

THE THEOLOGY OF CREATION IN VITO MANCUSO'S RADICAL THEOLOGY

ABSTRACT

Vito Mancuso, a young Italian theologian of lay inspiration, has been causing a great deal of theological unrest within Italy's conservative quarters because of his radical program intended to re-found Christianity in order for it to be understood by contemporary men and women. Mancuso's concern to re-anchor Christian theology in the experience of today's people drove him to affirm the fundamental importance of matter as source of everything. Thus, matter is the mother of all existing realities which include the universe, nature and even the soul. In other words, Mancuso proposes a theology from below which seeks to re-interpret the basic teachings of Christianity in a way which sheds light on the experience of today's world. This theological program includes the traditional doctrine of creation, which in Mancuso acquires a new facet as it is described in terms related to his conviction that the origin of everything should be understood in material terms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Vito Mancuso's theology of creation includes themes such as continuous creation, creation and freedom as well as the relationship between creation and incarnation (but also the cross) in close connection to his perspective on Christ and his reinterpretation of the concept of the Son of God. Creation, therefore, is not necessarily a historical event but rather an interpretation of evolution because, while science fosters data and information to be analyzed scientifically, theology (as well as philosophy) makes use of these data in order to create a worldview. This is actually Mancuso's most important contribution

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to contemporary theology, namely his attempt to offer a comprehensive explanation of reality based on his materialistic-experiential perspective on the world in its entirety. Mancuso is aware that today's world suffers from severe fragmentation to the point that an endless chain of theoretical explanations of the world tend to create an environment of sheer distrust and negativity. This is why his perspective on the world, which seeks to put traditional theology behind the scene in favor of an explanation which makes sense to the expectations of today's people, is an effort to provide a unified view of reality in a world which is divided among a huge variety of different interpretations. To conclude, Mancuso's theology of creation is an attempt to explain the world in a way which renders justice to the experience of today's men and women, based on a radical reassessment of traditional theology from a starting point which is deeply rooted in our historical existence. This paper presents an analysis of Mancuso's perspective on this notion of creation as reflected in his *Il dolore innocente* ("Innocent Suffering"), *Rifondazione della fede* ("Rebuilding Faith"), and *L'anima e il suo destino* ("The Soul and Its Destiny").

Mancuso's thought is an attempt to rebuild the doctrines of Christianity based on a theology "from below" (King 1982:174-176). This phrase is crucially important because it appears recurrently throughout Mancuso's works as an indication that everything stems from the natural reality of the universe. This is why, for him, life itself and the very essence of what he calls "the vital breadth" are inextricably connected with the dust of matter, which seems to postulate a similarity – if not even an identity – between the spiritual and the material realms (Gudmundsen 2009:45-48). In Mancuso, life is possible only because it comes "from below" or from the dust of the universe which contains within itself an infinite potentiality for life. In evident opposition to traditional Christianity, Mancuso postulates the impossibility of an intelligent plan which comes "from above", so the reality of God in and beyond nature is rendered useless. Intelligence does not come "from above" and neither is it the result of an ingeniously devised plan; intelligence originates in the dust or in the matter which forms the universe and is plenary accumulated within the human being (Mancuso 2007:12-13). Creation in Mancuso is ultimately a discourse about the origin of the human being and it must contain the fundamental awareness of man's indelible connection with matter as a proof that his destiny accepts the reality of death as a positive aspect of life in nature.

2. CREATION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND SUFFERING

As a result of his preoccupation to draft an image of creation for the men and women of the twenty first century, Mancuso's first attempt is to deal with creation from a philosophical perspective. Thus, if approached from a

