

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MAINTENANCE AND GOVERNMENT OF THE WORLD

1. For our religious consciousness the doctrine of divine maintenance and government of the world is far more important than that of creation. It opposes the view of deism that God withdrew from His creation, indifferent to the destiny of His creatures. He is rather the ever-present Mind and Will in all the events of life. The world which He created is maintained by Him in its continuous activity, the object of His incessant care.

2. Scripture knows nothing of natural law, but presents the changing phenomena of nature as special acts of God and considers the natural forces His messengers carrying out His will. "He opens the windows of heaven to let the rain descend upon the earth."¹ "He leads out the hosts of the stars according to their number and calleth them by name."² He makes the sun rise and set. "He says to the snow: Fall to the earth!"³ and calls to the wind to blow and to the lightning to flash.⁴ He causes the produce of the earth and the drought which destroys them. "He opens the womb to make beasts and men bring forth their young;" "He shuts up the womb to make them barren."⁵ "He also provides the food for all His creatures in due season, even for the young ravens when they cry."⁶ His breath keeps all alive. "He withdraweth their breath, and they perish, and

¹ Gen. VII, 11; VIII, 2.

³ Job XXXVI, 6.

⁵ Gen. XX, 17-18; XXX, 22.

² Isa. XL, 26.

⁴ Job XXXVIII, 25.

⁶ Ps. CXLVII, 8-9.

return to their dust. He sendeth forth His spirit, they are created; He reneweth the face of the earth."¹ We are told also that God assigns to each being its functions, telling the earth to bring forth fruit,² the sea not to trespass its boundary,³ the stars and the seas to maintain their order.⁴ To each one He hath set a measure, a law which they dare not transgress. God's wisdom works in them; they all are subject to His rule.

3. This conclusion betokens an obvious improvement upon the earlier and more childlike view. It recognizes that there is an order in the universe and all under divine supervision. Thus Jeremiah speaks of a covenant of God with heaven and earth, and of the laws which they must obey,⁵ and in Genesis the rainbow is represented as a sign of the covenant of peace made by God with the whole earth.⁶ As God "maketh peace in the heavens above,"⁷ He establishes order in the world. As the various powers of nature are invested with a degree of independence, God's sovereignty manifests itself in the regularity with which they interact and cooperate.⁸ The lore of the mystics speaks even of an oath which God administered upon His holy Name to the heavens and the stars, the sea and the abyss, that they should never break their designated bounds or disturb the whole order of creation.⁹

4. Further progress is noted in the liturgy, in such expressions as that "God reneweth daily the work of creation," or "He openeth every morning the gate of heaven to let the sun come out of its chambers in all its splendor" and "at eventide He maketh it return through the portals of the west." Again, "He reneweth His creative power in every phenomenon

¹ Ps. CIV, 27-30.

² Gen. I, 11.

³ Ps. CIV, 8.

⁴ Gen. VIII, 22; Job XXXVIII, 33.

⁵ Jer. XXXI, 39; XXXIII, 25.

⁶ Gen. IX, 12 f.

⁷ Job XXV, 2.

⁸ See Dillmann, l. c., 295 f.; D. Strauss, l. c., 629-643.

⁹ Enoch LXIX, 15-25; Prayer of Manasseh, 3; Suk. 53 a b; Hag. 12 a.

of nature and in every turn of the season;" "He provideth every living being with its sustenance."¹ Indeed, in the view of Judaism the maintenance of the entire household of nature is one continuous act of God which can neither be interrupted nor limited in time. God in His infinite wisdom works forever through the same laws which were in force at the beginning, and which shall continue through all the realms of time and space.

We feeble mortals, of course, see but "the hem of His garment" and hear only "a whisper of His voice." Still from the deeper promptings of our soul we learn that science does not touch the inmost essence of the world when it finds a law of necessity in the realm of nature. The universe is maintained and governed by a moral order. Moral objects are attained by the forces of the elements, "the messengers of God who fulfilled His word."² Both the hosts of heaven and the creatures of the earth do His bidding; their every act, great or small, is as He has ordered. Yet of them all man alone is made in God's image, and can work self-consciously and freely for a moral purpose. Indeed, as the rabbis express it, he has been called as "the co-worker with God in the work of creation."³

5. The conception of a world-order also had to undergo a long development. The theory of pagan antiquity, echoed in both Biblical and post-Biblical writings, is that the world is definitely limited, with both a beginning and an end. As heaven and earth came into being, so they will wax old and shrink like a garment, while sun, moon, and stars will lose their brightness and fall back into the primal chaos.⁴ The belief in a cataclysmic ending of the world is a logical corollary of the belief in the birth of the world. In striking contrast, the prophets hold forth the hope of a future regeneration of

¹ See Singer's *Prayerbook*, 37, 96, 290, 292.

² Ps. CIII, 20.

³ Shab. 119 b.

⁴ Ps. CII, 27; Isa. XXXIV, 4.

the world. God will create "a new heaven and a new earth" where all things will arise in new strength and beauty.¹

This hope, as all eschatology, was primarily related to the regeneration of the Jewish people. Accordingly, the rabbis speak of two worlds,² this world and the world to come. They consider the present life only a preliminary of the world to come, in which the divine plan of creation is to be worked out for all humanity through the truths emanating from Israel. This whole conception rested upon a science now superseded, the geocentric view of the universe, which made the earth and especially man the final object of creation. For us only a figurative meaning adheres to the two worlds of the medieval belief, following each other after the lapse of a fixed period of time. On the one hand, we see one infinite fabric of life in this visible world with its millions of suns and planets, among which our earth is only an insignificant speck in the sky. With our limited understanding we endeavor to penetrate more and more into the eternal laws of this illimitable cosmos. On the other hand, we hold that there is a moral and spiritual world which comprises the divine ideals and eternal objects of life. Both are reflected in the mind of man, who enters into the one by his intellect and into the other by his emotions of yearning and awe. At the same time both are the manifestation of God, the Creator and Ruler of all.

¹ Isa. LXV, 17.

² See J. E. and Enc. of Rel. and Eth., art. "Eschatology"; Schuerer, *G. V. I.* II, 545.