

Creation and Reality

Pages 60-82 (Michael Welker) - Analysis and Summary by Jeffrey Lee

I. Overview of Presentation

II. Problems and Solutions

Overall problems

Problem Description
More and more people are turning away from belief in a personal figure who exists over and above this world, who has brought forth both himself and all reality, and who controls and defines “everything” without distinction (p. 1).
A whole array of critical encounters and movements are thus collaborating in the collapse of this religious form of power. Yet instead of contentment and rejoicing at the success, perplexity and discouragement seem to be proliferating (p.1).
The new approaches to biblical theology also proceed from the assumption that many of the biblical traditions’ concepts and sets of concepts...which once possessed great orienting power, have now been so dulled by multiple accommodations to prevailing habits of thought and specific conceptions of rationality and moral systems that they function only as ciphers (p. 4).
This dulling of fundamental theological concepts is fatal not only to religious existence and the churches. It also robs cultures and societies of fundamental sources of orientation and important possibilities for self-criticism . Religion then becomes empty , boring, vapid, and banal, and so the augurs of the spirit of the age lament theology’s “lack of cultural competence” (p. 4).

Overall Solutions from The New Biblical Theology

Solution Description
Inasmuch as the new approaches to biblical theology, in their search for relative commonalities and continuities, do not seek to dissolve the differences in biblical traditions, they gain bases for realistically reconstructing complex theological and key religious and sets of concepts. They put themselves in a position where they are able to restore importance and orienting power to complex theological concepts that have had their cutting edge dulled by “natural” and so-called philosophical theologies in favor or reductionistic clarity (p. 4).
Instead theology must direct all of its powers toward uncovering the achievements of the central contents of faith in providing substantive orientation in diverse historical contexts (p. 4).

III. Creation, The Image of God, and the Mandate of Dominion

Central position of human beings in the whole process of creation was in any case regarded as a fortunate privilege, or as a distinction – perhaps tied to certain moral responsibilities.

Results:

- major ecological crisis
- systematic underprivileging and oppression of women

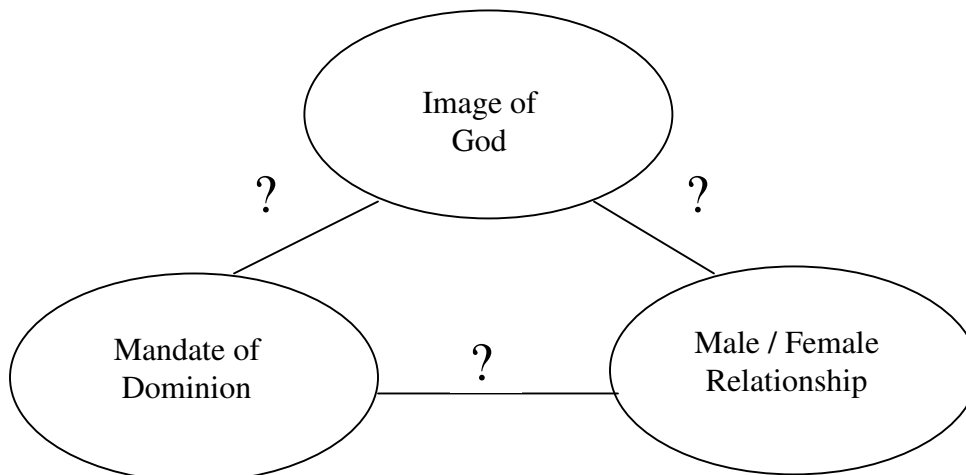
Implementation of Welker's methodology

The interconnection between the image of God and the mandate of dominion as that to which human beings are ordained. This interconnection has in various ways been theologically glossed over and repressed.

Creation, the Image of God, and the Mandate of Dominion	
False Abstraction(s): (pp. 61-64)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Gen 1 - over-simplified description of equality of male and female <i>or</i> over-simplified description of human as master and possessor of nature❖ Gen 2 - over-simplified description of tilling the earth <i>or</i> over-simplified description of inequality of males and females
Issues(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Forced to choose one or the other➤ Unable to relativize based on historical lines

Image of God - Questions:

- Does the image of God refer to the relation of created humankind as male and female?
- Does the image of God refer to the so-called mandate of dominion?
- Does the image of God refer to the connection of both aspects, the connection of the relation of man and woman with the mandate of dominion?



Creation, the Image of God, and the Mandate of Dominion	
False Abstraction(s): (pp. 65-66)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ I-Thou partnership ❖ The analogy between God and man... is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation.
Issues(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ dialectal nature of description ➤ only focuses on I-Thou relation in the Gen 1 account ➤ relies on Gen 2 for exact determination of relation of man and woman, ordination of to the image of God ➤ patriarchal conception of hierarchy selected

Others not discussed in detail today:

- **Jurgen Moltmann** - social doctrine of the Trinity – social doctrine connects the image of God to the relationship between human beings, and not to the mandate of dominion (pp. 66-67).
- **Phyllis Bird** - sexual differentiation and biological reproduction are the decisive viewpoint of the partnership and image of God - doe not tie biological reproduction to the mandate of dominion (pp. 67-69).

