

It is said of the Socratic philosopher, Aristippus, so Vitruvius wrote in the preface to the sixth book of his *De architectura*, that being shipwrecked and cast on the shore of Rhodes and seeing there geometrical figures on the sand, he cried out to his companions, "Let us be of good hope, for indeed I see the traces of men." After making his observation, Aristippus departed for the city of Rhodes (another unique creation of man) and there in its gymnasium talked philosophy.

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Traces on the Rhodian Shore

NATURE AND CULTURE IN WESTERN THOUGHT
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Chapter 4



God, Man, and Nature in Judeo-Christian Theology

1. INTRODUCTION

Christian thought, like any other which brings into focus numerous ideas from many sources (the ideas of God, of freedom, of nature, and of progress are examples), is not a unified body of thought; it is more like a series of texts which have accumulated numerous exegeses which comment not only on the texts but on other exegeses as well. Attitudes toward man, nature, God, the world (whether we mean the cosmos, the physical earth, or the social milieu) are in this category. Contradictory ideas may grow up; balancings and reconciliations of ideas may be both subtle and fragile. Examples are the problems of physical and moral evil (that is, the tragic consequences to human beings of a catastrophic storm or of cruelty inflicted by one person or another). God is good; he loves the world and his creations. He also saw fit to destroy them. The beauties of the earth are of his making, but man must walk warily among them, for his destiny lies not in this world but in the next world. Nevertheless, God saw to man's creation and to his multiplication, willing that he have dominion over all life on earth.

Man is a created being. So is the earth in which he lives. Much of Christian thought, in so far as it is related to our themes, is concerned with establishing connections between these two creations. The outstanding attempt (antedating Judeo-Christian thought, as we have seen) is the theme of God's care for the world—care for man, his fellow beings, the plants and the animals, the physical earth. God's care for the world can thus be a unifying theme. In this and the following chapters illustrations of this truth will appear.¹

Apart from its religious importance, perhaps the most significant observation to be made about the account of the creation in Genesis I is that it is brief. Words are used so sparingly in describing the successive acts in the creation of the cosmos that, with the growth of Christianity and the continuing strength of Judaism, an enormous exegetical literature was inevitable. The acts of creation are basically concerned with physical and biological matters, and the ensuing exegesis, whether it is Philo's around the beginning of the Christian Era or a nineteenth century attempt to reconcile scripture with religion, of necessity used materials currently available from botany, zoology, physics, astronomy, sacred and profane history, and even ethnology. There are strong incentives also in this theology toward the love of nature and even toward its study. The intense otherworldliness and rejection of the beauties of nature because they turn men away from the contemplation of God are elaborated upon far more in theological writings than in the Bible itself.

God is the Creator of heaven and earth. Unlike Greek speculation, Genesis I is unconcerned with their origins. Neither is God the artisan-deity of Plato's *Timaeus*, bringing order out of recalcitrant materials. The creation is evidence of the existence of God, but it must not be confused with him. The beauties and the glories of the creation are not to be loved for themselves: they are of God but God is not in them; they may be teachers of mankind, leading it, with the help of the words of God, to the life that is to come after death. God has bestowed strong powers on man, notwithstanding his propensity to evil; man has a divine mission to control the whole creation. To achieve this, it is God's intention that mankind multiply itself, spread out over the earth, make its dominion over the creation secure.

2. THE CREATION, SIN, AND DOMINION

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters."²

¹ See generally, Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, pp. 15-34.

² Clarke, *Concise Bible Commentary*: "Hebrew history for the O.T. writers begins with Abraham, the stories in Gen. 1-11 belonging rather to world history as then conceived" (p. 10). See also p. 336: "Yahweh [beginning Gen. 2:4] is a figure very far

In the first chapter of Genesis, "the organization of human life within the pattern of the week, the last day of which is a holy day, is . . . presented as purposely ordained by God and reflects the world's first week in which the creative work was accomplished."³

Light was created before the sun during the first day, that is, from evening to evening in the Hebrew manner. In the second, He created the firmament, or the heavens, separating the waters above from those below. On the third day, two works were accomplished: the waters were confined and dry land appeared, with its varieties of vegetation. The fourth day saw the creation of the lights of the firmament, one for night, and one for day, to indicate the march of the seasons and the passage of the years. On the fifth day, He created the creatures of the sea and the birds. Finally, on the last day, there were also two works: the creation of the animals and the creation of man.

The living things which God created—sea monsters, fish, birds—were blessed by God. "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth" (Gen. 1:22). God said to man also, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28). Seed-yielding plants and fruit trees were provided for animals and for men, since they were vegetarians.

Man, unique and in the center of the creation, is set apart from all other forms of life and matter because God has willed this role for him; he is "the climax of God's work, set here as a steward, responsible to his Creator for all he does with the world over which he is given dominion."⁴

The idea of stewardship has played an interesting role in the history of Christian thought toward other forms of life and even of inanimate nature; in recent years it has often been invoked in pleas for conservation and nature protection, Christian stewardship being closely linked with the responsibility that a temporary sojourner on earth has toward posterity.

Man is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) in the sense that "the total being of man bears a likeness to the total being of God. Man alone on this earth has this likeness; the animals do not possess it (though in paganism they did)."⁵

The cosmos and every element in it are continually dependent on God's care

removed from the majestic Deity of Gen. 1. Like a potter using clay he makes man out of the dust of the earth." In many of his actions, he "behaves like a magnified man." See also Clarke's commentaries under Gen. 1 to 8, and Frazer, *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, Vol. I, pp. 3-6, 45-52. See also Bultmann's discussion of the doctrine of creation, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-22.

