

VII

CREATION

GOD needs no being other than Himself. He not only contains within Himself the sufficient reason for His own existence, but every other sufficiency. To His limitless perfection, nothing whatever is lacking; there is no need of His nature that some lesser being could supply; there is no luxury, even, that some lesser being could bring Him. In His own nature is all being, all perfection, all bliss.

Why then did He create a universe? There can be vast theological discussion here but it can be reduced, not too crudely, to the single statement that He knew we should like it. Creation brings Him no gain, but it brings us tremendous gain: it means that we are something instead of nothing, with all the possibilities of life and growth and happiness instead of the mere blankness of nonentity.

It is a new light upon the love of God that our gain could be a motive for His action. He knew that beings were possible who could enjoy existence, and He gave them existence. By existing they glorify Him—but who is the gainer by that? Not God, who needs nothing from any creature: only the creature, whose greatest glory is that he can glorify God.

ALL THINGS OF NOTHING

We use the word “create” for this conferring of existence. God made all things of nothing. Of what else could He make them? Not of Himself, for He is utterly simple:

in Him there are no parts which He can break off and, so to speak, set up in business on their own. Not of Himself then: and beside Himself, apart from creation, there is nothing.

So He used no material in creating the universe. He made it wholly—that is indeed the definition of “create”, to make a thing wholly, to make the whole of it; and only God can do it. A carpenter does not make the whole of a chair, the wood already exists; a poet does not make the whole of a poem, the words already exist. But God did make the whole of the universe; there was no existing material to make it of, and He could do it because there is no limit at all to His power—“He can send His call to that which has no being, as if it already was” (Romans iv. 17).

For the Catholic all this may seem old stuff. He cannot remember when he first learned that God had made him of nothing. Neither indeed can I. But I can remember very well when I first realized what it meant.

I was speaking on a Catholic Evidence Guild platform in Hyde Park. I remarked for the hundredth time, or perhaps the thousandth, that God had made me of nothing. But this time I heard what I was saying, and the experience was utterly shattering. To *realize* that one is made of nothing gives a feeling of hardly being there at all, a feeling that one has no hold on existence and might vanish away.

And all this because I had paid no attention at all to the truth that follows upon our being made of nothing—namely that God continues to hold us in existence.

God made us of nothing, but by the mere act of His will He made us into something. And the same will that brought us into existence is required to keep us in existence. Think hard about this, for in it is the primary truth about ourselves; without it we shall not know the first thing about ourselves—the *first* thing.

A carpenter makes a chair. He leaves it, and the chair continues to exist. Why? Because the material he made it of preserves the shape he has given it. In other words, when the maker of a thing leaves it, it is kept in existence by the material used in its making. If God, having made us, left us, we should be kept in existence by the material used in our making—namely nothing.

This is the truth about the universe as a whole and every part of it (including ourselves). Unless from moment to moment God held it in being, it would simply cease.

Whatever are the ultimate constituents of matter, God made them of nothing and sustains them in existence. The highest created spirit equally was made by God of nothing and without Him could not endure.

What it is made *of* does not account for any being's coming into existence or remaining in existence; everything depends at every instant upon the God it is made *by*. That is one reason for giving the whole power of our mind to knowing God.

WITHOUT GOD ALL IS MEANINGLESS

God made us and all things of nothing. We may look, and feel, pretty substantial, so much flesh and blood and bone: but the matter of our body God made of nothing (as He made our soul); and it has nothing but what God has given it. God holds us and all things in being. As we have seen, if He withdrew His will for our existence, we should be nothing: I do not mean that we should die, I mean that we should be nothing at all.

Not to know these two truths is to be wrong about everything. If we omit God, we see nothing as it is but everything as it is not—which is the very definition of insanity.

God is the explanation of everything. Leave out God, then, and you leave out the explanation of everything, you

leave everything unexplainable. Science studies the constitution of matter—what things are made of. But no science can study the two far more vital questions—*by whom* were they made, *for what* were they made.

I have called these more vital, and so they are. Consider one thing only. You cannot use anything intelligently until you know what it is made for. Science cannot tell you what the universe was made for: only its Maker can do that—because He knows what He had in mind when He made it.