philosophical angle, the idea of creation and especially the power to create is no longer ascribed to God but to man, even to the point that God is a creation of man (Hallward 2006:127-158). This approach does not hinder him from using Scripture in order to make his point, and the passage he chose for explaining what he means by creation is Revelation 13:8. He notes from the very beginning that the original Greek rendering of the text allows for at least two translations which result in totally different interpretations. The first – which for Mancuso is predominantly Calvinist and biased to promote predestination – goes like this: “everyone whose name has not been written in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain” (the English Standard Version). The second – much older in Mancuso's view and clearly his favorite – reads “all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world” (the New International Version). Mancuso seems to favor the second translation because it provides a clear connection between the doctrine of creation and the Lamb. This is crucial in Mancuso because, on the one hand, creation is not a doctrine but an idea which can and should be discussed philosophically. It is clear at this point that his understanding of creation departs from the traditional understanding of creation in the sense that his perspective on creation is informed “from below” which is in total opposition to traditional Christianity's reading of creation “from above”. This is why, in Mancuso, creation is not an aspect of theology but of philosophy. On the other hand, however, Mancuso prefers the second translation which links the Lamb to the creation of the world because the Lamb represents Christ and Christ is a concept which cannot be properly understood without the life and works of Jesus of Nazareth. What is important though at this point has to do with Mancuso's underlining that Christ, or rather the idea of Christ, must also be understood in philosophical terms. When he says that Christ should be understood in philosophical terms, Mancuso actually means that he must be seen anthropologically, an idea which opens theology to a philosophical-anthropological perspective (Gustafson 1994:69-70). In other words, the Lamb is the idea of Christ but the idea of Christ becomes clearer when we attach it to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. So the Lamb carries with it the anthropological essence of Jesus of Nazareth, who was a mere man. It is here, however, that one must pay full attention to Mancuso's reasoning: in addition to the fact that the Lamb should be understood anthropologically and in connection with Jesus of Nazareth for that matter, one must not lose sight of the idea of Christ which, at least in traditional theology – and Mancuso points to Nicaea's *homoousios* – introduces the notion of divinity into the concept of Christ. To resume, the Lamb is understood with reference to Jesus of Nazareth (so the Lamb is seen anthropologically) but at the same time one must not avoid the notion of divinity which is inserted within the link between the Lamb and Jesus the man. To conclude, as the Lamb is connected with

Jesus the man through the divinity of Christ, Mancuso suggests that the Lamb contains the idea of divinity (with reference to Christ) but both the Lamb and Christ's divinity must be understood exclusively in anthropological terms (because Christ, who points to the Lamb, cannot be detached from the human reality of the man Jesus of Nazareth). Having established that there is a clear connection between the Lamb, Christ and Jesus, Mancuso tries to find their common philosophical denominator which, at least in his mind, is the idea as well as the reality of suffering (Mancuso 2002:154-156).

Suffering is essential for Mancuso because it describes the core of human experiences. Man exists in this world and regardless how life is understood in various quarters, the common element of all interpretations of human life is suffering (Pinckaers 1995:24). This is why, in Mancuso, suffering becomes some sort of hermeneutical key for the interpretation of human life and experience in the world but also the idea of creation. Nevertheless, as suffering is essential to humanity and humanity is the reality which informs both the idea of Christ and that of the Lamb, it means that suffering should be the way through which we understand both Christ and the Lamb. Christ, however, carries with it the idea of divinity, so suffering is automatically connected with divinity and with God. It should be stressed here that Mancuso is not interested in seeing the divinity of Christ in traditional terms which defend the metaphysical ontology of God; on the contrary, his intention is to connect the very idea of creation to the reality of man's historical existence through the reality of suffering. So Jesus the man helps us understand the idea of Christ – which traditionally is divine – while Christ tells us how the Lamb should be seen. On the other hand, Jesus the man suffered which means that the idea of suffering is inherent to the notion of Christ, so suffering cannot be detached from the idea of God. In Mancuso, however, it is not God who informs human suffering as in traditional theology but it is suffering which defines God. To be more precise, in Mancuso, suffering tells us how we should understand the idea of God. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that the relationship between Jesus the man, the Christ and the Lamb is explained only with reference to the creation of the world, so the way we should understand creation is given by how we see the relationship between humanity and God based on the idea of suffering. It is clear in Mancuso that man's existence is characterized by suffering but suffering also defines the idea of God, so God can be said to suffer too. Jesus the man suffered, Christ the God suffered, which means that the idea of the Lamb captures within it the suffering of both man and God. In other words, as both man and God have suffered from the creation of the world, suffering is the very essence of reality, human and divine. However, the fact that the Lamb encompasses humanity and divinity at the same time through the idea of suffering and suffering is the hermeneutical key for understanding reality "from below", it means that divinity is not a different type of reality as compared with the reality of man's experience; divinity is just an aspect of man's experience

