

CREATION : BEFORE SCIENCE.

CHAPTER 3.

VISIONS OF CREATION.

The Jewish and Christian account of the creation is contained in Chapter one and the first three verses of Chapter 2 of the book of Genesis. It is the finest prose-poetry that I know. As a poetic account of the Creation, I do not think it can be improved upon; and it is entirely worthy of its theme, which is to describe the stupendous fact of Creation. From my reading Professor Caird's book "The Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers", I get the impression no Greek account of Creation exists at all. I know of none.

This is exactly what you would expect, contrasting the fierce monotheism of the Jews with the immoral Greek pantheon. The Jewish account has God creating Man in his own image; the Greek gods were surely created to some extent to satisfy the psychological needs of intelligent men? The consequences are also what you would expect. For the Jews, appointing a King was almost a betrayal of the "Kingship of God"; the Greek city states elected their Kings, and experimented with forms of government. So while the secular history of Israel was a bit of a shambles, because at first Judges were expected to arise from among the people to deal with any crisis, and then autocratic Kings, who of course made mistakes when power went to their heads; in contrast in the Greek city states the art of government was assiduously studied. And the pre-eminence of the Greek method ended with the conquests of Alexander the Great, and the spread of Hellenic culture far and wide. Jewish religion has spread far and wide, but there has never been the remotest prospect of Jewish culture doing so.

The scribes who compiled the book of Genesis had no hesitation in claiming to know the thoughts and actions of the Creator; so there is no harm in my doing so too. History surely suggests that the Almighty decided to introduce His Incarnation into the world, in the person of Jesus, when the Roman Empire was at its zenith; when the Augustinian peace had dawned, and before decay

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had seriously begun. There was free movement in the Empire, for those who were free. So the message could travel far and wide in a remarkably short time. At first the message was simply to believe in Jesus; the Church had no need to consider Law and Order, except that St.Paul urged Christians to be law-abiding. The Romans maintained Law and Order, and woe betide anyone who interfered with their prerogative. But after Nicea in 325AD, when Christianity became the official religion of the Empire, it should have occurred to Church leaders that they must express some views on the relationship between Church and State; and that meant they must have views, and think about it.

You could say that after Nicea, the Church was faced with the challenge, or even the vocation, of reconciling the practical necessities of governing a civil community, with the imperative of remaining faithful to the one true God, who created everything. The Church failed hopelessly. As Professor Caird writes in the last chapter of his “Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers”, the Church only considered the Incarnation as it concerned Jesus, and never went on to consider its application to normal Man. Had they gone on to consider normal Man, it might have occurred to them that they should consider what part he should play in the maintenance of Law and Order. They didn't; in short, the early fathers failed to understand the very subject that they were supposed to know about. Two thousand years later, the clergy are no better. Is it surprising that the C.of E. today is heading for the scrap heap of terminal decline?

By 406AD. when the German tribes crossed the frozen Rhine, and for three years turned Gaul into a flaming desert, the Gallic clergy's thoughts had only progressed to blaming this awful calamity on the failure of the population to repent; while the clergy in Italy continued their persecution of the Pelagian heresy. A more inept response to the crisis is hard to imagine. In 410AD. Alaric the Goth, having ravaged Greece, sacked Rome. In response to that tragedy, Augustine was moved to write his “City of God” in defence of Christianity. The traditional gods, it was said, would not have allowed the sack to happen.

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Augustine does sketch the relationship of Church and State, in a form with which I agree; but of course he was not able to give a detailed analysis of the relationship, because he had no experience of administration on that scale, and no tradition of administration on which to draw. After him the Dark Ages descended, and the opportunity was lost. Only in recent times has an adequate analysis been made, recognising that we all have only limited knowledge of any situation we are in, and therefore a fallible judgement of it; so that a decision making process must be set up, which commands respect, in other words which can be enforced; and which is subject to appeal. Religion should recognise that this is a secular process, which necessarily involves force and coercion. And Religion should admit too that non-resistance is a hopeless and irresponsible response, not only to violence and lawlessness, but to amicable civil disputes too. What was right in the Roman Empire; it is dramatically wrong now.

Today, in my experience, the C.of E. limits its interest in Law and Order to making a few unctuous prayers about it, and fails completely to recognise that force and coercion are both necessary and right, even for the most law-abiding community. The public quite rightly has tired of its spinelessness, and stays away from church. Its teaching is irrelevant to most of ordinary life, including in particular what to do when in a Romeo and Juliet situation. The parish parson ought to be the person a parishioner instinctively goes to in social or emotional difficulty. In fact he is the last person most people think of going to, because they feel his advice would not be worth listening to, as he is unlikely to have much worldly wisdom. So if they want to pour out their souls, they go to a counsellor attached to their local medical practice or to a psychologist.

Only once in my life have I ever heard a sermon preached on that uncomfortable saying of Jesus, that anyone who had faith in him would be able to do all that he had done, and greater things still when the religious authorities had made away with him. Most clergy shun this text; they do not preach on it, and probably do not think about it. And one wonders if this same Jesus, whom

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they profess to worship, would say that they were therefore not faithful to him. But whatever Jesus would say, the thought that they should use his courage and initiative to lead a life like his, seems as far from their minds as the East is from the West, to use the psalmist's penitential phrase.

The simple truth is that Jesus, at great cost to himself, showed us the nature of an indwelling between Man and God. He did not go on to show us how a similar indwelling between men (or man and woman) dovetailed in with an indwelling with God. It was impossible for him to do both at the same time. But such a dual and complementary relationship is necessary before "believers" can start thinking seriously about Law and Order, and the administration of society. This goes far beyond anything Jesus attempted; but then this is exactly what he said we should do! Whatever anyone says about my attempt to solve the Romeo and Juliet situation, it was at least an attempt to do just this.

Is it a surprise that the Church of England, only one of whose clergy in my hearing has sympathised with my view, is now majestically heading for the scrap heap of terminal decline? Could it possibly be that, after 2000 years of neglect or failure, the Almighty, the Creator, has had enough of us? What would the minor Prophets have said? Or should someone else try again?

But the answer to that first question: "Could we have had a better account of Creation?" seems to be that we will never know. Not from Science anyway. What science can do is wonderfully to illustrate the way Creation has developed as Canon Professor Raven described in his Riddell Lectures in 1935 to Durham University. But as to the awful moment when physical matter was first created out of nothing, the best science can do is maintain a respectful silence. The account of Creation we have, is the only one we are ever likely to have; not literally true, but poetically true. And we must be thankful that we have got it.