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Creation. It was not alone in the matter of departing from the revealed God of the Old and the New Testament that the Jewish and the Christian world turned from the path direct respecting the knowledge of God. Kindred things—the creation of the world, and the origin and nature of man are among the things of revealed knowledge that have been lost. The Christians converted into dogma the false notion of the creation of the universe out of “nothing.” Assuming God’s transcendence of the universe, they accepted the idea that “creation” meant absolutely bringing from nonexistence into existence, and ultimately pronounced anathema upon those who might attempt to teach otherwise. While it is true that the use of the word “create” is applied to the idea of bringing forth something from nothing, from nonexistence into existence, yet there is nothing in the word itself, we are assured on good authority, that demands any such interpretation of its use in Holy Scripture.³ On the contrary, “fashioned” or “formed” from preexistent materials is just as consistent an interpretation of “create” and “creation” as the idea of creation from nothing. After conceding that most of the Jewish philosophers find in Gen. 1:1 that “creation” meant “creation out of nothing,” the *Jewish Encyclopedia* says that the etymological meaning of the verb (“create”), is to “cut out,” and “to put into

³For modern studies of the issue of creation *ex nihilo*, see Johnathan A. Goldstein, “The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35 (Autumn 1984): 127–35; David Winston, “Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited: A Reply to Jonathan Goldstein,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (Spring 1986): 88–91; Keith Norman, “Ex Nihilo: The Development of the Doctrines of God and Creation in Early Christianity,” *BYU Studies* 17 (Spring 1977): 291–318; and Gerhard May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts: Die Entstehung der Lehre von der Creatio Ex Nihilo*, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte, 48 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978).

shape” (fashion); and thus “presupposes the use of material.”¹ It is significant that in Gen. 1:1 it is the verb that is used—“in the beginning God created” etc.; that is, “cut out,” “put into shape,”—or fashioned out of preexistent material, the heaven and the earth.

Even Roman Catholic authorities—and the Roman Catholic Church may be regarded as the staunchest proponent of the doctrine of “creation from nothing”—concedes that the idea of “creation from nothing” is “the implicit, rather than specifically explicit statement of the Bible.”² It is only fair to say, however, that this authority holds that her deductions from the implication of scripture on the creation of the universe from nothing is warranted. It is important, however, that this authority should admit that the “creation from nothing” idea is implicitly rather than explicitly found in the Bible. The Protestant division of Christendom have generally been in substantial agreement with both Jews and Catholics on this subject.

A word of evidence [is in order] of what was said a moment since as to good authority sustaining the view that there is nothing in the word “create” itself that requires its interpretation to mean “create out of nothing.” This in addition to what is quoted above from the Jewish and Roman Catholic Encyclopedias.

The Reverend Baden Powell of Oxford University, writing for Kitto’s *Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*, says:

The meaning of this word <create> has been commonly associated with the idea of ‘making out of nothing.’ But when we come to inquire more precisely into the subject, we can of course satisfy ourselves as to the meaning only from an examination of the original phrase.³

The professor then proceeds to say that three distinct Hebrew verbs are in different places employed with reference to the same divine act, and may be translated, respectively, “create,” “make,” “form or fashion.” “Now,” continues the professor,

though each of these has its shade of distinction, yet the best critics understand them as so nearly synonymous that, at least in regard to the idea of making out of nothing, little or no foundation for that doctrine can be obtained from the use of the first of these words.⁴

And, of course, if no foundation for the doctrine can be obtained from the first of these words—viz., the verb translated “create,” then chances are still less for there being any foundation for the doctrine of creation from nothing in the verb translated, “made,” “formed,” or “fashioned.”

¹*Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Creation.”

²*Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Creation, Part III.”

³Kitto, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*, s.v. “Creation.”

⁴Kitto, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*, s.v. “Creation.”

