

FAITH AND THOUGHT

VOLUME 111 ● NUMBER 2 ● OCTOBER 1985

*A Journal devoted to the study of the inter-relation of the
Christian Revelation and modern research*

GENERAL EDITOR: Dr. A. B. Robins



Published for
THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE



by
THE PATERNOSTER PRESS

R. J. Thompson

The Theology of Nature in the Light of Creation, Fall and Redemption

In venturing into the mine-field of the relations of science and theology, I am encouraged by the words of T. F. Torrance in a work dedicated to John Marks Templeton in gratitude for the award of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion in 1978.

At no time for nearly a millenium and a half has the opportunity for genuine theology been greater, since the ground has been cleared in the most remarkable way of the old dualist and atomistic modes of thought that have plagued theology for centuries.¹

The subject of nature, in particular, and its future, if any, has brought theologians and scientists around the conference table — most strikingly in the Boston Conference of 1979 on 'Faith and Science in an Unjust World'. This was preceded in 1978 by the Zürich preparatory conference on 'Faith, Science and the Future' which in the words of its report 'sought to shape a "unifying vision" of reality'.

It looked at all nature as creatures of a God who is transcendent but never remote.

It related the human dominion of part of creation to human stewardship. It looked again at the Biblical promises of a redemption for all creation, and asking what these might mean for Christians today'.²

This is not unlike my agenda in this paper.

The ensuing Boston Conference in its section *Humanity, Nature and God* claimed that the 'creation stories in Genesis 1–2 answer not simply the question of the origin of the world but the question of its continuing existence'. In particular 'the Flood was seen as the centre of the Primal history',³ as had been pointed out in Gerhard Liedke's address⁴

Genesis 1 shows how God really meant his creation to be, while Genesis 9 shows what in fact became of it after the eruption of deeds of violence into the

1. T. F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (1980) p.178.

2. C. Birch (ed.) *Faith, Science and the Future* (1978) p.19.

3. P. Abrecht (ed.) *Faith and Science in an Unjust World II*. Reports and Recommendations (1980) p.30.

4. G. Liedke in R. L. Smith (ed.) *Faith and Science in an Unjust World I* Plenary Presentations (1980) p.75.

world (p.75) . . . The world in which we live is the world 'after' the Fall of Man (Gen. 3), 'after' the fratricide and the revenge (Gen. 4), 'after' the Flood (Gen. 6-9) and 'after' the dispersion of the peoples (Gen. 11 [p.76]).

Relating this to environmental problems, Liedke claims that Genesis 1 'is less a document of rudimentary natural science than an assignment of the creatures to their places in the habitats created for them by God'. Let us look at this suggestion, before moving on to more philosophical matters.

A. Creation

One of the well known theories of the structure of Genesis 1 called the 'framework' hypothesis, but which would be better described as the 'recapitulation' hypothesis,⁵ draws attention to the parallelism between Days 4-6, and Days 1-3 as God 'fills' what He has 'formed'. In Liedke's terms this becomes 'the habitats' and their 'creatures'. As set out by James Houston, limiting himself to six stages and retaining the cumulative order.⁶

GOD 'FORMS'
in the midst of formlessness
(tohu)

GOD 'FILLS'
in the midst of emptiness
(bohu)

DAY 1 Division of light
from darkness (1:4)
DAY 2 Division of lower waters
from upper waters (1:7)
DAY 3 Division of lower waters
from dry land (1:9);
creation of vegetation (1:11)

DAY 4 Creation of lights
in the sky (1:16)
DAY 5 Creation of water,
animals and birds (1:21)
DAY 6 Creation of land, animals,
man and the provision
of food (1:29)

GOD FINISHES CREATION
on the Seventh Day (2:1-3)

5. 'Recapitulation' as in the parallel visions of seven seals, trumpets and bowls in the Book of Revelation.

