubens an Bittgebets erhörungen, Marburg 2012.

²¹ Cf. for that e.g. W. BRUGGER, Summe einer philosophischen Gotteslehre, München 1979, 289–427; W. BREUNING, Art. “Eigenschaften Gottes”, in: W. BEINERT (Ed.), Lexikon der katholischen Dogmatik, Freiburg–Basel–Wien ³1997, 106–109; G.L. MÜLLER, Katholische Dogmatik, Freiburg–Basel–Wien ⁶2005, 238–243; M. LÖHRER, Dogmatische Bemerkungen zur Frage der Eigenschaften und Verhaltensweisen Gottes, in: MySal II, 291–315; J. AUER, Gott – der Eine und Dreieine, Regensburg 1978, 370–580; W. PANNENBERG, Systematische Theologie I, Göttingen 1988, 365–483.

indeed, the predicates “almighty”, “omni-benevolent”, and “omniscient” are decisive and that it depends on specific patterns of behavior in relation with these attributes, whether an instance can be identified as “divine”. Similarly, it seems to be indispensable for the knowledge of God that these attributes and patterns of behavior are consequential in a way that they serve human beings for the understanding of their existence, e.g. by pointing to phenomena, which can be interpreted as divinely caused miracles or answers on petitionary prayers.

However, it is questionable from an epistemological, ontological or language-theoretical point of view, whether one can argue for this theory with good reasons. In the following, I am going to make an attempt to correct it. By doing so, precisely the method will be applied, which is used for its justification, namely to arrive at analogical conclusions concerning divine being, attributes and relation to the world on the basis of the world’s being-created.

3. The Always Greater Difference between Creator and Creature: Talking about God’s existence and action in an analogue way

If the being-created of the world implies that the world depends on God in a radical way and is radically distinct from him at the same time, only such statements about God are possible at first, which stress his transcendence and alterity. Nevertheless, a relational-ontological determination of the God-world-relationship or a radical distinction between God and world does by no means exclude further statements about God’s existence and divine attributes: If God marks the reason without whom is nothing (although he is neither “something” nor “somebody” nor “everything”), everything, which is separated from nothingness, is related to him in a radical way. Therefore, God is the “whereupon” of this being-related. Now, if the world is or if the world is a reality, then the “whereupon” of this being-related must also be real or a reality. If God was distinguished from the world in every way, there could be no being-related of the world to God. God and the world have something in common in the fact that they are radically distinguished from nothingness – although this applies to them in different ways.²² The traditional doctrine of analogy claims that common ground for God and the world,

²² This ontological state of affairs has immediate consequences for talking about divine “existence” in an adequate way: That God “is” does not apply for him in the same way as the world “is”, because the latter is radically different from God. Therefore, the word “is” cannot be used in an “univocal” way. However, that God “is” does also not apply for him in a radically different manner from the way the world “is”, because the latter is related to God in a radical way. Hence, the word “is” can also not be used in an “equivocal” way. Since God cannot not be and in face of the fact that the world is related to him as well as radically different from him, the word “is” must be used in an analogue way.

which it has gained via *affirmationis*, but does also take the difference between God and world into account by modifying all affirmative claims through the via *negativa* and the via *eminentiae*.²³

On the basis of a relational ontology, it is also possible to apply such a method. In doing so, the following premises and steps have to be taken into account, which finally lead to an analogue notion of divine omnipotence, omni-benevolence, and omniscience:

If God constitutes the difference between non-being (“Nicht-sein”) and existence (“Dasein”) in favour of being then existence is given to the created entities by God and their own distinction from nothingness applies for them via and through God’s own radical distinction from nothingness. Regarding the being-different from nothingness, a “similarity” between creator and creature can be asserted and stated in an affirmative way. At the same time, negative statements are necessary regarding the radical difference between creator and creature. While talking about God, it should be taken into account that no “similarity” between creator and creature can be stated, which is not encompassed by an always greater dissimilarity. Hence, one can only predicate attributes to God, which apply for him in an analogue way. Analogue statements can be derived from the following three steps:

(1) Via affirmativa: What can be said about the creature with regard of its being-created, i.e. regarding what is constitutive for its existence (“A is such that it cannot be without the property B”), can also be said about God as its creator.