in the world. To be sure, God is not a being which is different from the human being; God is just an aspect of the human being. This is an interesting parallel with Miguel de Unamuno's conviction that the individual person, which is well acquainted to suffering, is actually God (de Unamuno 1954:203-208). In Mancuso though, God encapsulates the idea of suffering from the creation of the world, so the reality of man's existence in the world has always been characterized by suffering because the idea of God defines man's existence as inescapably linked to suffering. But as the Lamb was slain and the Lamb has within it the idea of God due to the notion of Christ, it follows that God was also sacrificed because Jesus the man accepted to suffer for others. For Mancuso, this is a clear indication that God should be conceived in terms of withdrawal or even removal: the more we understand the suffering of Jesus the man, the more we understand that the idea of God withdraws from the scene; the more we see Jesus dying for his fellow human beings, the more we understand that God should be removed from our understanding of the world. This is evident in Mancuso because the Lamb and the idea of Christ, which includes that of God, must be understood in anthropological terms, namely based on the humanity of Jesus, the man from Nazareth (Mancuso 2002:157).

In Mancuso's thought, the key to understanding creation is Jesus the man, who suffered on a cross. Human suffering is the very aspect which helps us understand creation and there is no creation without suffering. There is no creation without seeing a suffering Christ which tells us about a suffering God. To put it positively, creation is understanding that Christ and God suffer because they are both included in the notion of the Lamb; Christ and God, however, as included in the idea of the slain Lamb present us with an image of human suffering. Creation is understanding that the essence of humanity, the very core of man's existence in the world is suffering. Suffering, however, is not the only feature of humanity; suffering cannot be detached from the cross on which Jesus the man died for the benefit of his fellow men and women, so creation is understanding that human existence is indeed made up of the special blend of suffering and love. In this respect, Mancuso's attempt to bring God down to earth by connecting the idea of God to the reality of human suffering and love places him very close to process theology (Trethowan 1985:80-88). In other words, the key to successfully understanding creation comes "from below", from the reality of suffering and love which characterize human existence. The more we think in these anthropological terms, the less we see God in traditional terms. In Mancuso, creation must be understood from the standpoint of nature, because nature is the context of human existence and experience. Love and suffering happen in nature, so they must be understood from a naturalistic point of view. The same is true about God, who must also be seen from a naturalistic perspective. But the more we see God through the eyes of nature, the more we understand that he is absent from nature. God disappears from this naturalistic depiction of creation but we are left

with the image of “the Son”, namely that of Jesus the man, who suffered and died on the cross, the person who loved other so much that he was believed to be God. So, in Mancuso, true divinity is nothing but true, selfless, loving and suffering humanity. The God of creation – so praised by traditional theology and Nicaea’s *homoousios* – is nothing but an idea which helps us understand that creation is nature, and nature is natural. At the same time, we should understand that factually this God does not exist within nature. We understand the idea of God only by looking at Jesus the man, who suffered and died for others due to his own free choice. Thus, in Mancuso, creation is not only love and suffering but also freedom, an idea which is not restricted to Mancuso’s thought (Southgate 2008:35-39). In other words, creation is not a physical reality but rather a spiritual state of mind; the God of creation is not the traditional being who lives beyond history and creation itself but rather an energy which gives itself to others in love, suffering and freedom. If creation is a spiritual reality which exists within the physical reality of man’s historical existence in the world, it follows that the laws which govern the physical world must be identical with the laws which govern the spiritual world. This also means, according to Mancuso, that there is no real distinction between the spirit and matter because this is the conclusion which was reached by contemporary physics, again according to Mancuso. The common feature of both spirit and matter though seems to be the energy, a concept which Mancuso applies to a significant range of ideas from God to cosmos and nature. Creation must fit within this equation which includes the spirit, energy and matter so, to draw the line, for Mancuso creation is the result of love and suffering. Jesus the man proved that love and suffering are truly meaningful only when exercised in total freedom, so creation is freedom. Freedom, however, is characterized by contradiction because it generates both good and evil, as Mancuso is keen to underline. For him then, creation is the spiritual state of the human existence which accepts that love and suffering should be lived out in total freedom irrespective of its contradictory nature that can result in good and evil. Thus, because, the final result of freedom can be either the good or the evil or both, and freedom is the essence of creation through suffering and love, creation is ultimately a message which must be deciphered by every human being during his or her journey within the life of this world (Mancuso 2002:138-161).