6. J. Houston, *I Believe in the Creator* (1979) p.60.

A more exact parallel representation which indicates that eight works have been compressed into six is offered by J. A. Thompson in his *New Bible Dictionary* article.⁷

CREATIVE ACTS		DAY	CREATIVE ACTSDAY		
(God said)	No.	ELEMENTS	(God said)	No.	ELEMENTS
1. verse 3	1	Light	5. verse 14	4	Luminaries
2. verse 6	2	Firmament	6. verse 20	5	Birds
3. verse 9	3	Seas	7. verse 24	6	Fishes
4. verse 11		Land and Vegetation	8. verse 26		Animals and Man

Liedke notes that unlike the preceding works of creation, man and animals have to share the same habitat and resources. While both eat vegetable food in Genesis 1, a distinction is made between 'every green plant' — presumably that which grows of itself — assigned to animals (v.30), and 'plant yielding seed' — presumably 'corn' — and 'trees yielding fruit' (v.31) into which man's labour must enter to cultivate and tend — 'assigned to man'. At this stage there is no conflict between man and the animals, but this changes after the Flood, when man becomes meat-eating (Gen. 9:3ff.), and beasts go in fear of man (Gen. 9:1-2).

Leaving aside that subject until later, we look now at four questions — Was the world created? When was the world created? How was the world created? Why was the world created?

Was the world created? The books of both Scripture and Nature answer in the affirmative. The Scriptural answer is not confined to Genesis 1 in its two halves, but recurs in Genesis 2, and in passages in the Psalms, like Psalm 104, the Prophets, like Isaiah 40, Wisdom writings, like Job 38-41, the Gospels, like John 1, and the Epistles, like Hebrews 1 and 11. The answer of nature is in its design and purpose in 'the large', even if not in all the details once put forward by Bishop Paley.

The large canvas now had to embrace vast vistas of time, which were pictured by one scientist (and not a recent one, who might want to triple the figures), as a clock of twelve hours with every minute representing seven million years. On this time-scale animal life had begun at 6.30, mammals at 11.50, man at 10 seconds to 12.00 and homo sapiens fifty thousand years ago (i.e. half a second since!)

F. R. Tennant in his *Philosophical Theology* of 1930 sought to come to terms with the new scientific chronology by arguing

7. J. A. Thompson, 'Creation', *New Bible Dictionary* (1962) p.271.

'that the inorganic environment is as much adapted to life . . . as living creatures are to their environment',⁸

without necessarily accepting the view that

'our ordered world is due to some evolutionary process within the whole universe analogous to that secured within organic Nature by natural selection out of random variations'.⁹

William Temple also has reminded us that design may be seen in retrospect, where once it would not have been dreamed of:

'if anyone studied the world, before there was life on it, he could never have predicted life; if anyone had studied vegetation he would never have predicted animal life; if anyone could have studied the animal world, he would never have predicted human civilization, and the arts . . .'¹⁰

Even if purpose must be given up there is still the argument ascribed to Aquinas 'There must be a God, because the world exists, not because the world shows signs of having been planned, but because it is contingent'.¹¹ On this view, the argument from the existence of the world to the existence of God still stood, even if the world had not had a beginning. It was not the beginning of the world, but its dependence on God, that creation was about. Only by revelation does man know that there was a beginning.

But what do we mean by beginning? Here we move back from Aquinas to Augustine.

When was the world created? It has been traditional to believe that God and time preceded creation, but Augustine returning for the second time to the question 'what was God doing before he made heaven and earth?' to which he could find no answer in *Confessions* XI.xii after intense thought comes in XI.xxx to challenge the use of time-words like 'never' — and we might add 'before', and 'after' — as inappropriate to an Eternal Being. 'God did not create the world in time or before time, but with time (i.e. the world and time were created together)'. Similar sounding as this may be to Alexander's 'space-time deity' and Einstein's fourth dimension, it could go back to Plato's *Timaeus*.¹²

Modern theologians of the Process School have mercilessly pilloried

8. F. R. Tennant, *Philosophical Theology* II (1930) p.86.

9. *Ibid.*, p.80.

10. W. Temple, *Christian Faith and Life* (1931) pp.29–30. The quotation continues 'if he had studied the selfishness of mankind he could never have predicted a life of perfect and selfless love'.