(2) Via negativa: What can be said about God as creator differs from that which can be said about human beings as creatures (“Property B cannot be predicated to instance A in the same way as this applies for instance C”).

(3) Via eminentiae: If something can be said about the creator at all, which is also constitutive for the existence of creatures, then this must apply for him in an ingradable and unique way (“If property B applies for God, he possesses it in a way, which cannot be modified or enhanced, enlarged, amplified etc., i.e. it applies for him in a way, in which it cannot be said about anything or anybody else”).

By applying these three steps for an analog determination of divine omnipotence, one receives the following chain of thoughts, which should also be plausible outside a relational-ontological framework of reference:

(1) One makes the experience that he one start something in the world, i.e. that one can begin something new and that one can begin in a new way. Something, which has not been in the world before, comes to the world through human will and acting: Something, which has not been there before, has been transferred

²³ Cf. for that THOMAS AQUINAS, ScG I, 30.

from non-being to being-there. This new beginning can spontaneously be brought about by a human being, i.e. in a free act and through a break-through of existing chains of actions. This potency (of freedom of will and action) is constitutive, characteristic, and a resource for the meaning of life, i.e. his being-one-self and his being-on-his-own manifests in this ability and, so, distinguishes him from other creatures. Insofar, as this potentiality of being able to start something new and bringing something forth in the world, which has not been in the world before, does apply for human beings because of their being-created, this creative potentiality of making existence possible can also be attributed to God.

(2) The capability of man to start anew or to start something new is not free from preconditions and conditions, but bound to contingent modes of his existence (e.g. psycho-physical restrictions, limitation of resources, and concurrence with other people). Insofar, as the potentiality to make something be, which has not been so far, or to change non-being into being-there is predicated to God, all contingent and limited modes of existence have to be negated on the way. It must be the potentiality to start something new without any preconditions.

(3) If God can start (something new) without any preconditions, this exceeds and surpasses all world-immanent beginnings. Solely such a potentiality is unsurpassable, which constitutes the difference between Being and Nothingness in favour of being. The notion “omnipotence” refers to the fact that there is no greater power than the potentiality to constitute the difference between being and nothingness.

From these three steps, it follows that the notion “omnipotence” designates a unique characteristic of divine essence and reality. The importance of the *via eminentiae* lies in the fact that it designates characteristics of divine existence and reality, for which a “*maius cogitari non potest*” applies. In the following should be examined which implications for a description of the relation between God and world are included in this notion of omnipotence. The discussion will be structured in a way, which, first of all, examines which assumptions are not compatible with these implications. A first implication affects the semantic content and pragmatic use of the notion of omnipotence: The use of the notion “divine omnipotence” does only make sense in the context of a theology of creation. Only here – and nowhere else – God proves himself as omnipotent, because the question of to or not to be is at stake.

4. Divine Essence and Action – The Coincidence of God’s Existence and Divine Attributes

The relation between God and the world, which is based on divine omnipotence, can neither be enhanced nor be relativized: At all times, everything, that is, depends on its relation to God, who alone is able to constitute the difference between Being and nothingness in favour of beings. No existing entity has the ability to preserve this difference out of its own power at any point of time. Everything, that is, depends on God at all times in an unsurpassable way and without exception, since nothing can be without God. This aspect of the world's persistent relatedness to God, which has traditionally been expressed as "creatio continua", is by no means relativized in a relational-ontological perspective, but stressed according to its reference to the "creatio ex nihilo". Insofar, it is wrong to accuse this concept of affirming the claim of the world's "godlessness" or a loneliness of the world from God.²⁴

Nevertheless, the account on divine omnipotence and being-created of the world, which has been presented so far, is still challenged by the assumption of a relation between God and the world, which implies a divine intervention in world-immanent processes and structures. Proponents of this view point to "miracles", which allegedly cannot be explained in a different way than by an enhancement or a surpassing of God's relation to the world, which is designated by the notion of "being-created". However, such a hint overlooks that "omnipotence" is a "final notion" of ontology: Just as the difference between Being and nothingness does not know any grades or can never be surpassed in any way divine omnipotence does not know any grades. If the world in its totality "has to do" with God, how could there be something in the world which has even "more to do" with God?