And it is not only the whole universe that we see wrong if we leave out God. We do not see any single thing right. God is at the centre of the being of each individual thing, giving it the existence it has, keeping it in existence. To see anything—yourself, for instance—without in the same act seeing God holding it in existence is to be living in a world of fantasy, not the real world.

You see a coat hanging on a wall; with the eyes of your body you do not see the hook, because the hook is under the coat; but with the eyes of your mind you see the hook, all right. Supposing you did not; it would mean that you thought the coat was hanging on the wall by its own power: you would be wrong about the nature of coats, the nature of walls, the law of gravity. You would be living in wonderland. If the failure to see so small a thing as a hook means a deranged universe, how much more the failure to see God—on whom everything depends, including the hook.

God is not just a sublime extra. It is not that we see the same things as other people, plus God. Even the things we and they both see do not look the same, and in fact are not the same. Think of a physical landscape at sunrise; it is not that you see the same hills and trees and houses as before, and now you see the sun as well. The sun is not just one more item; you see everything sun-bathed. God is not just

one more item; we must see everything God-bathed. Only then are we seeing everything as it is.

Of course it is not only a question of seeing; this truth affects our actions too. Sin, for instance, is an effort to gain something against the will of God; but the will of God is all that holds us in existence; when we sin, we are hacking away at our only support. What could be more idiotic? The realization may not prevent us from sinning; but it ensures that we shall feel fools while doing it. God's will is the only law for sane people.

Yet this concentration upon the nothing God *made us of* must not lead us to think that we *are* nothing. That would be an insult to our Maker. For if He made us of nothing, He made us into something. We are not just thoughts in His mind. We really exist. And that we are kept in existence only by the will of God does not mean that we have no secure hold on existence: we hold it so securely—or rather God holds us so securely in it—that is the one thing we cannot be rid of; even death does no more than change the condition of our existence: we cannot cease.

MATTER, ANGELS, MEN

The universe God created has two vast divisions—spirit and matter. From the point of view of creation, the one difference between them is paramount. For while everything made by God bears the mark of its Maker and tells much of Him, spiritual beings alone are made in His image and likeness.

We have here something like the difference between an artist painting a picture—of a landscape, say, or a friend—and painting a self-portrait. The material universe is God's work of art, but spiritual beings are His self-portraiture. Our own soul is a spirit, so that every man bears a portrait of God,

painted by God, within him. It is painted by God, for every soul is a new creation, made by God in His own image; but in most of us the likeness of God is sadly defaced by sin.

Man's soul, of course, as we have already seen, is not the highest of created spirits, it is the lowest. Over it tower the angels. They are pure spirits—that is, they have no bodily element at all—simply minds and wills, minds knowing, wills loving, both at an intensity of power beyond our conception.

That angels exist we know by God's revelation. Science, which has developed marvellous skill in the examination of matter, can make no pronouncement at all as to these beings in whom there is no faintest element of matter.

We call them angels—the word means messengers—because of so many instances in Scripture where God uses them to convey His will to men; but of course they do not exist for us, any more than we for them: we and they alike exist for God. Yet they *are* our mightier brothers and their love and their protection are ours for the asking. "What are they, all of them, but spirits apt for service, whom He sends out when the destined heirs of salvation have need of them?" (Heb. i. 14). When Our Lord was in agony in Gethsemane, His Father sent an angel to comfort Him. We sometimes need comfort ourselves.

From end to end, Scripture is so filled with the activities of angels that it is puzzling to find so many Christian bodies ignoring them altogether, save as ornaments on Christmas cards. But even we who are Catholics overlook them very easily, to our great loss. We know from Our Lord's words that every child has an angel to guard him; and it is the universal teaching of theologians that this is so not only of children but of all: yet we seldom turn to them for help.

We tend to forget about angels simply because they *are* spirits. Matter is not so easy to overlook. Angels can nourish

our minds, as cows our bodies; we are more solicitous for the nourishment cows give. Fallen angels can damage our souls, as microbes our bodies: we are more on our guard against microbes. Sanity demands that we correct this strange defect in our seeing.