³ Wright and Fuller, *The Book of the Acts of God*, p. 50.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

for their survival. "Without God's constant concern, the order of nature would be wiped out in a moment and would revert to the original chaos."⁶ It is this belief in God's continuing care which, I believe, is the basis of the famous idea of the *creatio continua*, common in the Middle Ages and in modern times as well, as we see in John Ray's preface to *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation*. The creation is a continuing process requiring the constant care, activity, and solicitude of God.

Since He is a transcendent creator, evidences of His work are in the creation; it is however limited in what it can reveal because it is only a creation. Much but not all can be known about God through it. "God is the ultimate mystery beyond all things knowable; he is known only because, and in the manner that, he has revealed himself."⁷

In the second creation myth, man's relation to the earth is entirely different. The earth, already in existence, lacks vegetation because there is no rain. The order of creation begins with man (created from dust and made to live by God's breathing in his nostrils), followed by plants (by divine planting in the Garden of Eden), animals (produced out of the earth by God) and woman (from the rib of Adam). Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden "to till it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Is there not here a hint that man is a caretaker of nature, that nature may be man's garden? The vocabulary of the myth is that of a peasant farmer; the plants are domesticated and the gardener of Eden tends them, perhaps removing the weeds, but he is a caretaker, not a farmer.⁸ The animals are created as helpers of man—the Lord brings them to Adam for naming⁹ but they are wanting; Adam must have a helper fit for him alone.

When Eve yielded to the persuasions of the serpent, with irrevocable effects on Adam, Eve, and the serpent, the Lord said to Adam, "cursed is the ground because of you" (Gen. 3:17); henceforth toil will be needed for holding on to life. The story of the Fall became important to the Christian idea of nature because it is the source of the belief, widely held through the seventeenth century, that the fall of man has caused disorder in nature and a decline

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁸ Clarke, *Concise Bible Comm.*, "The story supposes that fruit and edible plants already exist. All man need do is to tend the garden and keep it safe; the toil of the cultivator lies in the future. Truly a peasant's paradise" (p. 342). "Der Mensch soll den Garten bearbeiten und bewachen; zu Grunde liegt diesem Zuge nicht etwa der modern-protestantische Gedanke vom Wert des Berufes und der Arbeit; sondern es ist das naive Ideal eines antiken Bauern, dass die ersten Menschen Gärtner gewesen seien: der Baum trägt seine Früchte, Jahr für Jahr, fast ohne Arbeit des Menschen; der Acker aber muss alljährlich mühsam bestellt werden 3 17ff.; so ist das Ideal des Bauern, Gärtner zu sein und von Baumfrüchten mühelos zu leben; und nun gar Gärtner im Paradies!" Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 10.

⁹ "By naming the animals Adam gives them their essential nature." Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 342. See also Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 11.

in its powers, an idea clearly distinct from the classical idea of senescence in nature based on the organic analogy.¹⁰ The passage is also important historically because it introduced the idea of toil as a consequence of sin. Many Christian exegetes, however, have held that agriculture was a pleasing activity and not to be associated with sin.

Life becomes hard. Adam and Eve are driven from the garden. In succeeding generations, God regrets the creation of man and is determined to eradicate him, the beasts, and the birds (Gen. 6:7). God spared Noah and the animals which accompanied him, and God told him as they left the ark, "that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth" (Gen. 8:17).

3. MAN IN THE ORDER OF NATURE

When Noah built the altar and made offerings, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8:21-22). God blesses Noah and his sons, telling them again to be fruitful and to multiply, to fill the earth, that they are to have dominion over all living things. "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything" (Gen. 9:3). God makes a covenant with Noah and his sons, their descendants, and with the creatures that were on the ark. There will be no more floods to destroy the earth (Gen. 9:11). Henceforth mankind and his creatures can expect, despite the evil of the world, an ordered universe without further worldwide catastrophe; man can count on order, regularity, and permanence in nature, and can be assured that the earth will remain the permanent abode of man (Gen. 9:8-17). According to the apocryphal book of Enoch¹¹ (composed over a period of a century, 165-63 B.C.) the elements of nature actually took the oath of the covenant.

The order of the cosmos and man's place in nature are reaffirmed elsewhere in the Old Testament. "Yahweh is the God of an ordered universe; . . ." he cares for the world which he created for human habitation. "For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!). . . ." (Isa. 45:18.)

¹⁰ This theme is considered in more detail in the discussion of the Middle Ages. See George Boas, *Essays on Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages*.

¹¹ Robinson, *Inspir. and Rev. in the OT*, p. 10; *1 Enoch* lxix, 16ff. See chap. 4, p. 247, note 11, of the Charles trans. On *1 Enoch*, see Wright and Fuller, *The Book of the Acts of God*, pp. 234-235.

¹² Stanley Cook, *An Introduction to the Bible*, p. 129.

The theme may be compared to that of Psalm 8 where man, despite his insignificance in a cosmos encompassing the moon and the stars ("What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?") plays an exalted role as an expression and an evidence of God's purpose. "Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands. . . ." (Ps. 8:5, 6.) "The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of men" (Ps. 115:16). The theme that man, sinful though he be, occupies a position on earth comparable to that of God in the universe, as a personal possession, a realm of stewardship, has been one of the key ideas in the religious and philosophical thought of Western civilization regarding man's place in nature.