Within this context, it is by no means necessary to deny that there are phenomena in the world, which cannot be explained with the help of scientific causality or conditionals or via the laws of nature (as e.g. a spontaneous cure of life-threatening diseases). However, natural laws do not define the relationship between world and God, but only world-immanent processes. There may well be jumps and gaps. But these are not jumps and gaps in the relationship between God and the world. All scientific theories about the development, the conservation and the end of the world are relevant for the totality of that, which is different from God and for everything that can be said about it concerning its difference

²⁴ Proponents of a relational ontology are occasionally accused of a "semi-deistic" position, cf. STOSCH, *Gott – Macht – Geschichte* [cf. fn. 17], 105: "Gott zwar nicht nur (im Sinne des Deismus) die Welt im Sinne der creatio ex nihilo einmal geschaffen hat und dann wie ein Uhrwerk weiterlaufen lässt, sondern auch im Sinne der creatio continua als der in allem Mächtige ständig am Laufen hält, ohne je in sie eingreifen zu können". This accusation reaches its peak in the criticism that "keine gelungene Explikation christlichen Glaubens zu bieten, sondern eher eine Welt zu beschreiben, die sich der Illusion verschrieben hat, Gott ein für alle Mal losgeworden zu sein".

from God. However, they do not affect this totality concerning its relationship to God or its relatedness to God.²⁵

Furthermore, it should be noted that certain concepts of miracles, which are popular in theology, end up with the contrary of that, what they initially aimed for: They assume a divine intervention in the structure of the world, which partially or in certain situations abrogates this very structure. Such concepts are not only incompatible with the world's dependency on God, which is unsurpassable and without exception. If such "miracles" – partially or in certain situations – abrogate the structure of the "order of creation" or the logic of the sense of human existence, freedom, and autonomy, then they relativize the dignity of these instances, whose conservation and importance they are allegedly meant to serve. Whoever demands such an intervention, formulates a contradiction between the means and the end of such an intervention: If a "miracle" is ipostant in order to reveal the sense-structure of the world by showing God's power over being and history, it would be contradictory that such a miracle depended on circumstances, under which this very sense structure would be abrogated together with the radical difference between creator and creature. Freedom, autonomy, and identity of created beings, which is founded in the being-created of the world, would be violated. Why? Because of God's standing up for freedom, autonomy and identity of created beings? Who seeks to gain anything for freedom by giving up or relativizing the radical difference between God and the world violates the constitutive structure and logic of the creation's freedom, autonomy, and identity and its own power over history. If theology argues for "miracles", which are meant to manifest a violation of the laws of nature, it still cannot plausibly argue for a change in the structure and logic of man's being-created, i.e. of his God-world-relation, with the help of these phenomena.

Provided one attributes the capability of transferring not-yet-being into being to God to call it from all contingent modes of existence have to be negated on this way. (Onto-)logically and theologically, it does only make sense to talk about divine omnipotence regarding the constitution of the difference between Being and nothingness in favour of beings, as has been shown above. From that, it does not follow that divine omnipotence would imply that God is able to let things become real, which are logically and/or ontologically (self-) contradictory. This would mean to assume that an unlimited notion of omnipotence implies that an al-

²⁵ This state of affairs is continuously neglected, when the help of scientific theories and their critique is used for a justification of a theological understanding of miracles. Cf. e.g. C.J. AMOR, *Renaissance des Wunders?! Zur Rehabilitierung einer beinahe totgesagten Kategorie*, in: SIEBENROCK/AMOR (Eds.), *Handeln Gottes* [cf. fn. 17], 265–302.

mighty subject can and is willing to realize something, which is logically impossible.²⁶ Again: One can only talk about omnipotence, where the constitution of being and nothing in favour of beings is in question – and nowhere else. This also is the very reason, why divine omnipotence cannot be used as object for mere mental exercises, as this is the case in the many discussion of the “paradox of the stone”.²⁷ The very intelligent and penetrative way of reasoning in this thought experiment (“Gedankenexperiment” makes it an attractive intellectual amusement. Nevertheless, this attraction does not change the fact that a theological engagement with it is a waste of time – although a very intelligent one.