3. CREATION BETWEEN MYTHOLOGY AND BIOLOGY

Mancuso is convinced that that traditional doctrine of creation is wrong in many respects, so it badly needs serious revision. For instance, he cannot accept the fact that, in traditional theology, man is presented as having been created good, in a relationship of friendship with God and also in harmony with

himself and nature in general. This is why Mancuso asks – both rhetorically and ironically – what kind of holiness is that which despises God from the very start, with reference to the fact that man committed sin and disobeyed God the very first moment when he had the chance to act like this. Something must have been wrong there or something is definitely wrong with traditional theology and its interpretation since man – who was created good in all respects – sinned against God at such an early stage of his life. One can hardly ignore Mancuso's ironical remark that today one could speak of a fabrication defect, which is for him an indication of the fact that man's creation, at some point, went wrong. What Mancuso actually cannot accept is the goodness of man as connected with creation. The fact that man sinned is in Mancuso's mind a confirmation of the fact that creation either went wrong or it should be drastically reinterpreted. His problem with traditional theology has to do with the fact that the account of creation is connected to the doctrine of original sin which, for Mancuso, are both myths. In other words, if for traditional theology, both creation and man's fall are historical events, for Mancuso they function as myths. In Mancuso there is no creation and no fall, which is also true of pagan philosophies where man was created evil by evil gods (Smith 1992:65). The difference between a historical event and a mythological account does not consist of their particular claims of truth because both the historical event and the mythological story can be equally true. Myth, however, is something more than just a mere event which happened in history. For Mancuso, myth talks about truth in a much poignant way because while the historical event presents us with something which happened only once, myth brings forward realities which occur literally every day. So, creation is not a historical event which reportedly happened once in the distant past; Mancuso is sure that there must be something else attached to it, so he believes that creation is a myth which constantly reveals truths about the reality of man's daily experience in the world, an idea which is also explored by Virginia Hamilton (Hamilton 1988:x). It is important to understand that Mancuso can only see creation as a myth because it is his most inner conviction that myth manages to convey truth in a far better way than any particular historical event. But in order to convey truth, any historical event must be interpreted so it appears to be much better if one approached creation as a myth, not as historical event, since the quality of telling the truth is much stronger in mythological explanations than in the mere interpretation of a historical event. In Mancuso, the quality of truth delivery in myth is much stronger than the interpretation of a particular historical event because, while the interpretation of historical events is predominantly individualistic, myth is the result of the thinking process of an entire generation of people. In other words, myth does not provide us with one singular interpretation but with a wide range of various interpretations which make up a mythological system which is eventually called – quite inadequately

as far as Mancuso is concerned – religion. Reading Mancuso's explanation the other way around, it follows that religion is a conglomerate of myths so the doctrine of creation in traditional theology should be seen as a myth – as a religious myth, to be more precise – and not as a historical event. Thus, according to Mancuso, one can understand more about creation if seen as a myth for the simple reason that it can convey more truth than singularizing interpretations of historical events (Mancuso 2005:96, 84-85).

So it is all about truth at the end of the day and, as Mancuso has no doubt about the fact that myths can convey truth better than interpretations of historical events, it is clear that the doctrine of creation should be read as a myth. Myths, however, can only be understood symbolically because symbols point to realities which happen in real life. When it comes to real life, Mancuso resorts to science and it is only scientific facts which can eventually decipher the factual realities of life that are presented to us symbolically as myths. In other words, what is traditionally said to be the doctrine of creation needs to be seriously reevaluated from the perspective of myth but also from the standpoint of science. This means that one cannot adequately interpret and understand creation without reading it as a myth and, at the same time, bear in mind the newest discoveries of science. To put it simply, creation stands between myth and science, so in Mancuso, it is always that myth and science inform our understanding of creation, as in David C. Korten (Korten 2006:266). Consequently, it is important to see what is the meaning of creation given the fact that it must be understood mythologically and scientifically. For Mancuso, the account of creation in itself does not shed significant light on what lies beneath it unless connected with the presentation of man's fall. It is clear that in Mancuso both creation and man's fall should not be taken as historical events but rather as myths which carry with them certain symbols of how the world is constituted and of how it works. Creation talks about who the man really is within his historical existence but man's fall points – rather surprisingly – not to man himself but to God and his actions. It is clear that the account of man's fall presents man's disobedience to God who created him but, in Mancuso, neither the fact that God created man nor that man sinned against God is really important. The fact that God created man seems to be merely an indication that man does exist in this world while his sin against God reveals that his is far from perfect. The factuality of man's existence and his imperfection are not vital for Mancuso because they are both evident and must be taken for granted. What is really important has to do with the fact that God is said not to have intervened despite his omniscience and omnipotence. This indicates that God was absent in man's fall and, as the account of man's fall is a myth, the whole thing must be interpreted symbolically. So it is not crucial to see how God created man because sciences give us all the information we need; likewise, it is not vital to understand why man sinned against God because this is only a presentation of man's imperfection. It is absolutely decisive, however,