Professor Powell further says:

The idea of creation, as meaning absolutely making out of nothing, or calling into existence that which did not exist before, in the strictest sense of the terms . . . is *not* a doctrine of *Scripture*; but it has been held by many on the grounds of *natural theology*, as enhancing the ideas we form of the divine power, and more especially since the contrary must imply the belief in the *eternity* and *self-existence* of matter.⁵

Dr. William Smith's great *Dictionary of the Bible* has no article on the term "create" or "creation," but in the article "earth" we have reference to the subject, and really an implied explanation as to why his work contains no treatise on "create" or "creation."

The act of creation itself, as recorded in the first chapter of Genesis, is a subject beyond and above the experience of man; human language, derived, as it originally was, from the sensible and material world, fails to find an adequate term to describe the act; for our word "create" and the Hebrew *bara*, though most appropriate to express the idea of an original creation, are yet applicable and must necessarily be applicable to other modes of creation; nor does the addition of such expressions as "out of things that were not," . . . or "not from things which appear," . . . contribute much to the force of the declaration.⁶

Philosophers on creation. The philosophers with equal emphasis sustain the contention as to the facts of science being against the idea of "creation from nothing." Herbert Spencer, in his *First Principles*, says:

There was once universally current, a notion that things could vanish into absolute nothing, or arise out of absolute nothing. . . . The current theology, in its teachings respecting the beginning and the end of the world, is clearly pervaded by it. . . . The gradual accumulation of experiences . . . has tended slowly to reverse this conviction; until now, the doctrine that Matter is indestructible has become a commonplace. All the apparent proofs that something can come out of nothing, a wider knowledge has one by one cancelled.⁷

John Fiske follows Spencer, and in his *Cosmic Philosophy* sums up the matter in these words: "It is now inconceivable that a particle of matter should either come into existence or lapse into non-existence."⁸

⁵Kitto, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*, s.v. "Creation."

⁶Smith, *Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "earth."

⁷Spencer, *First Principles*, 176-77.

⁸Fiske, *Outline of Cosmic Philosophy* 1:94.

Bible meaning of “create.” Turning to the Bible, we have in the chapter which is supposed to dispose of the matter of creation (Gen. 1:1-2) three things given as existing when the work of the creation began:

- (1) “In the beginning God . . . ;”
- (2) “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep” (chaos or earth-material in chaotic existence);
- (3) The Spirit of God; “And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”

These three things we have and then the work of “creation” of “fashioning” began.

“And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” This the first creative act; and it occurred on the first of the six creative days. “And God saw the light, that it was good: and divided the light from the darkness. . . . And the evening and the morning were the first day” (Gen. 1:3-5). Thence followed the other creative acts, climaxed by the creation of man in God’s own likeness and in God’s own image; and in giving man dominion over the earth.

Two things should here be observed with reference to this sublime account of creation: first, that the whole introduction to the drama of creation (Gen. 1:1) should be rendered in the light thrown upon the whole subject of creation by Genesis 2:4, viz., “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth *when* they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.” This rendering of Genesis 1:1-2 will then be, “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” On this rendering creation is not out of nothing, but out of preexisting material in a state of chaos.

The second thing referred to as necessary to remember in the exposition of the creation story is to note the fact that the creation of the heaven and the earth mentioned in Genesis 1:1—“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,” etc.—“creation” mentioned there did not precede the work of the six days, but comprised it. The creation did not begin until the first of the six days, when God said on that first day or period, “Let there be light, and there was light.”

In addition to the fact that there is no explicit, direct authority from the Bible itself that “creation” is “creation from nothing to something,” but on the contrary the etymology of the verb “create” implies creation from preexisting materials, the theologians of the “creation from nothing” school have to meet the stern facts presented by

science on the eternal existence of the universe, manifested both by the uncreatability and the indestructibility of matter and force—and hence the necessary eternity of the universe. There is a possibility of ceaseless and infinite changes within the universe, and this under the direction of eternal Intelligences operating within the universe—but no possibility of absolute beginning or absolute end. These subjects have been dealt with in previous pages, to which the attention of the reader is again invited (see chapters 7 and 8 above).