On the basis of a relational-ontological notion of divine omnipotence, the divine attributes of “omni-benevolence”, “omniscience”, and “omni-presence” can be reconstructed as analog final notions. In a certain sense, they are nothing more than an unfolding of those determinations, which are already given with the notion of omnipotence. The notion “*divine omni-benevolence*” can immediately be derived from the statement that God constitutes the difference between Being and nothingness *in favour* of being and institutes this difference as a “beneficial” difference from nothingness as well as from God: It constitutes identity, autonomy, and freedom of the world that it depends on God in an unsurpassable way, but also in a distinction from him (and from nothingness) without any exception. There is no “greater” power, which might bring about something “more pleasant” than the one, which enables a being’s being-on-its-own, its being-a-purpose-for-its-own and constitutes its freedom out of nothing, without posing conditions in advance or afterwards. And there is no higher good for a creature than to be distinct from nothingness (existence), to be on its own (identity) and to be able to choose the purposes of its free actions, which are determined by itself (autonomy).

1. Divine omnipotence, which correlates with divine omni-benevolence, does not imply that God donates benefactions to man, which would surpass or limit his identity, autonomy, and freedom given to him before (for the sake of an even greater good).

2. As divine omnipotence excludes that something logically and/or ontologically (self-) contradictory becomes real in the world, God’s omni-benevolence excludes an intervention in the world, which would partially or in certain situations abrogate human freedom, autonomy and being as an end of itself.

²⁶ For a defense against such unreasonable assumption cf. A. LANGE, *Allmacht denken. Studien zur widerspruchsfreien Konzipierbarkeit eines fundamentalen Gottesprädikats*, St. Ottilien 2012. In this context, the studies J. BAUKE-RUEGG, *Allmacht Gottes. Systematisch-theologische Erwägungen zwischen Metaphysik, Postmoderne und Poesie*, Berlin–New York 1998; J. BAUKE-RUEGG, *Was heißt: ‘Ich glaube an den allmächtigen Gott?’* in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 97 (2000) 46–79 are also very helpful.

²⁷ Cf. LANGE, *Allmacht denken* [cf. fn. 26], 63–151.

3. As divine omnipotence does not have any grades, there also is no gradual more or less for divine omni-benevolence and its efficiency. This does not stand in any contradiction with the experience of special moments of happiness, for which religious people give thanks to God in a special way. However, pointing to such “experiences of grace” does not make a surpassing of the structure and the quality of the relation between God and world a plausible argument in any way. “Experiences of grace” do not surpass an existence, which is dignified with freedom, autonomy and through being-an-end-in-itself. Much more, these features manifest the impossibility to surpass such an exceptionally mode of existence.

With reference to divine omni-benevolence, one cannot lament the absence of a divine intervention in world-immanent processes as an expression of divine powerlessness or a reduction of God to inaction. Making human existence in freedom and as an end in itself possible is already something, whereupon nothing greater can be said about God. However, where existence, freedom, and autonomy are accepted as facts, their unavailability has to be accepted at the same time. It would mean to formulate a contradiction between means and ends, between way and purpose of a divine intervention – as in the case of miraculous interventions in the world – to violate this unavailability with the help of (allegedly) benevolent deeds.

Likewise, the notion of “*divine omniscience*” has to be seen in relation with divine omnipotence at first. Omnipotence consists in the constitution of the difference between Being and nothingness. Knowledge consists in knowing what is “really true” or what the primary and the final conditions of somebody are. Knowledge is always related to something real and true. Regarding the world, to recognize what is “really true” means: If God is that, without which is nothing, and if the world cannot be without God, then the world without God is not “real”. What the condition of the world “really” is, results from its dependency on God, from whom it really is distinguished. One can only gain such knowledge if one understands that the world would not be without the difference between Being and nothingness “Omniscient” is not, who possesses complete information about everything which is, which happens *in* the world, or which might occur.²⁸ Much

²⁸ This (miss-) understanding continuously applies for all interpretational attempts, which have been suggested by proponents of “analytic theology”. Cf. E. STUMP et al. (Eds.), *Göttliches Vorherwissen und menschliche Freiheit. Beiträge aus der aktuellen analytischen Religionsphilosophie*, Stuttgart 2015. Additionally, proponents of “open theism” show a striking incomprehension concerning analog statements about God. Mostly, a simple method of surpassing is used by applying potentiality for God in the sense of a linear enhancement, which is also possessed by human beings. The “*via negativa*” is omitted as well as the divine characteristic of “incomparability” or uniqueness, which is expressed by the “*via eminentiae*”. This also affects the study of J. GRÖSSL, *Die Freiheit des Menschen als Risiko Gottes. Der offene Theismus als Konzeption der Vereinbarkeit von göttlicher*