Creation, the Image of God, and the Mandate of Dominion	
Updated Theology:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bird's emphasis on the connections between biological reproduction, equality of sexes and powerful domination ➤ Connection between biological reproduction and cultural development ➤ The ordinance placing human beings and animals in community of solidarity and the resulting problems ➤ Klaus Koch's use of <i>rdh</i> meaning "guiding, pasturing, fostering behavior of human beings toward animals" ➤ The mandate of dominion serving to impart a differentiated order to the "world of nourishment" shared by human beings and animals ➤ It is God's will that human beings stand in a community of solidarity with animals ➤ As God's image, humans stand over against animals and extend God's solidarity and care to what is creaturely.
Problem(s) addressed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ subjugation with the so-called mandate of dominion with using Gen 1 ➤ modernity's well-known triumphalistic anthropology / expansion of humanity
Solution(s) presented:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ conflict-resolution in area of nourishment– so-called mandate of dominion serves to impart a differentiated order ➤ preserves the concept of an image, that is, only a likeness. ➤ extends beyond humankind's directly looking out for its own interests ➤ preservation of creation in its complex structures of interdependence

	➤ overall, he accounts for the relationships between the image of God, so-called mandate of dominion and the relationship between the sexes.
Problem(s) Remaining:	❖ human beings ignore and misuse the mandate of dominion, and that <i>imago dei</i> gets lost under the power of sin ❖ ?

IV. Creation and Sin

General question: Where do the abstract idea of omnipotence and other primitive conceptions of power find their foundation and support? (p. 73)

Creation and Sin	
False Abstraction(s): (pp. 73)	❖ Gen 3:22a...gives witness and religious confirmation to the source and content of humankind's autonomy. ❖ Hegal - one "moment" of creation contains "not only the source of evil, the act of eating the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and thereby falling away from the image of God... but also the principle of the return to that image." ❖ "good and evil for humans" describes what is beneficial or detrimental to life ❖ explanation for the source consciousness or of autonomy and self-determination
Issues(s):	➤ too narrow ➤ strongly oriented on the human individual ➤ fails to account for the function of humankind in its origination...that finds its fulfillment in the "life of the community" and is related to that life!

Creation and Sin	
Updated Theology	➤ fact of Adam's isolation (p. 79) ➤ through the fall autonomous human beings have loosed themselves from the community of creation, from the association of relations of interdependence and intended by God (p.80). ➤ because of this, human beings fall into a situation structured by enormous delusion. ➤ knowledge of creation and sin cultivates sensitivity to this collective powerlessness and self-disempowerment. It discloses the connection between the relative power and intra-creaturely self-isolation of the human species. ➤ human beings have decided what is beneficial to life and what is detrimental to life from its own simultaneously powerful and extremely limited perspective.

Problem(s) addressed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ illusion that human beings know and enact what is beneficial and detrimental to life (p.81) ➤ movement toward isolation
Solution(s) presented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ realistic, biblical oriented theology of creation is indispensable in fending off false promises of solutions ➤ same applies for honing the eye for productive approaches to paths out of danger (p. 82) ➤ biblically oriented perception of creation sharpens and enriches the perception of the “realities in which we live” ➤ Biblically oriented knowledge of creation cultivates sensitivity to the relations of power, relations of powerlessness, and the manifold ways in which two are interlaced both in heaven and on earth. ➤ Biblical oriented knowledge of creation heightens the experience of human distress – but it also sharpens the perception of the divine powers whose goal is the deliverance of human beings
Problem(s) remaining:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ problems still do not have a specific theology to address the complex issues at hand ❖ ?

V. Welker’s Embedded Assertions Concerning Good Theology

For Welker, good theology takes into account a Biblical-theological orientation, an interdisciplinary approach and a pluralistic approach.

For Welker, good theology must be a specific theology that accounts for the inherent complexities of the target issue or problem. In other words, his theology is not based on false abstractions.

For Welker, good theology restores importance and orienting power to complex theological concepts that have had their cutting edge dulled by “natural” and so-called philosophical theologies in favor of reductionistic clarity.

For Welker, good theology, inasmuch as the new approaches to biblical theology search for relative commonalities and continuities, does not seek to dissolve the differences in biblical traditions. Instead, good theology gains bases for realistically reconstructing complex theological and key religious and sets of concepts.

VI. Discussion Questions

1. Which of the false abstractions does Welker move more effectively toward a transformed abstraction (Creation, Image of God and Mandate of Domion OR Creation and Sin) and why?
2. How do the outputs from his methodology handle the same critique that when applied to his updated theology? Does Welker make any progress by applying his methodology in arriving at each new theology?
3. What is another example of a false abstraction that should be addressed using Welker's methodology? Does Welker's methodology help us move from a false abstraction to a transformed abstraction? If not, what improvements should be made to his methodology?