We next turn to the second subject mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, viz., the origin and nature of man. These remarks will be addressed only to those people who have supposedly built their faiths upon the revelations of God found in the Old and in the New Testament; and it should be observed that the people having access to the revelations of God and professing belief in them, could more reasonably be expected to have the clearest and most accurate ideas on this subject; but I shall make bold to say that they are without clear-cut, definite ideas upon this important subject; and nowhere is there an authoritative statement pointed to by them in the scriptures, or to be found in their creeds in the interpretation of the scriptures, anything that is satisfactory upon this subject.

The origin of man. “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained,” exclaimed David, addressing himself unto God,

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet . . . O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! (Ps. 8:3-6, 9)

Paul in substance quotes these words of David (Heb. 2:6-8), but neither David nor Paul answer the questions propounded, nor have others in the Jewish or Christian world given definite, authoritative answer to them. While both Jewish and Christians may refer man’s origin to God, as their “Creator,” yet a divided conception is held with reference to the manner of his creation. These views are expressed usually under what is known as “creationism” or “tradoscianism.”

Creationism is generally defined as the doctrine that the universe was originally brought into existence without preexistent material, by the word of God, and also that new species or forms of being have been successively produced by the direct formative exercise of the divine wisdom and power; and as applied to the creation of man’s soul, or

spirit, that God creates a new soul whenever a human being begins to live. This is the Roman Catholic view, and so far as Protestant divisions commit themselves on the subject, the general Protestant Christian view also. That this is the Catholic view is sustained by their *footnote* comment on Gen. 2:2 which is as follows: “*He still worketh . . . by conserving and governing all things, and creating souls;*”⁹ and of course, from the Catholic viewpoint of creating, creates out of nothing new souls, each time that a human being is begotten by act of generation. Professor Draper in his *Conflict Between Religion and Science* suggests that “to many devout persons there is something very revolting in the suggestion that the Almighty is a servitor to the caprices and lusts of man, and that, at a certain term after its origin, it is necessary for him to create for the embryo a soul.”¹⁰

The other theory of the origin of man already mentioned, “Traducianism,” the doctrine that human souls (spirits) are propagated by generation along with human bodies, is opposed, as will be seen, to “Creationism.” This theory consigns to man, except as to the first, a purely human origin.

There remains one other theory as to man’s origin, but it has no general standing among Jews, Roman Catholics or Protestants, namely “Infuscianism”: the doctrine that the soul is preexistent to the body, and infused into it at conception or birth. This is sometimes called “Pre-existentism,” meaning that every soul has been in existence either from all eternity or from the creation of the world, the birth of the individual being viewed as the conjoining of the soul and the body in one person. The theory was held by Origen, a Greek Christian Father of the third century. It seems to have been adopted by him from the speculations of Plato and of the Pythagoreans. It has emerged occasionally in modern theology but as before stated it has had no wide acceptance.

Purpose of God in the earth life of man—not known. With reference to the purpose of God in the earth life of man there appears no clear-cut ringing statement to be found in either the Old or the New Testament. As far as that revelation is contained in these books, the best statement on the subject is to be found in St. John’s Revelation: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11). And let this be considered, for the purpose of emphasis, in connection with Proverbs 16:4, “The Lord hath made all things for

⁹Douay Bible, 6, note on Genesis 2:2; italics in original.

¹⁰Draper, *Conflict between Religion and Science*, 127.

himself”; and again, for enlargement of the view, “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible ⟨or⟩ [and] invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him” (Col. 1:16). And, of course, including man. And this also is quoted by those who seek to know the purpose of God in the creation from the Bible: “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever” (Rom. 11:36). This is as far as the revelation contained in either the Old or New Testament gives light upon the subject. And it must be confessed that this light is not very clear; these statements are not very definite. They amount simply to this, that God has created all things for his pleasure; for himself; for his glory; but as to how this creation is to contribute pleasure to him, or glory, nothing definite is stated; and as to man’s part in it—what knowledge may he gather as to God’s purpose with reference to him—there is only—silence; and that, it must be confessed, in this case, is not “golden”—not of value!