more, it means to be able to say what the primary and ultimate condition of the world truly is. This demands knowledge about the fact, wherein the difference between Being and nothingness, between reality and nihility really consists.²⁹ Is there a purpose, an end, an aim behind it? Man only knows that he does not know, whether the distinction between being and not-being implies more than to act in order to constitute existence in favour of being on the side of God. The knowledge of the “why” or the “for what” of this distinction and of its finality in favour of being is detracted from him.³⁰ This fact does not stand in contradiction with a notion of divine “providence”, if it is seen in relation to divine omnibenevolence and omnipotence. God’s providence includes all, what makes man able to lead a life in freedom, autonomy, and as being-an-end-in-itself. There is no “predetermination” of human existence, which could be “better” or “wiser”. And there is no better knowledge or no greater good for man than to count on the fact that he is different from nothingness, that he belongs to himself and that he can determine the purposes of his free actions on his own.

As divine omnipotence excludes that something becomes real in the world, which is logically and/or ontologically (self-) contradictory, and as his omnibenevolence excludes that he intervenes in the world by abrogating partially or in some situations the logic of human freedom, autonomy, and being-an-end-in-itself, so divine omniscience does neither consist in having information of events, which have not become real so far, nor in a foreknowledge of free human decisions. Future events and decisions are not real (so far), so that claims about their realization cannot really be true (at the moment). Who argues against this gets involved into the struggles between truth and reality. Who makes statements

Allwissenheit und menschlicher Freiheit, Münster 2015, which is otherwise marked by logical consistency.

²⁹ Here, “omniscience” and “omnipotence” can be characterized as final notions of theology (of creation), from which no consequences for the descriptions of world-immanent processes or divine influences on these events can be derived. Hence, many contradictory problems (as e.g. the compatibility between divine omniscience and human freedom) just disappear, which have driven theology into finally aporetic discussions until contemporary times. Cf. e.g. the discussion between T. SCHÄRTL, Gottes Ewigkeit und Allwissenheit, in: *Theologie und Philosophie* 88 (2013) 321–339, and J. GRÖSSL, Schöpfung, Ewigkeit und Allwissenheit, in: *Theologie und Philosophie* 89 (2014) 200–214.

³⁰ Occasionally, this question is answered with the formula that God wants to create “co-lovers” (according to JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *Ordinatio* III, d. 32, q. unica n. 6: “[...] deus vult habere condiligentes”). If God was love himself and if the motive of transcending oneself onto something else belonged to love, then this would also be the “for what” and “why” of human existence. However, if the will for co-love (or co-lovers) is already fulfilled according to an Inner-Trinitarian understanding of God or is not based on a lack or need within God, not much is gained with that expression. Still, the “why” or “for what” of this “co-love” is not fathomed.

about future free decisions of a human being and claims truth for these statements, can only do so on the basis of existing determinations, which take away the character of free decisions from future decisions, and that would mean that they were not “truly free”. Who makes such an attempt, gets involved into a struggle between truth and freedom. To get involved into such a struggle is clear evidence for the inconsistency and incoherence of the concrete claimed position. This also applies for the attempt to prosecute a claim for a prevention of human suffering by referring to divine “omniscience” or to regard divine omniscience and omni-benevolence as falsified, if suffering really happens. Events, which will happen in the future, are not part of divine or human knowledge – especially, when they proceed from free decisions and actions of human beings.

Only when the notions “providence”, “omnipotence”, and “divine omni-benevolence” are related to each other, the ultimate “real truth” comes in sight, in which man primarily and finally, i.e. at all times can trust in, because it is true and real at all times. Divine omniscience and providence has a future aspect only insofar, as it encompasses everything, which is true and real at every point of time. The sentence “Anytime God knows, what is true and real” means in this case: “God knows, what is true and real at every point in time.” What is really true at all times is valid without any restrictions. One can count on it and it is resistant against all deception and disappointment. Man can ultimately rely on that, which is true at all times. Theologically, divine “providence” is really understood only then, when it is related to that, on which man can ultimately rely on at every point in time: that God will constantly decide the difference between Being and nothingness in favour of man in the moment of death.³¹