to explain why God did not intervene in man's fall. The fact that he did not intervene shows that he was not there and the fact that he was not there tells us something symbolical about God's presence in history. So, the fact that God was not present in man's fall points to the fact that God is never present in history. Man's fall and creation for that matter are symbols of God's absence from the natural world. The belief in God's absence from history places Mancuso among post-structuralist attempts to define the idea of God, which were investigated by Timothy Bewes (Bewes 2002:57-58). God is never present in man's historical existence and neither is he present in nature in general. As strange as it may sound, Mancuso's belief is that creation reveals God's absence from the world as well as the fact that one cannot talk about God with reference to the natural world. Any discourse about God is possible only in connection with the spiritual world, which is the world of the spirit. To be sure, creation teaches us that the only way to talk about God is to think of him in terms of the spirit – the spirit of man or the spirit of humanity – so creation tells us that God is the creation of the human spirit (Mancuso 2005:97-99).

It should be clear by now that in Mancuso creation is not a doctrine but rather a religious philosophy with mythological symbols which underlines the impossibility of God's existence in the natural world and, at the same time, highlights the spiritual aspect of God's existence as the result of man's spiritual endeavors. So God does not exist in nature which means that he only exists in man's spirit. Creation, therefore, is left without the presence of God in the world and because of God's actual absence from nature, the only criterion which regulates our interpretation of creation is biology. Man exists in the world, and it is evident that both the human being and the world itself are physical realities. Man, however, is more than just physical; he is also biological and it should be stressed here that in Mancuso the biological reality of man is actually the home of man's spiritual capacities. The spirit cannot be detached from the biological constitution of the human person and neither can man be separated from the world around him. This is why, for Mancuso, the world is equivalent to man's biological body; both the world and man's body share the same "dust". Man is "dust" and he will return to the "dust" of the world, so there is a permanent connection between man's biological constitution and the physical composition of the world. In this particular context, creation is the acceptance of man's mortality but also the fact that man's existence cannot be detached from the physical constitution of the world, which calls for a serious investigation about the relationship between creation and mortality, as in Wojciech Szypuła (Szypuła 2007:338-340). Thus, creation teaches us that man is from the world and it will stay like that forever. At the same time, creation teaches us that as man is irrevocably bound to originate from the world but also return in the world, evolutionary biology is the key to the correct interpretation of man's existence. One could say with Mancuso that creation is evolution, so the account of creation must be accepted in evolutionary terms.

This underlines that creation does not only talk about man's life but also about his death. There is an indestructible wedlock between life and death; there is no creation without life and death because the life of certain beings means automatically the death of other beings. At the same time, the death of certain beings is the life of other beings – a lesson which biology never ceases to teach in nature. From this perspective, creation is the acknowledgment of death as part of life because – as evolutionary biology stresses – the survival of the fittest, which involves the death of the weakest, is merely a natural aspect of life in the world. This emphasis of death seems so important in Mancuso that his philosophy of creation appears to be more prone to death than to life. To be sure, he is convinced that we all live in a huge graveyard and the world is nothing more than a giant slaughterhouse – although he himself admits his dependence on Hegel for this particular picture; Hegel himself applied the image of the slaughterhouse to world history (Bronner 2002:27-28). At this point, Mancuso is in sheer opposition with traditional theology because while in classical Christianity man is presented as the crown of God's work which makes his existence crucial for the entire creation, in Mancuso man is nothing but a being which ends in death despite his exquisite intellectual and spiritual capacities. Creation speaks about man's greatness both in traditional theology and in Mancuso's thought; there is, however, one major issue which makes all the difference. While in traditional theology man's greatness is paramount, in Mancuso it is negligible. This turns Mancuso's philosophy of creation into a bleak presentation of man's incapacity to reign supreme in the world because his actual biological life ends in death and there is absolutely nothing to be done once the biological "dust" of his body has joined the "dust" of the world (Mancuso 2005:51-54).