The universe God called into being has in it these two great divisions—the world of spirits and the world of matter. It is the special reason for man's existence that he makes these two worlds, locks these two worlds, we might say, into one universe by belonging to both. Without man, spirit and matter would be two spheres, not touching; but man, belonging to one by his soul, the other by his body, joins them together. Think of the universe, not as two unrelated spheres, but as a figure eight, with man on both sides of the join.

This is man's special function in the universe: his body is not just an accident, a punishment for sin from which he is to work free, a temporary embarrassment to be shed at death as a butterfly sheds its cocoon: it is essential if he is to act his part in the universe. That is one reason for the resurrection of our bodies at the last day: we should not be men without them, but only inadequate angels.

Remember what was said of soul and spirit in Section II. They are not two words for the same thing. Spirit is a partless, spaceless, immortal being, which can know and love. Soul means principle of life in a living body: man has the only soul that is a spirit, the only spirit that is a soul.

HOW GOD CREATED

The question of how God created falls naturally into two questions—what the creative act meant in terms of God whose act it was, and in terms of the universe which resulted from God's act.

As to the first question: God willed that things which were

not should come to be, simply willed it. He is omnipotent, limitless in power, and therefore requires neither material to work upon nor any process of manufacture. His will is enough. The reader might profitably linger on two texts of Scripture. One is from the Psalms: "He spoke and they were made; He commanded and they were created" (cxlviii. 5). The other is the one already quoted: "He can send His call to that which has no being as if it already was" (Rom. iv. 17).

By revelation we can go further. Creation was the work of the Blessed Trinity, the three Persons acting as one Creator. Just as Father and Son produce the Holy Spirit, so Father, Son and Holy Spirit create the universe. Here we should re-read what has been said of appropriation (pp. 43 ff.). The Creeds speak of God the Father as Creator of heaven and earth. But Scripture is insistent, too, that all things were created by the Son (John i. 3; Heb. i. 2).

We have seen how the two truths combine. That something should come into existence of nothing is a work of pure origination: as such, creation is "appropriated" to the Father, who within the Blessed Trinity is Origin. But the something that results is not just anything; it is an ordered something, ordered in itself and in its possibilities of development: as such it is a work of wisdom and is "appropriated" to the Son, who is the uttered Wisdom of the Father. When the order was wrecked, it was the Son who became Man to restore it.

The second of our two questions was what the creative act meant in terms of the universe: had we been looking at the time, what should we have seen? Nobody, naturally, was looking. Of that first instant before which there was no instant, we can know only as much as God tells us. The telling is in the opening two chapters of the Bible's opening book, Genesis (which means "beginning"). Please read them carefully; we shall be much occupied with them.

They tell of the creation of the world in six days; as we read on in the Old Testament, the surface meaning seems to be that it all happened roughly four thousand years before the birth of Christ. Scripture did not require the surface meaning, but having no reason to do otherwise, men generally did, up to a century ago, take the four thousand years for granted. Modern science—geology especially—provided reason against believing the four thousand years and they were dropped painlessly. Man is immeasurably older, and the universe immeasurably older still.

What of the six days? What of the order Genesis gives for the emergence of sun and moon and the rest? The Fathers and Doctors of the Church never thought of Genesis as giving us a scientific blueprint of creation. Around the end of the fourth century, over fourteen hundred years before Darwin, St. Augustine wrote *De Genesi ad Litteram*, establishing that Genesis was not meant to be taken literally. His own view was that in the beginning God created the "seeds", the elements which would ultimately develop, evolve, into our universe. (He has a couple of theories about the six days, neither of them literal.)

The burning question, of course, was as to the creation of man. Genesis speaks of two elements—earth and the breath of God. "The Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth" and "breathed into his face the breath of life; and the man became a living soul." Did the word "formed" mean one single, instantaneous action? Or could it mean a long process, animal bodies slowly developing (under God's guidance) until at last one was evolved capable of union with a spiritual soul? Obviously the word "formed" could mean either: of itself it does not tell us.

Nor does the Church. Catholics may, if they will, believe in an immediate creation of the human body from elements in the earth; they are allowed to believe in an evolutionary

process by which the first human body comes from the earth by way of other animal bodies.

What they must not deny is the immediate creation, for the first man and every subsequent man, of the soul. The soul, being a spirit, having no parts, cannot evolve from some lower form; it can exist only if God creates it.