4. EARTHLY ENVIRONMENT

God's power is infinite: "He binds up the waters in his thick clouds. . . . He covers the face of the moon, and spreads over it his cloud. . . . The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astounded at his rebuke. By his power he stilled the sea. . . . By his wind the heavens were made fair. . . ." (Job 26:8-13.) The environmental conditions on earth are God's handiwork. God is an omnipotent weatherman particularly interested in heat, rain, and wind. "Hear this, O Job; stop and consider the wondrous works of God": the "balancings of the clouds," the heat and stillness created by the south wind, and the skies spread out "hard as a molten mirror" (Job 37:14-18; see also 36:24-33). The Lord silences Job in the language of the carpenter and the mason: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone? . . ." (Job 38:4-6.) Who set bounds for the sea and said to it, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed?" (Job 38:11.) (The attention given to water and to the confinement of the seas—probably owing to arid climates and to the Mediterranean—is very noticeable both in the Bible and in the patristic literature.) The Lord queries Job on his understanding of the order of nature; to really understand, he would have had to witness its planning. ("Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place? . . .") (Job 38:12.) Does Job comprehend the depths of the sea, the expanse of the earth, the dwelling place of light and of darkness, the storehouses of snow and hail? "Who can number the clouds by wisdom? or [in the language of the desert] who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens, when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cleave fast together?" (Job 38:37-38.)

The Lord asks Job questions about the habits of the mountain goat, why the wild ass ("to whom I have given the steppe for his home, and the salt

land for his dwelling place") goes free (Job 39:6), about the faithfulness of the wild ox to man, the habits of the ostrich, the power and usefulness of the horse, the soaring of the hawk, and the nest of the eagle in the rocky crag (Job 39). Further illustrations are given Job of man's weak powers of understanding the creation with descriptions of the life habits of the behemoth and the leviathan.¹³

By this questioning, the Lord instructs Job in the workings of an ordered world in which so many relationships unsuspected by him must be considered. He is speaking of various physical environments: deserts, streams, and mountains, and mountain pastures and the animals which inhabit them, and their breeding habits and means of self-preservation which enable them to continue as a species, despite their preying on one another. The purpose, the forethought, and the wisdom shown in the order of nature on earth transcend the insights of even the most pious, patient, and understanding heart. The Lord explains that nature serves man—even limits him—but nature is not for him alone and its significance does not depend on human wants. "Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no man is, on the desert in which there is no man; to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass?" (Job 38:25-27.)¹⁴

The book of Job shows that the processes of nature may be beyond the comprehension of man; but they are mysteries only to him, for they are the product of a divine and rational purpose. There are similar ideas in Psalm 104, but the message is more cheering and exultant. The cosmos is ordered and beautiful; it is created by God though he is not part of it. "Man is indeed central in the picture, though at first sight he seems to take so small a place."¹⁵ He is central because the "culmination of the Psalm in the praise of God by man" is made by "the one earthy creature in which praise can be articulate."¹⁶

¹³ Clarke, *Concise Bible Comm.*, says that the anticlimactic speech of Yahweh in Job 40, 41 may be due to the fact that the second speech of Yahweh may be derived from an Egyptian wisdom book, p. 473; see also p. 474.

¹⁴ "Perhaps the lesson most needed today is that of 38, 26 ["to bring rain on a land where no man is, on the desert in which there is no man"]—while Nature has its influence on man's destiny, this does not exhaust its meaning for God." *Ibid.*, p. 474.

¹⁵ Robinson, *Inspir. and Rev. in the OT*, p. 8. "If the first speech of Yahweh in the Book of Job gives us the fullest Old Testament review of Nature's mysterious details, the best picture of Nature as a going concern is to be gained from Psalm civ. even though this is partly borrowed from the Egyptian 'Hymn to the Sun.'" [On this point, see chap. I, note 6.] "The point of view is here a different one from that of 'Job.' It is not the incomprehensible mystery of these items in the catalogue of Nature that attracts the eye of the psalmist, but the harmonious order which rules them all, through the moon and the sun, so that the night is made for the wild creatures and the day for man." *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁶ "The psalm really illustrates the thought of Isa. xlv:18, which says that God formed the earth that it might be inhabited, and the thought of Psalm viii, which sets man in the supreme place amongst the creatures of God" *Ibid.*, p. 9, footnote 1.

The Lord in his wisdom has created the varied relief of the earth, confined the seas, and has made water easily obtainable for all life. God is a generous, compassionate, and continuous overseer of the natural processes on earth; "the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy work" (Ps. 104:13). He has seen to it that there are wild plants for the animals, cultivated plants for man, that the birds and the land animals have proper habitats ("the high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the badgers" Ps. 104:18), that even the predatory beasts have their prey. "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all" (Ps. 104:24).¹⁷

It is not to be wondered at that Psalm 104 has been quoted so often by thinkers sympathetic to the design argument and the physico-theological proof for the existence of God. The life, beauty, activity, order, and reasonableness in nature are described without mysteries, joyously—even triumphantly. God is separate from nature but he may be understood in part from it. In the late seventeenth century, John Ray prefaced his famous work, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation* with the twenty-fourth verse of Psalm 104; with him and thinkers of similar belief, the praise of God by the discovery of wisdom in his works becomes a bridge between science and religion: praise and love the Lord, and show this love by study and learning, for in this way one obtains knowledge of nature and a deeper understanding of the works of God.