4. CREATION BETWEEN ENERGY AND EVOLUTION

Despite his discourse about biological life which is made of "dust" and ends in "dust", thus turning death into the final reality of life, Mancuso insists that his philosophy of creation is not about death but rather about life. As life is part of nature and nature is vital for his thinking, Mancuso cannot but connect life with his perspective of creation, which also includes concepts such as energy and evolution. With reference to the idea of energy, Mancuso seems convinced that the universe in its entirety is indwelt by a fundamental reality which he defines as energy. He is definitely not alone in associating energy with creation, which are corroborated in the thought of Michael Newton (Newton 2004:339). As an interesting peculiarity, one would probably notice the weird title coincidence between Michael Newton's *Destiny of Souls* and Vito Mancuso's *The Soul and Its Destiny*. The latter's perspective on energy is actually very physical, in the sense that beside being the fundamental reality of the universe, energy is

also the capacity to produce work. This is because – and Mancuso insists on this thought the universe is always at work. Whatever exists in the universe, whatever is there and can be said to exist in reality is energy. This definition includes the human being both as an individual and as society because the capacity to produce work is what actually characterizes everything, animated and non-animated entities alike. In Mancuso, the concept of work cannot be detached from the idea of energy because there is no work without energy and vice versa. He underlines the fact that both animated and non-animated entities produce work and therefore exist as characterized by energy because their presence in the world in any possible shape whatsoever is a proof of their capacity to exist as energy. There is no perfect identity between two entities, animated or non-animated, and this is – according to Mancuso – a feature of energy itself. Energy becomes mass – Mancuso underlines that energy actually assumes mass – but this mass is particular as well as unique. Each object and each being which exist in the universe have energy because they all have mass, which is a proof that energy is always at work. In Mancuso, the fact that all existing entities have mass is a work of what he calls the “nature-physis”. It is pretty clear in Mancuso that the concept of nature-physis makes reference to the reality that each existing entity has its own mass (and range of various physical and chemical characteristics for that matter). The work of nature-physis, however, is a continuous as well as generative process which has been active for almost fourteen billion years. As difficult as it may be to prove this figure, Mancuso insists that human beings are part of this process, so they are part of the nature-physis whose most fundamental feature is the presence of energy. To be more precise, Mancuso insists that human beings come from or originate in the nature-physis, which is an indication of the fact that – in their capacity of existing entities with biological lives – men and women have their origin in matter. As far as Mancuso is concerned, this is true because matter itself is the most fundamental product of energy. The idea of man's origin sheds more light on Mancuso's perspective on creation because man is not only the result of primordial energy but also specifically of matter. Thus, Mancuso's theory of creation goes like this: energy produces matter and matter produces the human being following a very long evolutive process. This is once again an indication that, in Mancuso, creation can only be explained through evolution. Matter is the mother of all things, including the human being; in Mancuso's rendering, matter is the mother of all the primordial elements which constitute the foundation of life, regardless whether it is the life of human beings or that of any other thing that has the capacity to move on its own (Mancuso 2007:12-13).

It is rather evident that Mancuso is very fond of the concept of matter because he seems to suggest that, within the context of the reality of energy and evolution, matter should be seen in a more “active” way. This is to say that, in

his philosophy of creation, matter should be tackled as a life-producing and life-sustaining reality. In other words, matter should not be conceived materialistically as inanimate or dead. This is obviously a critique of scientific as well as philosophical positivism but also of metaphysical dualism which reportedly infected even Christian theology. Mancuso insists that his critique should not be directed against metaphysics but only against metaphysical dualism which, as he said previously, is a feature of traditional Christianity. Although he does not elaborate on the distinction between metaphysics and metaphysical dualism, the fact that he distinguishes between the two is indication of a crucial concept which could explain his theory of creation. If metaphysics is different from metaphysical dualism and Mancuso rejects the latter, it means that metaphysical dualism is part of traditional Christianity and, almost for sure, works with two different levels of reality: the natural world and the spiritual world. The problem is not necessarily the existence of two different worlds; for Mancuso, the real impediment is the fact that those who accept metaphysical dualism also believe that the natural world and the spiritual world are guided as well as sustained by different laws (while it has already been established that, in Mancuso, the laws which guide the natural law are valid also for the spiritual world). Consequently, Mancuso's rejection of metaphysical dualism as promoter of an ontological distinction between natural and spiritual reality leads to the conclusion that metaphysics has nothing in common with an ontology which is beyond the reality of man's historical existence but it is only a feature of man's existential endeavors. By dismissing metaphysical dualism as inaccurate, Mancuso made sure that metaphysics stayed within the limits of nature, so that matter could be really called the mother of all existing things. This particular aspect, which places metaphysics in nature, shows that Mancuso comes very close to Heidegger's phenomenology (Fraleigh 2004:119). This adds to his theory of creation which is based on the following equation: energy produces matter (actually mother-matter) which produces life. In a more "philosophical" formula, Mancuso's theory looks like this: *energia* produces *materia-mater* which produces *natura naturans*, so there is an evident relationship between energy, matter, and nature, as suggested by Peter C. Hodgson (Hodgson 1994:186ff). It is crucial to notice here that the origin of life, which is also the origin of man's life, is deeply rooted in the reality of matter, so Mancuso's theory of creation is based on the conviction that human beings are exclusively the result of matter following the excruciatingly long process of evolution. It is very clear that Mancuso's thought runs contrary to traditional theology which posits not only God's existence as ontologically real beyond the reality of our world but also the fact that God himself – as a being that truly exists in reality – created every human being on his own. Mancuso cannot accept such a possibility because the postulate of a real God, a God that has an actual existence beyond the world he created himself, destroys the fundamental freedom of the world but also that of nature, matter and energy.

