

WHY DO THEOLOGIANs SPEAK ABOUT GOD WHEN THEY SPEAK ABOUT HUMANS?

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Abstract. The paper explores the definition of the human person from the standpoint of third-person-perspective and first-person-perspective, arguing that three biblical foci on humans, expressing the so-called “first-person-perspective” of the belief in God, should be considered. This perspective is central for the biblical view of humans, comprising the issues of creation, prayer and grace. As a consequence, it is shown how belief in God shapes and modifies traditional anthropology.

Keywords: Theology, anthropology, third-person-perspective, first-person-perspective, creation, prayer, grace, Paul

With this question I formulate the specificity of the scientific discipline “theo-logy”: Theologians speak about God when they speak about humans and humanity - or at least they should speak about God. They should follow the psalmist who asks “What are human beings ...” and then he addresses himself to God in his prayer: “... that you remember them?” (Ps 8,5). Those for whom “religion is nothing but ... the mirroring of humanity through itself” or with other words, for whom “God is” (nothing but) “the mirror of humans”¹ will denounce this as unenlightened or unscientific. They - naturally - *must not* speak about God when they want to speak adequately about humans.

Anthropology is an interdisciplinary science. Today the main discussion is to what extent natural sciences, biology above all, are the leading disciplines in this field, or to what extent human sciences, such as psychology, history, sociology, ethnology, literature, philosophy have an important position in this interdisciplinary dialogue as well. What is the relation between physical, cultural and historical dimensions in anthropology? Theology that claimed the right of definition of the academic discourse about humans and humanity for centuries definitely has no more a leading position. Theology is rather an observer or a questioner at the margins of academic discourses today.

I. Third-person-perspectives and first-person-perspectives on humans: A fundamental theological reflection

The answers to the question “what is humanity” given from the perspectives of the different scholarly disciplines are very different. The neurobiologist Wolf Singer has proposed to make a fundamental difference between statements about

¹ L. FEUERBACH, *Das Wesen des Christentums I*, Akademie, Berlin 1956, 122 (all translations into English are mine, unless otherwise noted).