11. Aquinas, quoted by E. L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (1956) p.264.

12. Tennant, *op. cit.*, p.132.

traditional theology for taking over this Greek 'Changeless Absolute' into their doctrine of God in place of the passionate and compassionate God of Scripture, who suffers with His people. A distinction made between the appearance and its reality, as e.g. by Anselm that 'God was compassionate in terms of our experience but not compassionate in terms of His being' seemed a sleight of hand. The Thomist, Mascall, however, defends the older view and replies to the question 'If God is transcendent, why does he need to be timeless' by answering that time is 'one of the characteristics of finite beings which, when we pass from finite beings to God, needs to be transcended'.¹³

It is not only with creation in the beginning that modern thinkers have a problem, but also with it being regarded as once for all, rather than continuous. Both the temporality of God and continuous creation have been appealed to on the basis of the present tense of texts like John 5:17 'my Father works and I work' and Genesis 8:22 and Matthew 5:45, but Houston has come down firmly on the side of a 'finished work' quoting the past tense of texts like Psalm 102:25, 93:1; Isaiah 45:12, and the New Testament formula 'from the beginning of Creation',¹⁴ not to forget Genesis 2:1-3! The concern of the advocates of 'continuous creation' is to avoid any suggestion of a deistical God aloof from His world, but for their opponents this is achieved by a doctrine of providence following creation e.g. the 'upholding of all things' in Hebrews 1:3 in addition to the 'creating of' in Hebrews 1:2. A middle position favoured by Nels Ferré might be more satisfactory. 'Creation is continual not continuous, because God is not the slave but the Lord of time . . . God works and rests. God is and works'.¹⁵

How was the world created? is a related question which finds some surprising changes of side as some conservative scholars like Houston, who had insisted on a cut-off point for creation, are less concerned to deny the use of pre-existing material as the *ex nihilo* formula traditionally required.¹⁶ While appeal is usually made to the lack of a clear Biblical base for the teaching, there is probably an unconfessed recognition, from the scientific side, of the magnitude of the universe and the mass of it which had to be reduced to order, as Professor Boyd reminded this Institute recently that 'the Genesis record does not suggest creation from nothing but says rather "let the seas bring forth

13. E. L. Mascall, *Openness of Being* (1971) p.168. He sees it as an additional advantage that if God is timeless questions of foreknowledge and predestination do not arise (p.172).

14. Houston, *op. cit.*, pp.106-7.

15. N. Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God* (1951) pp.128-29.

16. Houston, *op. cit.*, pp.51ff., 275ff.

. . .", "let the earth bring forth" and Adam is singled out as formed from the dust of the ground like the creatures of Psalm 104.¹⁷

From the side of those who would defend the doctrine come both Biblical and theological arguments. While the first explicit use of the term 'out of nothing' is not found until the late Apocryphal book, 2 Maccabees 7:28, it is implicit in texts like Romans 4:17 (He) 'calls into existence the things that do not exist' and Hebrews 11:3 'made out of things which do not appear'. The fact that the doctrine was particularly developed by the Early Church Fathers to refute the Manichaeic doctrine of the evil of matter, and its eternity, does not make it less relevant today, as such ideas continue to emerge from time to time — as perhaps in the doctrine of the finite God in the writings of J. S. Mill, H. G. Wells and E. S. Brightman.

Whether Process theology should come under this stricture is a larger question than we can handle here. It would be ironical if a protest movement against the borrowing of the idea of a changeless, a-pathetic Absolute from Greek philosophy in general, and Plato's *Timaeus* in particular, should now itself be accused of substituting for Almighty God the dualistic Demi-urge, who lacked the power to control his creation, derived from the same source!¹⁸

On the other hand to say 'omnipotence must prevail' does not explain 'why there is anything for him to prevail against' (A. M. Farrer).¹⁹ Like the name 'Almighty', it is probably an unfortunate way of looking at a father God, who is better described with the Greek as 'Pantokrator' — ruler over all! Some would feel that if a choice has to be made between omnipotence and love in God omnipotence must go.

Why was the world created? The traditional answer to this is spelt out in terms of love, and the desire to bless. Hendry speaks of God's goodness overflowing, and quotes Plato that God is good, and the good is always generous — it seeks to give and impart itself to others — and Peter Brunner 'they receive His divine glory, and as in a mirror reflect it back to Him', which is reminiscent of the poet Schiller's lines

'Created spirits, blessed mirrors of His blessedness'.²⁰

The problem of this, however, is in Schiller's preceding lines

Friendless was the mighty Lord of worlds,
Felt defect — therefore created spirits . . .'

17. R. Boyd, 'Creation of the Cosmos' *Faith and Thought* 109, 2 (1982) p.123. On the analogy of Genesis 2:4, and the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, a number of translators have also read Genesis 1:1 as a 'when' clause, rather than an absolute beginning.