Summarizing these considerations concerning the divine attributes, it can finally be noted, how divine “omnipresence” might be understood. This does not mean that God is everywhere, i.e. that he can be encountered in the world at every

³¹ The mutual conditioning of divine omnipotence, omni-benevolence and omniscience also has consequences for an examination of the theodicy problem. Most times, it is understood as a problem of contradiction, which results from the innocent suffering of man before an all-powerful, in every respect benevolent God, who knows about future events. Relativizing divine attributes or an “acceptance” of suffering by God for the sake of a divinely willed higher good are the most discussed strategies for a solution, which aim at a mitigation of the problem (cf. K. v. STOSCH, *Theodizee*, Paderborn 2013). Such assumptions are nothing more than a “disimprovement” of the problem. Suppose, it would be an expression of divine benevolence to pose man in immeasurable suffering for the sake of a greater good: Would it not just stress the cruelty of the suffering once more instead of mitigating it, if a divine purpose were behind it? And what would be a possible candidate for such a “highest good” after all? Moreover, it is principally questionable, whether one can do justice to an existential human problem by solving compatibility problems concerning divine attributes. Would such a solution of cognitive problems prevent anybody from despairing because of his immeasurable suffering?

place and at every time, but that he is “close” to everything, that is, in the same way. At every place and at every time, everything, that is, depends on God in an unsurpassable way – in life as in death. In this sense, there is no godless time and no godless place in the world, because everything, which is created, cannot be anytime and anywhere without God.

The “beneficial” difference between creator and creature implies that relations and differences, which are characteristic for created entities, cannot be attributed to God without further refinement. Presumably, a violation of this rule is at the origin of those problems, which appear in connection with the popular distinction between God’s “being” and his actions. In the realm of human experience, it is possible to distinguish between existing and acting. A human being can be present and inactive at the same time. It can pause in his action and still “be” there. Things are different, if it is not allowed to distinguish between acting and being. In the realm of created things, a magnet is already effective through its mere existence and its effective power is not added to its existence afterwards. In the sphere of emotions, rage only appears in the mode of being-in-rage. Where somebody *does* something out of rage, this rage is not surpassed or enhanced by the actions following from it. Much more, his rage is revealed therein. What about the sphere of the relation between God and man?³²

If we say about God that he “is” the creator by constituting the difference between Being and nothingness *in favour* of beings (in biblical language: that he is “love“, cf. 1 John 4, 8), so that man lives in and out of this relation of free and unconditioned respect, than God’s relationship to the world “is” already his mode of action (and vice versa). In this relationship, God’s being is at work. In this relationship, the coincidence of being and acting is realized. Then it is idle to wait for divine deeds, which will surpass the way how he is turned towards man from the very beginning of the world. If divine action and divine being coincide, then God has already *permanently* decided the difference between Being and nothingness, between life and death in favour of life. This is the core feature of God’s turning towards the world. It is unsurpassable as well as irreversible.

By choosing an anthropomorphic way of talking for this “onto-theo-logical” state of affairs, one could say: God has decided on man. Or rather: God has committed himself to man. God has no other and greater power than the force of this decisive turning towards the world. It does not preserve man from the fact that he finally will die. It does not prove its strength in bringing a new life to man, which again is threatened by death. Who comes back to life in a miraculous way

³² Karl Barth has expressed a fitting answer in the following striking formula: “Wesen und Wirken Gottes sind ... nicht zweierlei, sondern eins. Das Wirken Gottes ist das Wesen Gottes in seinem Verhältnis zu der von ihm unterschiedenen, zu schaffenden oder geschaffenen Wirklichkeit“, K. BARTH, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik I/1*, Zürich 1986, 391.

after having encountered death from face to face, comes back to a life, where death awaits him again. Such “miracles” do not change anything concerning the deadly struggle between life and death. In this life, death will always win. The promise of creation given by God aims at an end with death’s defeat. God decides the struggle between life and death in favour of life *in the moment of death*.³³ To count on this ensures that the belief in a God, who is radically distinct from the world, is by no means without consequences for a life in this world.

(Translated by Martin Blay & Judith Krain)

³³ For further details cf. H.-J. HÖHN, *Versprechen. Das fragwürdige Ende der Zeit*, Würzburg 2003.