The creeds of Jews and Christians so far as they have expressed themselves on this subject have been under the necessity of doing so by such deductions as may be made from these unsatisfactory passages of scripture; or else by their conjectures merely.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* which stands for the Presbyterian subdivisions of Christendom generally, ascribes the purpose of all the creative acts of God to be the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness.¹¹ In an authoritative explanation of this part of the creed it is said: “The design of God in creation was the manifestation of his own glory.” And again:

Our Confession very explicitly takes the position that the chief end of God in his eternal purposes, and in their temporal execution in creation and providence is the manifestation of his own glory. . . . The Scriptures explicitly assert that this is the chief end of God in creation. . . . The manifestation of his own glory *is* intrinsically the highest and worthiest end that God could propose to himself.¹²

The Commentator refers for proof of his assertions both for his comment and for the substance of his creed, to the Scripture passages quoted above, and those passages are the only warrant for the statement in the Westminster Confession.

The great Protestant body of Christians, known as the Episcopal Church, English and American, whose doctrines are set forth in the

¹¹*Westminster Confession of Faith*, “Of Creation,” section 1.

¹²Hodge, *Commentary on the Confession*, 84.

Book of Common Prayer; are silent on the purpose of God for man's existence, except that their creed proclaims faith in God "the Maker and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible";¹³ but nowhere does it declare the purpose of that creation and consequently they have no word as to the object of man's existence.

The Roman Catholic view is perhaps best explained in their catechism, the *Douay Catechism*, as follows:

Q: What signify the words, "Creator of heaven and earth"?

A: They signify that God made heaven and earth, and all creatures in them, of nothing, by His word only (Gen. 1).

Q: What moved God to make them?

A: His own goodness—so that He might communicate Himself to angels, and to man, for whom He made all other creatures.

Referring again to man's creation the following occurs:

Q: Do we owe much to God for creation?

A: Very much, because He made us in such a perfect state, creating us for Himself and all things else for us.¹⁴

From all this it may be summarized that the purpose of God in the creation of man, according to the Catholic view is: (1) that God might communicate himself to them; (2) that they might be partakers of his glory; (3) that he created them for himself and all things else for them.

While this may be in part the truth, and so far excellent, it has no higher warrant of authority than human deduction based upon rather indefinite scripture; and it certainly falls short of giving to man that "pride of place" in existence to which his higher nature and his dignity as an intelligence entitles him.

Several "origins of man" have no warrant of scripture. It is not my purpose in this chapter to undertake an extended discussion of man's origin, nor the purpose of God in his earth life, but the development of our theme to this point, and the intended conclusion of this Part I—which approaches—seemed to require that something be said as to the doctrine taught in the revelation of the Old Testament and of the New Testament in regard to man's origin. Moreover that it should be considered from the scriptural view point rather than from any

¹³*Book of Common Prayer*, 557.

¹⁴*Douay Catechism*, 11, 13.

discoveries that may obtain in the world of Science. There is nothing in the scripture, let me be bold enough to say, that warrants the idea of “Creationism” namely that God with every new human physical life begotten, creates at conception or at birth a soul for each such person; nor is there scripture warrant for “Traduscianism,” the doctrine that man, spirit, and body, is the product of his parents by act of propagation, giving to man no higher origin than a merely human, physical origin—mental, and spiritual, except as to the first man.

It will be seen from the above that the revelation-believing world are far removed from a strong scriptural doctrine of man’s origin. The fuller treatment of this theme, however, belongs to a subsequent chapter. It is merely to note the world’s limited and unsatisfactory knowledge on the subject that it is mentioned here.

Further references recommended by Roberts for this lesson: Roberts, “Man’s Relationship to Deity,” in *Gospel*, 3d ed.; Smith, “King Follett Discourse;” the standard Bible dictionaries and commentators under “subjects here treated.”