18. Cf. F. Sontag in S. Davis (ed.) *Encountering Evil* (1981) pp.123-25.

19. A. M. Farrer, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* (1962) p.36.

20. G. S. Hendry, *Theology of Nature* (1980) pp.120-21.

Does this mean then that God lacked something? The theologians W. N. Clarke and W. R. Matthews answer respectively 'not that he must have a universe to be God, but that because He is God, He will have a universe', and 'it was a necessity of His nature to create, but what He created is the result of a free act',²¹ but this requires them to side with those Fathers, who said God was eternally Creator, and so never without some creation or other (Clarke pp.285-6), or that God always had a universe, because personality requires a 'not-self', although not necessarily a physical one (Matthews p.208).

B. The Fall

Closely related to the problem of God's omnipotence is the problem of evil. If God is omnipotent how can he allow evil in any of its forms? Years ago a toddler that was you reached out to pull a purple flower, and got a finger full of prickles, or to pluck a rose and was speared by the thorns, and learnt the hard way that this was not a perfect world. As we have grown older we have become even more aware of nature's ambiguity. The most beautiful sounds we can hear — the bell-like tones of a boy soprano — are a bitter sweet, which not only delights us but fills us with an aching pain. The most beautiful sights we see, when nature is at her most perfect, waken in us, not only contentment, but also nostalgia, as if 'nature herself is mourning a lost good'.

The Old Testament similarly both affirms nature, and yet describes its discord. We have on the one hand the magnificent creation psalm, Psalm 104 which speaks of God's control of the elements, and of His provision for each species in air, sea and land, and ascribes this to the continuing, creative power of the breath of God. Yet we also have Jeremiah's 'creation in reverse' (Jeremiah 4:23-26). (See overleaf).

Already in Genesis, with the stories of the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, this darker side is shadowed forth. The flood is the reversal of the Creation, as the fountains of the great deep are broken open, and the primeval chaos, briefly tamed by the Creator, returns again. The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah transforms the 'Garden of the Lord' of the Jordan Valley into a wilderness of brimstone and salt, and threatens a like doom on the land of any nation that will turn away from God. The use of the story in this way in Deuteronomy 29:23ff. conjures up a vision of disaster second only to 'the day after' of a nuclear holocaust.

21. W. N. Clarke, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (1909) p.287. W. R. Matthews, *God in Christian Thought and Experience* (1939) pp.206, 208.

Psalm 104:27-30

These all look to thee,
 To give them their food in
 due season.
 When thou givest to them,
 they gather it up;
 when thou openest thy hand,
 they are filled with good things.
 When thou hidest thy face,
 they are dismayed;
 when thou takest away
 their breath, they die
 and return to their dust.
 When thou sendest forth thy
 Spirit, they are created;
 and thou renewest the face
 of the ground.

Jeremiah 4:23-26

I looked on the earth, and
 lo, it was waste and void;
 and to the heavens, and
 they had no light.
 I looked on the mountains,
 and lo, they were
 quaking, and all the
 hills moved to and fro.
 I looked, and lo, there was
 no man,
 and all the birds of the
 air had fled.
 I looked, and lo, the
 fruitful land was a
 desert, and all its cities
 were laid in ruins before
 the Lord, before his
 fierce anger.

Types of Evil

Moral Evil. It is usual to distinguish physical evil from moral evil, but these categories are no longer enough. The editor of a recent symposium *Encountering Evil*²² notes that whereas for two hundred years the paradigm for evil has been the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, which took 80,000 lives — a physical (he says 'natural') evil, the paradigm appealed to by his contributors is the Holocaust in this century which claimed the lives of six million Jews (a moral evil). If there are to be future generations — and we shall have to be much meeker than we are at present if there are to be, seeing that it is only 'the meek who will inherit the earth'²³ — the paradigm will surely be nuclear warfare, for which we shall need a new category — 'cosmic evil' — not that it is any less moral and physical!