Elsewhere the theme of the majesty of the Lord and his care for man is reiterated, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8:1.) The Creator has also been solicitous of man, whom He has made little less than God. "Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet . . ." (Ps. 8:6): sheep, oxen, the beasts of the field, the birds, and the life in the sea. This is the most important idea in Christian theology relating to one of our themes, the idea of man as a controller and modifier of his environment. God, the maker of heaven and earth, has given the earth to man to rule over it. His dominion over the animals is exerted in two ways: through domestication and through man's ability to extinguish animal life in order to obtain food or for other purposes.

5. ATTITUDES TOWARD NATURE AND THE WISDOM LITERATURE

"The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). God is "the hope of all the ends of the earth, and of the farthest seas" (Ps. 65:5): he has created the earth with water, and blessed the growth of plants on the soil. "Thou crownest the year with thy bounty; the tracks of thy chariot drip with fatness. The pastures of the wilderness drip, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,

¹⁷ Compare Ps. 148.

the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy" (Ps. 65:11-13). This sublime passage, one of many descriptions of the beauties of nature in the Old Testament and especially in the Psalms, is matched, in its mingling of landscapes made beautiful by nature and by man, only by the beauty of Psalm 104.

Further evidence of a love for and delight in nature and of a belief that it is manifestation of God's handiwork comes from the conception of *wisdom* developed particularly in Proverbs of the Old Testament and in the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus of the apocryphal writings. In this literature, "Wisdom is regarded as a Being dependent on God but in some sense separate from Him."¹⁸ "Wisdom" is human and divine; Yahweh creates wisdom before the creation itself; "Wisdom comes to be a personification, almost a person; it is the artificer of all things."¹⁹ Wisdom is conceived of as a "mediating and quasi-personalized entity."²⁰ Most writers have seen Hellenistic influences in the wisdom literature; it clearly is not a doctrine of immanence nor is it the Stoic Logos. The most lucid expression of the conception is Wisdom's speech in Proverbs (8:22-31).

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth; before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men.²¹

In this passage the joy in nature, the joy in human life, the joy in doing things that one does superlatively well, are in startling contrast with the sombre themes of another exemplar of the wisdom literature, the book of Job.

¹⁸ Rankin, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*. For a detailed list of this literature, see pp. 1-2, footnote 1. See especially pp. 1-15; 35-52; 198-210; and chap. IX on "The Figure of Wisdom"; these are the most important discussions for our theme. Quotation is on p. 224.

¹⁹ Cook, *Intro. to the Bible*, p. 68. On Wisdom's being replaced by the Logos in Philo, see *ibid.*; on Hellenistic influence on *The Wisdom of Solomon*, see p. 67. See also Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11, and Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, pp. 96-97.

²⁰ Robinson, *Inspir. and Rev. in the OT*, p. 10. "The precise origin of the figure of Wisdom in Hebrew usage is obscure and disputable. Here it must be sufficient to say that its appearance suggests outside influence, possibly Iranian. [Follows Rankin, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, pp. 228-254.] Its unifying function in regard to Nature is obvious. The world becomes a revelation of the divine wisdom, and Nature is a unity in the sense that it exhibits the wisdom of its divine Creator and Upholder" (p. 11).

²¹ This is but part of the hymn to wisdom. See Proverbs 8-9:6. In 9:1-6 Wisdom becomes virtually an omnipotent housewife.

Neither Wisdom nor the Creator is the artisan-deity of Plato, but the Lord here seems like a surveyor and to a lesser extent an architect, Wisdom the highly competent journeyman who sees at a glance what must be done and how to do it. One can almost see the two of them, the master and the respected servant, walking on an equal footing through the fields discussing where to mark the boundaries, where to plant the grains, where to build the houses.

In the Wisdom of Solomon,²² which may be regarded as an extension of the teachings of Proverbs 8, the Spirit of God fills the world²³ and death is not of God's making; his creation meant that all things should have being. "For he created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are wholesome. . . ." (1:14.) These verses elaborate the thought of Genesis 1:31, that the creation is good and that the Lord is satisfied with it.²⁴ Man's knowledge comes from God: our being and words, our understanding, our prudence, our skills, knowledge of the order of the world, the structure of the world and the activity of the elements (7:16-18), the course of the months, of the seasons, the sun, the cycles of the year, the constellations (19-20): "I learned both what is secret and what is manifest, for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me" (7:21-22); she is not only a teacher, she is "a breath of the power of God. . ." (7:25). "She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well" (8:1). She is compared to a young love, a bride, she lives with God who loves her and she participates in his craftsmanship (8:2-5). God made the world with his word, and has created man to rule the creation "in holiness and righteousness. . ." (9:3.) But wisdom is his helpmate. "With thee is wisdom, who knows thy works and was present when thou didst make the world, and who understands what is pleasing in thy sight and what is right according to thy commandments" (9:9). Wisdom watched over Adam and gave him dominion over all else (10:1). God's love of his creation is emphasized (11:25-26). But why cannot man see and know God? Men "were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works. . ." (13:1.)²⁵ Instead they made gods of fire, wind, stars, turbulent water, the sun, and the moon. Perhaps, delighted with their beauty,

²² According to Clarke, *Concise Bible Comm.*, the text of the Wisdom of Solomon (= the Vulgate Book of Wisdom) points to multiple authorship because it lacks unity; it is based on the teaching of Proverbs 8. Its author has "a considerable, if second-hand, knowledge of Greek philosophy, especially Plato and the Stoics" (p. 646). On this book's influence on New Testament writings, especially Paul's The Epistle to the Romans, p. 647.