In Mancuso, nature, matter and energy must work freely, on their own, not guided by a force which transcends them. This is why in Mancuso's theory of creation there is room only for a God which exists in this world, namely in the spiritual reality of man's historical existence. God is absent from nature in an active way because he is a spiritual concept which works within man's variegated religious convictions. Such a God could not have created man and Mancuso is fully aware of that. This is why he insists that creation should be thought in terms of energy, matter and – once matter enters the actual discussion – evolution (Mancuso 2007:13-14).

Having established what he means by energy, matter and life, Mancuso sets up to define his understanding of evolution which, while retaining some basic aspects of classical darwinism, goes beyond it in an attempt to positively explain the origin of man's life as created by matter. For Mancuso, evolution is a fact, something which happens in reality, so it goes unquestioned. Evolution is not only a fact but also the most essential feature of nature and, as man belongs to nature, any theory of creation whatsoever, should be interpreted through the lens of evolution, as in Héctor Sabelli (Sabelli 2005:15). One of the basic characteristics of evolution is expansion which, in Mancuso, is clear once anybody studies the universe at a closer look. The universe has been expanding since the very first moment of its existence and is unlikely to ever stop. So, according to Mancuso, expansion is the fundamental law of nature; in other words, expansion is the very engine of evolution. It is very important to notice that, for Mancuso, evolution is not only mutation. Mutations are definitely part of the evolutionary process but they are not the only forces which drive the transformations which follow. He is very keen to underscore that evolution is much more than what classical darwinism promotes through the juxtaposition of mutation and natural selection. In Mancuso, evolution is growth, but not just any growth; it is a growth of order or, to use his rendering, even a progressive augmentation of complexity. It is clear then that evolution incorporates only the mutations which contribute to growth or, to be exact, to the growth leading to the progressive augmentation of the complexity of a certain organism. Any mutation which results in disorder is rejected as useless, so evolution retains only those mutations which turn the organism into something more complex, more ordered, more suitable to sustain life within the realm of nature. Mancuso seems convinced that, beneath the actual reality of what he believes to be evolution, there is a law or a force which pushes the process of evolution towards a higher order of complexity with the intention not only to promote and sustain but also to improve life. This law which lies at the basis of evolution has been philosophically recognized since ancient times in most cultures. For instance – and this is just one of Mancuso's examples – the Greeks called it *logos*, which explains the reality of man's creation in the doctrines of Christianity. In other words, whenever one reads about creation in Christian thought, he or she should really think of the concept of *logos* as the driving

force of evolution or, in Mancuso's terms, the fundamental cosmic law which puts together separated phenomena with view to creating a more complex order, as shown by Niels Henrik Gregersen in the challenging study about creation, logos, and evolution (Gregersen 2007:312-313). Thus, understanding creation means having a clear picture of evolution which goes beyond the mutation and natural selection of classical Darwinism to a complex set of connections meant to increase order. In other words, creation as evolution is not only the somehow negatively presented mutation and natural selection but also the more positive net – or web – of relationships which increase the development of nature towards a higher order. It is crucial to understand at this point that, even he accepts evolution, Mancuso dismisses evolutionism which reportedly presents evolution without any specific goal. He underlines that the acceptance of evolutionism as evolution without a goal presents the human beings with an ethical dilemma, in the sense that no sense of justice and respect is left in the world if evolution goes nowhere. Mancuso, however, is convinced that the goal of evolution is a much more complex order for the improvement of natural life which turns the human beings not into children of God – as traditionally presented in classical Christianity – but rather into children of the universe. This means that any discussion about creation should be understood in terms of our evolution within the universe because it is only in and through the human beings that the universe itself has managed to produce a consciousness of its own. Thus, according to Mancuso, understanding creation is eventually the realization that we are the most refined products of the universe's evolution towards complex thinking and ethical awareness (Mancuso 2007:14-20).