Physical Evil. Of course 'cosmic evil' has always been with us, although not always recognized in earlier generations, as it is today with 'space war' plans. I refer to the doctrine of the Fall in its effects on nature, to which lip-service has always been given, as well as on man. With their limited universe, ancient theologians were content to concentrate on the moral evil of Adam, which spilled over on to the animals, so that these in turn perished, along with man, in the Flood, and were provided for in the

22. S. Davis, *op. cit.*, p.6.

23. A remark ascribed by Charles Birch to Sloane Coffin during the SALT talks.

deliverance of the ark and in the following reconstitution. Even so orthodox a believer as Calvin, who in the *Institutes* II.i.v. says that the sin of Adam 'perverted the whole order of nature in heaven and earth', is quoted by Hendry for the position that 'despite his drastic view of the effects of the Fall on human nature (he) saw none in the world of nature, which he regarded as a theatre in which the glory of God is abundantly displayed'.²⁴

Cosmic Evil. It is hard for us to realize that the resistance to the new science of Copernicus, Bruno and Galileo in the Renaissance centred at first around the ascription of less than perfection to space — that the sun was defiled by sun-spots, the moon by valleys, and Jupiter by satellites not to mention Bruno's claim, for which among other things, he was burnt at the stake, that space was infinite. All these were in contradiction of the tidy world-view inherited from the Greeks that earth's contamination did not extend beyond the moon. Many may 'mark the earth with ruin', but his control 'stopped with the shore' of space!²⁵

How different things are today, when added to the enormous wastage of earth, in seed of all kinds which does not come to fruition, of which Huxley's metaphor of a scatter of grapeshot of which only one hits the mark, does not tell a thousandth part, we now have the dreary waste of the space wilderness with its incomprehensible distances and mind-blowing numbers of worlds beyond worlds, for which the Creator's sole purpose seems to have been, in the poet's jibe 'to make dirt cheap'. Our teleologies, and theodicies may work for the former, but what of the latter?

Concerning the former A. M. Farrer wrote:

'The world is not like God, though it reveals his power and glory. Nature is infinitely wasteful, but God wastes nothing. She is unfeeling; he is compassionate. She is blind; he is wise. For at the beginning and bottom of nature, there is a withdrawal, we may almost say a banishment, of God'.²⁶

Concerning the latter he asked 'in all the thousand million years when there was a universe, and nothing lived, what are we to say of its good and what of its evil? If a star exploded, was it good or bad?'²⁷ It is to the question of explanations that we must next turn.

24. Hendry, *op. cit.*, p.56.

25. J. S. Habgood, *Religion and Science* (1964) pp.27-30 and C. A. Russell's chart in *Cross-Currents* (1985) p.28.

26. A. M. Farrer, *A Celebration of Faith* (1972) p.72, quoted by E. L. Mascall, *Nature and Supernature* (1976) p.80.

27. A. M. Farrer, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* (1962) p.32.

Explanations

The Adamic Fall. The traditional view as stated by Mascall as 'almost universally held until recent years' is 'that all evils, both moral and physical, which afflict this earth are in some way or another derived from the first act by which a bodily creature endowed with reason deliberately sets itself against what it knew to be the will of God.'²⁸ Despite its base in Genesis 3, the doctrine is not much referred to in the rest of the Old Testament, but emerges in the Rabbinical Judaism of St. Paul (Romans 5), although not by the name of 'the Fall' until a century or two later.²⁹ In addition to Romans 5, which speaks of how death passed on human kind, Romans 8 describes a world 'subjected to futility' — a possible echo of Ecclesiastes — and of it having been subjected 'not of its own will, but by the will of him who subjected it in hope'. While 'the will of him who subjected it' might describe Adam, or even Satan, 'in hope' is parallel to the 'in hope' of v.24, and can best describe the polarity of the actions of God in both cases, one of judgement and one of redemption. The cause may still have been Adam's transgression, but this is not explicitly stated.

Other passages of St. Paul of still wider significance are those that speak of 'the powers', which had to be overcome by Christ (Colossians 2:15 and probably 1 Corinthians 2:8), the hostile heavens that had to be reconciled among the 'all things' of Colossians 1:15–20, and the rifted universe, fallen apart, which had to be re-united in Ephesians 1:10 (cf. 2:14). Hendrikus Berkhof has warned us against interpreting the *ta panta* of 'planets and galaxies of outer space', when the apostle's horizon is much more limited,³⁰ but at least they are extra-terrestrial. The real problem of the Adamic solution is not the spatial one, but the temporal one, as J. D. Dana put it long ago 'it is funny that the sin of Adam killed those old trilobites! The blunderbuss must have kicked back into time at a tremendous rate to have hit those poor innocents!'³¹

A Pre-mundane Fall was therefore suggested in a curious psychological theory put forward by the devout Anglican, who was described as 'the greatest parish priest in England', Canon Peter Green.³² Arguing from the unity of all believers in the corporate humanity of Christ, and the

28. E. L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (1956) p.32.

29. N. P. Williams, *Ideas of the Fall and Original Sin* (1927). Paul's word *parabasis* has a different meaning (pp.252–53).