²³ Clarke, *op. cit.*, points out the similarity between this idea and the Stoic conception of "the soul of the world" (p. 647).

²⁴ Clarke's commentary on Wisdom of Solomon, 1:13-16, *op. cit.*, p. 647.

²⁵ This passage occurs in the long discussion of idolatry. "The heathen failed to appreciate the argument from design, or to deduce from beauty the Author of beauty; the treatment of the subject is thoroughly Greek. Note that 9 contradicts 1." Clarke, commentary on Wis. of Sol., 13:1-9, *ibid.*, pp. 649-650.

men mistook them for gods? (13:2-3.) "For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator" (13:5).

Similar themes, often suggesting Proverbs 8, are also in Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach.²⁶ The power of man over the whole creation is reasserted as a divine plan for the birth, life-span, and death of man (17:1-3). Wisdom is like a mistress, or perhaps she is only a servant-girl. "Wisdom will praise herself, and will glory in the midst of her people. In the assembly of the Most High she will open her mouth, and in the presence of his host she will glory: 'I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist'" (24:1-3). Wisdom describes herself and the Lord's care for his creation in the nature imagery of daily life. "I grew tall like a cedar in Lebanon, and like a cypress on the heights of Hermon," or tall as the palm, the rose, the olive, the plane tree. "Like a vine I caused loveliness to bud, and my blossoms became glorious and abundant fruit" (24:13-17). In the imagery of trees, honey, wine, fruit, the harvest, and streams, the beauty and the honor and the riches of wisdom are set forth. Sometimes the metaphors describing the Lord's wisdom in fashioning the geography of the earth as he did are strikingly beautiful, even if the symbol is a commonplace possession of a Mediterranean people: "At his word the waters stood in a heap, and the reservoirs of water at the word of his mouth" (39:17).

The ways of God as a continuing creator, who interferes in the orderly and expected routines of nature and with the physical arrangements on earth when he sees fit to do so, are a boon to the good, a curse to the sinner (39:27). "Fire and hail and famine and pestilence, all these have been created for vengeance; the teeth of wild beasts, the scorpions and vipers, and the sword that punishes the ungodly with destruction. . . ." (39:29-30.)

The theme of natural catastrophes, of purposeful and violent changes in the physical nature of the earth as a punishment for sin—often collective sin—has been a strong one in Christian theology, reaching its climax in the Lisbon earthquake of November 1, 1755, an event which shook this and other Christian beliefs to their foundations.²⁷

Anthropocentric interpretations, reminiscent of Xenophon and like those the early Church Fathers will make, explain the courses of the sun and the gentler moon whose changes give man a calendar in the sky (43:1-8); the stars, "a gleaming array in the heights of the Lord" (43:9). All natural phenomena—the winds, snow, frost—are of his doing. "Many things greater than these lie hidden, for we have seen but few of his works" (43:32). Admirable as the creation is, God is not immanent in it; he is a transcendent being. "Who has seen him and can describe him? Or who can extol him as he is?" (43:31.)

²⁶ Ecclesiasticus (Vulgate) is Ecclesiasticus, or The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach; it was probably written between 200 and 180 B.C. Clarke, p. 651.

²⁷ This will be discussed in chap. XI. See T. D. Kendrick, *The Lisbon Earthquake*, pp. 113-169.

6. ROMANS 1:20

In the New Testament, the interrelationships of God, man, and earth are not always clear; perhaps this lack of clarity is because of the syncretism of the religion.²⁸ The most important ideas are in Paul's writings, one a *theologia naturalis* in miniature, the other an expression of a vanity and corruption which reached even the creation; both have had a deep influence on the Christian attitude toward nature and, by extension, on the study of natural history.

Paul attributes the sin of man to his failure to see in nature the works of God.²⁹ "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom. 1:20). With some change, this could have been written by a Stoic philosopher; it is also a complement to Psalm 104. Men have no excuse for not knowing or for not honoring God. Neither is there any excuse for idolatry. "Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles" (Rom 1:22-23). It is a theme repeated often in Christian theology: worship the Creator, not the creature. The works of God can be discerned in the creation, but God is transcendent, the creation is by him but not of him, and it is only a partial teacher. One can see His ways in it, but worship is for the Creator alone. There is a parallel thought in the Acts. Paul and Barnabas interfere with the priest of the temple of Zeus who is about to make a sacrifice; they tell the people to turn to the living God, the Creator, adding, "In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:16-17).³⁰

The creativeness of God is contrasted with the lesser talents of man. "For 'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it'" (I Cor. 10:26). "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth"

²⁸ See Bultmann's chapter, "Primitive Christianity as a Syncretistic Phenomenon," in *Primitive Christianity*, pp. 175-179. "Christian missionary preaching was not only the proclamation of Christ, but, when addressed to a Gentile audience, a preaching of monotheism as well. For this, not only arguments derived from the Old Testament, but the natural theology of Stoicism was pressed into service" (p. 177). See also illustrations, in part discussed here, of syncretism, in the New Testament, pp. 178-179.

