

## CHAPTER XXV

## CREATION AS THE ACT OF GOD

1. "Thus shall ye say unto them: The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, these shall perish from the earth, and from under the heavens. He that hath made the earth by His power, that hath established the world by His wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by His understanding . . . the Lord God is the true God."<sup>1</sup> With this declaration of war against heathenism, the prophet drew the line, once for all, between the uncreated, transcendent God and the created, perishable universe. It is true that Plato spoke of primordial and eternal matter and Aristotle of an eternally rotating celestial sphere, and that even Biblical exegetes, such as Ibn Ezra,<sup>2</sup> inferred from the Creation story the existence of primeval chaotic matter. Yet, on the whole, the Jewish idea of God has demanded the assumption that even this primitive matter was created by God, or, as most thinkers have phrased it, that God created the world *out of nothing*. This doctrine was voiced as early as the Maccabean period in the appeal made by the heroic mother to the youngest of her seven sons.<sup>3</sup> In the same spirit R. Gamaliel II scornfully rejects the suggestion of a heretic that God used primeval substances already extant in creating the world.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jer. X, 11-12 and 10.

<sup>2</sup> See his commentary to Gen. I, 1; comp. Neumark, l. c., I, 70, 71, 80 f., 87, 412, 439, 515; Husik, l. c., p. 190; D. Strauss, l. c., 619-660.

<sup>3</sup> II Macc. VII, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. R. I, 12; X, 3; Hag. 11 b-13 a; Slavonic Enoch, XXV; see J. E., art. Cosmogony and Creation; Enc. Rel. and Eth., 151 ff., 167 f.

2. Of course, thinking people will ever be confronted by the problem how a transcendental God could call into existence a world of matter, creating it within the limits of space and time, without Himself becoming involved in the process. It would seem that He must by the very act subject Himself to the limitations and mutations of the universe. Hence some of the ancient Jewish teachers came under the influence of Babylonian and Egyptian cosmogonies in their later Hellenistic forms, and resorted to the theory of intermediary forces. Some of these adopted the Pythagorean conception of the mysterious power of letters and numbers, which they communicated to the initiated as secret lore, with the result that the suspicion of heresy rested largely upon "those who knew," the so-called Gnostics.

The difficulty of assuming a creation at a fixed period of time was met in many different ways. It is interesting to note that R. Abbahu of Cæsarea in the fourth century offered the explanation: "God caused one world after another to enter into existence, until He produced the one of which He said: 'Behold, this is good.'"<sup>1</sup> Still this opinion seems to have been expressed by even earlier sages, as it is adopted by Origen, a Church father of the third century, who admitted his great debt to Jewish teachers.<sup>2</sup>

The medieval Jewish philosophers evaded the difficulty by the Aristotelian expedient of connecting the concept of time with the motion of the spheres. Thus time was created with the celestial world, and timelessness remained an attribute of the uncreated God.<sup>3</sup> Such attempts at harmonization prove the one point of importance to us, — which, indeed, was frankly stated by Maimonides, — that we cannot accept literally the Biblical account of the creation.

3. The modern world has been lifted bodily out of the

<sup>1</sup> Gen. R. IX, 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Strauss, l. c., 645 f.

<sup>3</sup> See Schmiedl, l. c., 91-128; Kaufmann, l. c., 280 f., 306, 387 f.

Babylonian and so-called Ptolemaic world, with its narrow horizon, through the labors of such men as Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Lyall, and Darwin. We live in a world immeasurable in terms of either space or time, a world where evolution works through eons of time and an infinite number of stages. Such a world gives rise to concepts of the working of God in nature totally different from those of the seers and sages of former generations, ideas of which those thinkers could not even dream. To the mind of the modern scientist the entire cosmic life, extending over countless millions of years, forming starry worlds without end, is moved by energy arising within. It is a continuous flow of existence, a process of formation and re-formation, which can have no beginning and no end. How is this evolutionist view to be reconciled with the belief in a divine act of creation? This is the problem which modern theology has set itself, perhaps the greatest which it must solve.

Ultimately, however, the problem is no more difficult now than it was to the first man who pondered over the beginnings of life in the childhood of the world. The same answer fits both modes of thought, with only a different process of reasoning. Whether we count the world's creation by days or by millions of years, the truth of the first verse of Genesis remains: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." In our theories the whole complicated world-process is but the working out of simple laws. This leads back as swiftly and far more surely than did the primitive cosmology to an omnipotent and omniscient creative Power, defining at the very outset the aim of the stupendous whole, and carrying its comprehensive plan into reality, step by step. We who are the products of time cannot help applying the relation of time to the work of the Creator; time is so interwoven with our being that a modern evolutionist, Bergson, considers it the fundamental element of reality. Thus it is natural that we should think of God as setting the first atoms and forces of

the universe into motion somewhere and somehow, at a given moment. Through this act, we imagine, the order prevailing through an infinitude of space and time was established for the great fabric of life. To earlier thinkers such an act of a supermundane and immutable God appeared as a single act. The idea of prime importance in all this is the free activity of the Creator in contradistinction to the blind necessity of nature, the underlying theory of all pagan or unreligious philosophy.<sup>1</sup> The world of God, which is the world of morality, and which leads to man, the image of God, must be based upon the free, purposive creative act of God. Whether such an act was performed once for all or is everlastingly renewed, is a quite secondary matter for religion, however important it may be to philosophy, or however fundamental to science. In our daily morning prayers, which refer to the daily awakening to a life seemingly new, God is proclaimed as "He who reneweth daily the work of creation."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See C. Seligman, *Judentum und Moderne Weltanschauung*.

<sup>2</sup> The first benediction before the Shema.