5. CONCLUSION

Creation is a crucial aspect of Mancuso's theology especially because he attempts to shape it in a predominantly philosophical way. Mancuso's declared intention is to rebuild Christian theology from a perspective which dramatically reinterprets – even to the point of elimination – traditional hermeneutics in favor of a more scientific approach which is reportedly in accordance with the convictions and expectations of contemporary people. It is relevant to notice that, in doing so, Mancuso still works with the Bible which he uses quite often whenever he wants to make a point in order to support his theories. The doctrine of creation undergoes the same treatment, so Mancuso postulates the necessity that it should be discussed not primarily from a theological standpoint but rather from a philosophical angle. As philosophy goes hand in hand with theology and especially with traditional theology, Mancuso is aware that he needs to at least start with the Bible so he chooses the text of Revelation 13:8 in order to show that creation needs to be connected with the

idea of the Lamb. The Lamb is evidently an image of Christ which is in turn an image of Jesus of Nazareth; for Mancuso, however, the use of the Lamb is merely an instrument which pushes his interpretation of creation to the realm of humanity and especially to the problem of suffering. As far as suffering is concerned, this is not idle but – as in Jesus' case – it is there for the benefit of others. So creation is a spiritual state which allows us to suffer for others following in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth who was so impressive in his death on the cross that he was later on called Christ but was also likened to the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Having explained creation through the connection between philosophy and suffering, Mancuso takes the whole explanation a little further in the direction of his theology "from below". Philosophy is not enough to make sense of the complexities of creation but it does point out that creation should be understood in a more scientific way than traditionally believed. This is why he points out that the biblical account of creation should not be taken historically but rather mythologically. Creation in the Bible is an image which has nothing to do with a historical event but with a myth which conveys collective truths. Mancuso prefers the myth over actual history because the interpretation of historical events is notoriously singular (and so is its corresponding truth), while myths bear with them a truth that was proved through generations. If creation is not historical, then it means that it was not God who created us but rather we created the idea of God which is present in the biblical account about creation. This proves that God cannot exist in our natural world in an ontological way, which is an indication of the fact that God is absent from the world. He can be present in the world only as part of the spiritual reality of our natural environment. In other words, God is present in this world only as a spiritual product of our human intelligence. Creation should not be understood spiritually but only biologically (from the perspective of biology as a science), so man is not the result of God's graceful action; man is the product of the "dust" which is essentially the constitutive matter of the entire universe. Creation is therefore the acceptance of our biological status in the world as beings who will eventually end up in death, the only reality that can present life in a meaningful way.

The final step of Mancuso's presentation of creation takes things not only beyond philosophy and suffering but also beyond mythology and biology. Consequently, one can easily notice that he channels his efforts in order to push creation towards the reality of energy and evolution. Energy is the vital force of the entire universe, the force which drives the "dust" of the universe to take an infinite variety of material shapes. Once matter is formed, the same vital force gives life to everything that exists in the universe, including animated or non-animated entities. Life itself is the result of matter, so our life – the life of the human being in general – originates in the reality of matter. Creation thus

should be understood materially but not materialistically. Matters is the origin of all things, including the human spirit, because what we are depends totally on the matter of the universe. Thus, Mancuso makes it clear that the laws of the material world should apply in the spiritual world, which is an indication that whatever we believe about creation must be confined to the natural world. The essence of the natural world though is expansion and all the things which exists are characterized by this reality. The universe has been growing since the very moment of its coming into being and the force behind this process is energy. Regardless how it was actually called in ancient cultures, this energy (called, for instance, logos in Greek philosophy) forced the universe into existence and so it did with all the things that have an existence of their own in the universe. Thus, the human beings should no longer consider themselves children of God – as in traditional theology – but rather children of the universe. In this sense, creation is the knowledge of the fact that the same force turned us – through a long evolutive process – into intelligent beings whose preoccupation for the importance of life is based on an exquisite ethical awareness (Simut 2011:87-102, 187-188).

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