²⁹ Paul prefaces these remarks by acknowledging his obligations to Greeks and barbarians (1:14-15), by asserting the power of the Gospel "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (1:16), continuing that it is not difficult to know about God: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them" (1:19).

³⁰ A similar thought is in Acts 17:24-25. God does not live in shrines made by man; he is not served by human hands. He is responsible for nations, for their boundaries, "Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'" (17:27-28).

(I Cor. 3: 5-6). "For we are fellow workmen for God; you are God's field, God's building" (I Cor. 3: 9; cf. 16). "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. . . ." (I Tim. 4: 4.) God cares for the world and loves it (John 3: 16).

Romans 1: 20, like Psalm 104, has been an important support not only for the argument from design (the wisdom of God as manifested in the creation) but also in keeping Christian theology on an even keel, avoiding excessive otherworldliness, rejection of this world, and complete estrangement from human society. St. Augustine uses it for this purpose. St. Bonaventura finds the reflection of God in his traces in the sensible world, ending his discussion with the quotation of Romans 1: 20, and St. Thomas Aquinas, as we shall see, has a vital interest in showing the goodness, not the corruption, of nature.³¹

7. CONTEMPTUS MUNDI

These are the affirmations of the closeness of the relationship between God, man and nature; they are also, I believe, the dominant ones in the Old and the New Testaments. Nevertheless it is undeniable that there has been in Christian theology, especially in the exegetical literature, a *contemptus mundi*, a rejection literally of the earth as the dwelling place of man, a distaste for, and disinterest in, nature, opposition to a *theologia naturalis*, the belief that one can find in the creation the handiwork of a reasonable, loving, and beneficent creator. Romans 1: 20 (quoted with such approval and piety by the scientists of the seventeenth century) was an invitation to a deeper understanding of God and of nature; opposed to it was Romans 5: 12-14, which is concerned directly with the condition of man. One man, Adam, brought death into the world through sin; death came to all men because they too sinned. Sin existed before the law, "but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come" (Rom. 5: 13-14). This passage, containing the essence of the doctrine of original sin, is essentially a commentary on Genesis 3: 17-18, the other important passage leading to a pessimistic view of man and of nature, in which the Lord addresses the serpent and Eve and Adam, giving punishment to each. The punishments, however, are more than personal; they mark an alteration in nature: "Cursed is the ground because of you" (Gen. 3: 17), the Lord says to Adam; now it will exact its toll of him and he will labor against the thorns and the thistles; a product of the earth, he will return to it when he dies.³²

³¹ St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Bk. I. chap. 4; St. Bonaventura, *The Mind's Road to God*, chap. 2, 11-12; see also St. Thomas Aquinas, *Philosophical Texts*, chap. V, on "Creation."

³² See Isa. 24: 4-6. "The earth mourns and withers"; "it lies polluted"; "a curse devours the earth and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt." In Isa. 11: 6 conditions existent in the Garden of Eden are restored.

According to one contemporary view, "the doctrine of the Fall with its sequel, the infection and total corruption of nature," has had a "far-reaching effect in estranging Christendom from an interest in science."³³ Paul's purpose was to demonstrate the greatness of Jesus' coming, because it was a symbol of life and redemption in contrast with sin and death which followed the first Adam. In Romans 5: 12-14 "it is by no means certain that the Apostle's language enforces the belief that Adam's sin tainted his posterity." Thus in subsequent theological doctrine, elements that were subordinate and incidental in the writings of St. Paul became of crucial importance in Christianity. Romans 8: 18-39 is far more representative of Paul's thinking and of the tradition: the creation "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8: 19). The fertility of the creation is owing to the will of God. The creation itself may look forward to a glorious millennium free from decay. The creation, "groaning in travail," and man are groping to a higher order and fulfillment. The imperfections, the "groaning," are not because of man's sin: these too are part of God's purpose and interaction. "St. Paul is far too good a theist, far too close a student of the Old Testament, to believe that the imperfection of creation is due to any act of devil or man: only God is in control of His World. Nor because still imperfect is that world deprived of the power to strive and agonize and yearn for that which is to come. With the active assistance of God's indwelling Spirit the creation gropes its way forward in hope."³⁴

According to another, the Fall symbolizes man's problem as being one of rebellion against his Creator. "He has used the freedom that God has given him for the purpose of ruling over the earthly creation in order to assert his independence of God and to become like God." He refuses to accept his status as a creature dependent on God, he seeks independence from Him, and equality with Him—and in so doing loses communion between himself and God. "His assertion of independence is actually his separation from the source of all life and all blessing."³⁵

8. KEY IDEAS AND THE NATURE OF THEIR INFLUENCE

The first chapter of Genesis inspired the hexaemeral literature, brought into being by the bare listing of acts in the six days of the creation. It was started by Philo, cultivated with charm by St. Basil, disseminated by the Latin prose of St. Ambrose, who borrowed much from Basil. Since Genesis 1 left so many questions unanswered, the hexaemeral writings, whether apologetics, exegesis, or homiletics, thus made use of knowledge for religious ends. (The hexaemeral literature continues through the Middle Ages, reaches magnificent expression

³³ Raven, *Science and Religion*, p. 34.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

³⁵ Wright and Fuller, *The Book of the Acts of God*, pp. 56-57.

in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and degenerates badly in the nineteenth century reconciliations between Genesis and geological theory, brought to a head by the controversies over historical geology and evolution.) The more literally the writers of hexaemeron interpreted the sequences of the creation, the more the need for evidence from physics and biology. Christian piety, natural curiosity, the desire for reliable exegesis made a more detailed embroidering of the account inevitable; the materials, many physical, biological, and geographical, were organized around the account of the six-day creation, becoming of the highest significance to revealed religion. The hexaemeral literature can be regarded as a vast curiosity and irrelevancy; it is closer to the truth, I think, to see it as a body of commentary which, however faulty, kept alive and before men's minds the idea that the history of the cosmos and thus of the earth had been an eventful one, and that the observation of nature was closely related to an understanding of the creation.