30. H. Berkhof, *God in Nature and History* (WCC 1965) p.8.

31. J. D. Dana quoted in A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (1906) p.403.

32. P. Green, evangelist, saint and thinker — a lover of nature as the son of a naturalist, he chose to spend his entire ministry in industrialized urban areas *The Problem of Evil* (1920). Ch.7 and *Pre-Mundane Evil* (1944).

unity of Christ, Spirit, Father in the corporate deity of the Trinity he posited a pre-existent Adam-Humanity soul, shattered in its unity by the assertion of the ego — an idea not dissimilar to that put forward by N. P. Williams in his Bampton lectures of 1927, 'of the collective fall of the race-soul of humanity in an indefinitely remote past',³³ although Green seems to have had the priority, as he claims to have been working on the idea since 1896 and published in 1920. However, his view of the non-egotistic nature of the members of the Trinity — the Son not seeking His own glory, the Spirit not speaking of his own but of Christ etc., may owe something to the following passage of Illingworth

'When we recall how in the days of our Lord's ministry on earth, Father, Son and Holy Spirit bore witness to each other, but no one of the Holy Persons ever to Himself, we are led on to wonder whether "in the light that no man can approach unto", where the Three are one, some higher analogue of what we call sacrifice does not forever flame; whose radiant reflection on the universe only becomes a shadow when it falls on a world of sin'.³⁴

Green's answer to the question as to where 'man' was, in the distant ages when 'great reptiles were fighting in the slime', was that the spiritual nature of man was prior to the physical development — 'where is the soul while the foetus develops in the womb?' While rebutting the charge of reincarnation by the answer that he was not talking of previous bodies or real existences, such a 'creationist' understanding of 'souls' seems to owe more to Origen, than it does to the Bible.

A Pre-cosmic Fall. In the above quoted passage from Mascal, he continues 'that in so rebelling, man was giving way to the prompting of an incorporeal being, who had already revolted against God in the spiritual realm'. Similarly an article on the Fall just published says 'Man is engaged in a web of evil which goes far beyond himself . . . The Fall is a reality which has introduced into human experience the spiritual rebellion of the fallen angels. We did not start this rebellion: we have been tempted into sharing it'.³⁵

It has the advantage of 'coherence' in that another free-willed being resisting God is a coherent explanation³⁶ (K. Ward); it is far enough back to obviate the necessity of further regress, and to meet William Temple's criterion that 'when in causal regress we arrive at a will, the regress is at an end',³⁷ it has the colour of Biblical support in passages about fallen angels in late epistles, but less probably in Isaiah 14 where

33. N. P. Williams, *op. cit.*, p.513. Another forerunner of the field was Origen.

34. J. R. Illingworth, 'The Problem of Pain' in *Lux Mundi* (1890) p.126.

35. G. Bray, 'The Fall', *Evangel* 3, 1 (Spring 1985) p.14.

36. K. Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God* (1982) pp.205-6.

37. W. Temple in P. Green, *The Pre-Mundane Fall*, p.34.

the subject is the King of Babylon, or Luke 10:18 and Revelation 12, which are not pre-cosmic. It, at least, is rightly described as a 'Fall', for such it was — a precipitate descent from height to depth.

Some problems are solved, but new ones are introduced. The sin of man, the compound of dust and deity — under his special situation of moral probation, which distanced him from God, is one thing, but the sin of pure, spiritual beings in God's living presence beggars thought, as does the alleged punishment of no forgiveness for them under any circumstances for ever. Such a towering opponent of God as Milton's Satan, smacks of a dualism, which is perhaps a greater threat than the alternative of recalcitrant matter. It has been suggested by Hendry quoting Basil Willey, that the growth of science was retarded for centuries by the doctrine of Satan's sway over nature, and that the 'rehabilitation of nature' was only achieved when Francis Bacon restated the doctrine of the Fall by limiting its effects to the moral order.³⁸

For the rest of the universe one alternative would be not to talk of *disorder*, as if it was a departure from order, but of *unorder*. It is chaos not yet overcome. It might be argued then that man came on the scene too soon, but the decision of God in His wisdom was that it was better that man come too soon than that the world should go on too long without him.³⁹ Man can co-operate with God in 'subduing the earth' for the world is not perfect, but perfectable (Moltmann).⁴⁰ If we still feel bound to retain a Fall doctrine we could perhaps follow Williams' suggestion and speak of sin and disorder not as cause and effect but of a more remote 'ground' and 'consequent',⁴¹ as Aquinas did for the relation of God to the created order. An element of mystery may be necessary if we are to develop, for as Tennant has said

'God must not be too knowable to us, or too active upon us', for 'an excess of motivation would defeat ethical freedom, and an excess of light preclude the necessary groping after God . . .' Human freewill means that 'God stands a hand-breath off, and gives his creatures room to act and grow "into" the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Tennant).

C. Redemption

I use this word for the third and final phase of our story instead of the word 'restoration', which in some respects would be better, for two reasons.

38. Hendry, *op. cit.*, pp.54-56.

39. J. B. Cobb *God and the World* (1969) p.93.

40. J. Moltmann, *The Future of Creation* (1979) p.120.

41. Williams, *op. cit.*, p.496.

- i. Redemption inevitably conjures up the figure of Christ, whose role in the future of the world is foundational. Christian eschatology is often identified with Jewish in that both speak of judgment, resurrection, millenium etc., but the central role of Jesus, not only as instigator, but as the foundation of each of these, lifts Christian eschatology into a different sphere altogether — the stratosphere of redemption.
- ii. Where 'restoration' suggests a return of what was before — 'the end as at the beginning' — ('Paradise Restored' for 'Paradise Lost') — the Biblical view is of 'something better than before' — 'a better covenant' that is inward and spiritual (Hebrews), and a new heaven and a new earth that is city more than garden (Revelation 21–22), a second Adam, who comes from heaven, and is a life-giving Spirit, who far surpasses the first Adam from the dust, who had to be breathed on, to become a living soul (1 Corinthians 15).

We limit ourselves in our survey of the New Testament to the teaching of Jesus and Paul, and some insights from Peter and the Book of Revelation.

The Teaching of Jesus. All the world knows that the teaching of Jesus is redolent with nature illustrations drawn from 'the wonder and bloom of the world', but it is not always realized, as C. H. Dodd has pointed out, that they invoked not just the *analogy* of nature by way of illustrating spiritual principles, as is done in Henry Drummond's famous book *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*⁴² although there is something of this in John's Gospel. They stress rather the *affinity* of God with nature (Hendry), as in T. W. Manson's inimitable words 'the picture of God making clothes for the flowers and preparing meals for the sparrows, is a picture of a God, who is Lord of Creation by being the Servant in love of all his creatures'.⁴³

Nor can the teaching be separated from His work as a whole, for as T. F. Torrance says 'Nowhere does the New Testament present us with a naked Christ, but only with a Christ who is clothed with His message and robed in His promises. There is no Christ apart from his teaching or saving acts'.⁴⁴ Among these, nature is again prominent, from the star over Bethlehem to the supernatural darkening of the sun at the time of the Crucifixion. Between 'He is seen and confessed as the New Man who had nature with its threatening powers under His control.' He was 'with the wild beasts (Mark 1:13); He walks on the waters, signs of chaos; He heals the sick and casts out demons' (Berkhof p.14).

42. Henry Drummond, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* (1883) quoted by Hendry, *op. cit.*, p.73. It is good to know the centenary of this attractive Scot is being commemorated by the commencement of a lectureship.

43. T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (2nd 1935) p.163.

44. T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (1976) p.48.

The Teaching of Paul is best represented by the Romans 8 passage already referred to. In the New English Bible it reads:

Up to the present, we know, the whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth.

For the created universe waits with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed.

It was made the victim of frustration, not by its own choice, but because of him who made it so; yet always there was hope, because the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendour of the children of God.