In the somber account of Genesis 1 no value judgments are made of man; his sin, his fall, and the consequences are part of the other story. The first chapter, moreover, gave a Christian setting to the argument of design; the subsequent history of that argument in medieval and modern times shows clearly the components coming from Biblical sources and those from the classical world.

The second chapter of Genesis (apart from its great religious significance) has had an enormous influence on the history of Western man's conception of mankind and of ethnological thought because it introduced questions concerning the nature of Adam as a man, thus inviting comparisons between him and the types of men who were born after the Fall. These comparisons introduced questions—which were widely discussed in the Middle Ages—concerning the nature of cultural primitivism, just as Greek and Roman thought, for different reasons and from different sources, had produced a similar literature. In inspiring the Garden of Eden literature, especially the attempts to locate and describe the Garden, Genesis 2 both influenced geographical speculation and encouraged idealized descriptions of nature—often they are descriptions of Mediterranean-type environments—and some which even point indirectly to environmental influences on man.

The idea, derived from Genesis 3, that the fall of man had also caused a deterioration in nature influenced conceptions of the nature of the earth, at least until the end of the seventeenth century. This deterioration and the toil required after the Fall to induce productivity in the soil were the counterpart in the physical world of evil in the moral world.

This deterioration is not an organic change; it is not a decline in the powers of nature. It is a curse, for to the Hebrews not only persons but objects could be cursed. The curse is not in forcing man henceforth to work—he is created for work—but in forcing him to toil among the thorns and thistles of stubborn

and ungenerous fields.³⁶ Even though there might be imperfections and a niggardliness in nature well suited to the evil propensities of man, this idea conflicted with another: it is God and not human evil that is responsible for the condition of the earth.

Questions concerning the constancy of nature are important and we will meet them again; they are important for the same reason that Lucretius' organic analogy and Columella's objections to it were important, for if the powers of nature are not constant, but decay as an organism decays, men can do little but resign themselves to geographical conditions which, with the passage of time, will only worsen and will inevitably lead to decay and death. The application of the organic analogy to the earth, however, is not characteristic of Judeo-Christian thought, although the idea of senescence in nature appears in II Esdras in which a comparison is made between the young, born from the womb of a young mother, with those of lesser stature when the mother is old. The stature of each succeeding generation will be smaller because each is "born of a creation which already is aging and passing the strength of youth." (II Esdras 5:55. See also 14:10-18.) This passage and the ideas of Lucretius were frequently cited in modern discussions of the constancy of nature.

The writings in the Old and New Testaments and in the Apocrypha are often notable for the beauty and richness of their nature imagery. The similes and other figures of speech might be in the language of the shepherd, the peasant, the artisan, or the farmer doing simple tasks. "I went forth," says Wisdom, "like a canal from a river and like a water channel into a garden. I said, 'I will water my orchard and drench my garden plot'; and lo, my canal became a river, and my river became a sea" (Sirach, 24:30-31).

These descriptions of nature, conspicuous in the Psalms, Job, and Sirach suggest daily life in a rural setting, the highland pasture and the grain field, the orchard, the olive grove, or the irrigation ditch. The Psalms dwell on the beauty of nature, the need to love it as a work of the Creator and to seek him in it. It is not God however that one sees in nature; it is only his works. Subsequent Christian theology is replete with these warnings of the danger of absorption in, contemplation and worship of, His works. The thought is well expressed in the Wisdom of Solomon (in the Apocrypha). Men ignorant of God, witnesses of earthly beauty, do not "recognize the craftsman while paying heed to his works" (13:1). No matter how fervid the natural theology, no matter how deep is the realization of earthly and celestial beauty, there must never be any confusion between the maker and his works. This distinction has been decisive in the Christian attitude toward the earth as a living place for man; too fervid praise for the works of the creation might lead to

³⁶ Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 22.

neglect of the revealed word or, as in the case of deism, to outright rejection of Christianity.

Most striking, for our themes, is the idea of the dominion of man as expressed in Genesis, and repeatedly expressed in other writings, notably Psalm 8. But one must not read these passages with modern spectacles, which is easy to do in an age like ours when "man's control over nature" is a phrase that comes as easily as a morning greeting. Is this idea of dominion anything more than a distillation of everyday observation of the techniques involved in the care of plants—gardening and oasis agriculture, grain growing, horticulture—the ability to kill the wild and subjugate domestic animals—putting the latter to work in the tasks of agriculture, herding or transport, or using their bodies for food or clothing? Is there not here also an assertion of the dignity of man who, made in the image of God, on His sufferance exercises dominion over living things on earth comparable in a small way with God's control of the universe? This power, moreover, is not achieved by, nor is it because of his abilities; he is lord of the creation because his superior place has been given him by God. Man's power as a vice-regent of God on earth is part of the design of the creation and there is in this fully elaborated conception far less room for arrogance and pride than the bare reading of the words would suggest.

Thou hast given him dominion over
the works of thy hands;
thou hast put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the sea.
Psalm 8:6-8

The power, though great, is derivative; it is thrust upon man; he has not earned it.³⁷

Genesis also posed important historical questions: how had the world's population grown; how had the distribution of men throughout the habitable world taken place and how had conspicuous changes among them occurred? Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, Japheth, accompany him off the ark. The world owes its peopling to them (Gen. 9:18). Then follow the genealogy of the sons of Noah, the lands they occupied, their occupations and skills; from

³⁷ "According to v. 7, man's power over creation is a kind of ethico-juridical power from God, perhaps in imitation of God's power over the universe and man. The terminology of the verse reflects clearly the terminology for such a concept, and the context implies that man has this power over all kinds of beings, even those apparently beyond his control. Especially in Gen. 1 and 2 it is clear that man has the right to use all things for his own purposes. Man may not be able to enforce this right at all times, but fundamentally he has it, thanks to God's establishment of man as lord of the earth." Conrad Louis, *The Theology of Psalm VIII*, p. 93.

these lands "the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood" (Gen. 10:32). (The uncertainties regarding the aborigines of the New World in the fifteenth century stopped with a papal bull pronouncing these peoples to be human, thus reconciling their presence with the Christian belief in the unity of the human race and its subsequent diffusion.) The biblical tradition is friendly to ideas of cultural diffusion, as the literature on the ten tribes of Israel attests; in modern times, the idea of independent invention based on the psychic unity of mankind has in part been a reaction to the extravagances based on an uncritical acceptance of biblical sources.

The Lord, seeing the city and the tower of Babel, scattered the people over the face of the earth with little thought of furthering intellectual communication. The world before the dispersion had "one language and few words." The story thus explains differences in language and habitat of contemporary peoples.³⁸ Was this the only plausible means of explaining the cultural diversity of their world, with its many languages and dialects, a world which according to scripture had originally been alike and unified?

Genesis also presented the problem of accounting for the growth in world population from the times of Noah and his sons to the contemporary era. In a typical chronology of sacred history, which was still being published in the nineteenth century, the creation occurred *anno mundi* 1; the birth of Noah in 1056; God's resolve upon the flood and his command to Noah to build the ark in 1535; the embarkation of Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives, and the animals in 1656, Noah being then 600 years old; the disembarkation in 1657; the construction of the tower of Babel in 1757; the birth of Christ in 4004.³⁹

There is nothing in this literature to compare with the classical speculations on the influences of the physical environment. There is the suggestion, however, that man is adapted to nature, dependent upon it, capable also of using it. "Eliphaz promises to an upright Job a covenant with the stones of the field, i.e., the removal of their threat to its fertility, whilst the beasts of the field will be at peace with him."⁴⁰ Plowing, harrowing, sowing, threshing, are done properly because the farmer is correctly instructed: "His God teaches him" (Isa. 28:26). The farmer thus carries out the purposes of Yahweh.

The influence of religion thus spreads far beyond ethics, philosophy, and theology; gathering evidence of the existence of God from observing the natural order, it brings geography and ethnology within its purview, often determining the framework within which the great themes of cultural history and human geography have been studied.

³⁸ See also Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 93.

³⁹ See Lavoisne's *Complete Genealogical, Historical, Chronological, and Geographical Atlas* (London: 1822), Chronological Maps No. 2 and 7. See also Map 6, *Division of the Earth Among the Posterity of Noah*.

⁴⁰ Robinson, *Inspir. and Rev. in the OT*, p. 10; Job 5:23.

The Judeo-Christian conceptions of God and of the order of nature were often combined by the early Church Fathers with both the classical argument of design and the idea of an artisan-deity or demiurge, creating a conception of the habitable world of such force, persuasiveness, and resiliency that it could endure as an acceptable interpretation of life, nature, and the earth to the vast majority of the peoples of the Western world until the sixth decade of the nineteenth century.

In one aspect, at least, that which glorified man and nature rather than denied them, the Judeo-Christian idea of man's dominion over nature emphasized his creativity, his activity, his technical advancement, because these qualities were not of his making but had been placed there by God. He not only had these godlike qualities, he was also close to God. Men were in an equivocal position with regard to the rest of the creation. God had brought it into being but He was not a part of it. Man was made in God's image. He too was not a part of nature in the way that plants and animals were; he was more a steward of God, and if he partook of the lowliness of nature, he also partook of the Godhead from which his stewardship came.

Christianity and the ideas which lay behind it is a religion and a philosophy of creation. It is preoccupied with the Creator, with the things he created and their relationships to him and among themselves. What is more usual than to find among the Church Fathers of the patristic period and the later scholastics long expositions of the nature of the Creator and his creation? This preoccupation inexorably built up its exegesis, great in volume if not in originality, but in so doing, different conceptions of life and of nature were fashioned in the incipient Western civilization. They were not Greek and Roman ideas in Christian dress; on the contrary, except for the environmental theories, the classical ideas now were ancillary to the new synthesis. The new foundations were built on this religion in northwestern Europe, less enmeshed in tradition than was the age-old Mediterranean civilization, in an environment calling for practicality and experiment.

PART TWO

The Christian Middle Ages