To whom does the redemption of the passage apply? Suggestions range all the way from believers only (they are certainly the subject of v.19, and in v.23 are groaning also as they await bodily redemption) to the rest of mankind, to the animal creation (they are said to groan in Old Testament passages like Joel 1:18), to inanimate nature (*pthora* in v.21 means 'decay', rather than 'mortality' — could it describe entropy?), to the *ta panta* of Ephesians and Colossians, perhaps suggested by the translation of *ktisis* as 'universe', to the Deity itself (the Spirit also groans in v.26). The Greek compound *sun* 'together' on the verbs to 'groan' and 'travail' raises the interesting question whether it is 'together with one another', or 'together with God'.

The Teaching of Peter and Revelation of the new heaven and the new earth might seem to stand in contradiction to Romans by teaching the destruction rather than the continuation of the present earth, but this is not necessarily the case. Berkhof argues that the MSS evidence in favour of the words 'burnt up' in 2 Peter 3:12 is inferior to that for 'found' or 'laid bare', so that a purification of the earth's surface by fire, as once by water in the Flood, rather than destruction, is what is envisaged.⁴⁵ He claims that not even the most apocalyptic passages like Mark 13 and its parallels, 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 18–22 speak of the end of the old cosmos. In Revelation 21 the new heaven and new earth seem to be superimposed on the existing ones as the cultural achievements of earth are brought into the City of God (Revelation 21:24, 26).

The question as to *when* and *how* this will be fulfilled remains a mystery in the mind of God, but what is clear is that Man does not bring it about, but only God. It is the voice from the throne that says 'Behold I make all things new' (Revelation 21:5). As indicated above Christ is the agent of each eschatological activity, and for this He returns in His Second Coming. We join then in the affirmation:

45. H. Berkhof, *God in Nature and History*, pp.18–19, now also in his *Christian Faith* (1979) pp.519–20. Note his §53 heading 'The Sanctification of the World'.

'Earth, thou grain of sand, on the shore of the universe of God, thou Bethlehem among the princely cities of the heavens, thou art and remainest, the loved one among ten thousand worlds and suns, the chosen of God. Thee He will again visit, and then thou wilt prepare Him a throne, as once thou gavest Him a cradle. In His radiant glory wilt thou rejoice, as once thou didst drink His blood and tears, and mourn His death. On thee hast the Lord a great work to complete'.

I began this paper with the introductory statements of the Boston conference of scientists and theologians, and I would like to finish with the concluding meditation of the conference given by Paulus Gregorios, formerly known as Paul Verghese, now Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church.⁴⁶

The Great Symbol

And a great symbol was seen in heaven!	
A woman, wrapped around in the sun	Clothed with the sun
The Moon beneath her feet	Feet on the moon
And on her hand (sic) a crown of twelve stars,	Crown of twelve stars
Pregnant, in labour pains, in agony to give birth!	
And behold, yet another symbol in heaven!	
A great dragon of fire appears,	Threat of fire dragon
With seven heads, each head with a crown,	
The tail sweeping away a third of the stars	
of heaven	Destruction of stars
And hurling them down on the face of the earth!	
The dragon confronted the woman about to	
give birth,	
In order to devour the child as soon as it was born.	
She gave birth to a son	Birth of a man child
Who was to reign over all with a sceptre of iron	
Her child was snatched away to God and to	
his throne	
While the woman fled into the wilderness.	Earth helps the woman
Book of Revelation, 12:1-6	v.16

Among other things the woman crowned with the sun represents the Church persecuted, and the human race in its labour pains to bring forth the new humanity. Relevant applications could be as follows —

' <i>clothed with the sun</i> '	—a future humanity sustained by solar energy
' <i>her feet on the moon</i> '	—already fulfilled-man has set foot on the moon
' <i>a crown of twelve stars</i> '	—by next century man may go beyond the solar system to the stars

46. R. L. Shinn (ed.) *op. cit.*, pp.378-89.

Despite all this the new humanity is not yet born, but the travail pains have come, as has the threat to stifle its birth.

'the great fire dragon' —nuclear warfare

'power in its tail

to sweep away a third

of the stars of heaven'

—star wars

'the earth helps

the woman' (v.16)

—this by swallowing the flood from the dragon's mouth that would engulf her (surely the acme of nature's contribution to human destiny!)

'the Man Child, Christ'

—as the new humanity survives to destroy the dragon. His people share the victory.

'A woman, when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come, but when she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more her anguish, for the joy that A Man Child is born into the world'.

John 16:21