

Chapter Four The Creation

Under the heading of omniscience one could discuss, not only God's self-knowledge of the Trinitarian relations, but also the present world, its constitution, its history, and its culmination. Thus the wars of Israel and the Babylonian captivity could be placed as a sub-paragraph under the heading of omniscience. But since theologians and seminary students do not see all knowledge at a single glance, we must break up the whole into smaller parts. One part of this whole is the whole itself over again. After a chapter on God, it is customary to discuss the divine decree. Since this is God's eternal plan and purpose, and is therefore logically prior to its execution in the works of creation and providence, the decree should probably be studied before taking up the creation of heaven and earth. But since the doctrine of creation includes the purpose for which the world was made, the eternal decree can be discussed under the sub-head -- sub-head indeed! -- of the world's purpose.

Creation ex nihilo

The Bible, arranged chronologically in the main, begins with the first exhibition of omnipotence and omniscience, viz., the creation of the universe. As usual, the starting point is the Biblical data.

- Gen. 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
- Neh. 9:6 Thou art the Lord, even thou alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all things that are therein, the seas and all that is in them. dr. Isa. 42:5.
- Acts 14:15 We also are men of like passions with you, and bring you good tidings

that ye should turn from these vain things unto a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that in them is.

Heb. 3:4 He who constructed the universe is God.

In these verses and others to be mentioned, the first point to note is that God created all things out of nothing. The terms used in theology are creation ex nihilo or fiat creation. This refers to God's initiation of temporal sequence; and to learn how interconnected all revelation is, the student may consider how the account of creation supports some previous material on the nature of God. When we ask, What is God? the reply is, maker of heaven and earth.

In Acts 14:15, quoted above, Paul and Barnabas, after they had been mistaken for Mercury and Jupiter, distinguished these pagan gods from the living God who made heaven and earth.

Creation was the distinguishing feature. The verses teach that God is omnipotent because only omnipotence could create ex nihilo.

The Hebrew verb bara in Genesis 1:1 perhaps does not conclusively prove creation ex nihilo; but its meaning, about which the student can ask his Hebrew professor, is so strange as to strongly suggest it. Added to its linguistic peculiarities, the phrase "in the beginning" shows that there was nothing prior from which to construct a universe. Further passages are even clearer.

Gen. 1:3 And God said, Let there be light, and there was light.

Psa. 36:6, 9 By the word of the Lord were the heavens made,
and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spake and it was done.

John 1:3 All things came into being through him, and without him not a single thing came into being that has come into being.

Col. 1:16, 17 For by him all things in heaven and on earth were created.

. . . and he is before all things and by him the universe has stood forth.

Heb. 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were set in order by the word of God, so that sensory objects did not arise out of phenomena.

That the universe came into being through God's mere command, is clear both in Gen. 1:3 and Psa. 36:9. God spake and it was done. With the verb made Psalm 36 could still be true even if there were pre-existing materials out of which God organized the heavens by his fiat. However, the last three passages in the list could not be plainer in denying God's use of building materials. Nothing except God existed before God spoke. These verses, which teach creation ex nihilo, also bear on the doctrine of the Trinity, for John 1:3 and Col. 1:16 show that Christ was the creator. This is noteworthy, though the main point now is not the role of Christ as a person, but the fact that the world was created from nothing: all things without exception came into being through Christ, and not a single thing came into being without him. He is before all things. Nothing existed for him to work on. By Him the entire universe stood forth, or, was completed. The world does not "consist" of Christ, as water consists of hydrogen and oxygen, or as bread consists of wheat. Even the King James version, when it uses the word consist, does not mean to say this. "Stood forth" is a better translation. Instead of saying "in him all things consist," one is justified in saying, "By his fiat all things stood forth." This rules out all pre-existent materials.

Above it was noted that there was some logical advantage in discussing the nature of God first and afterwards his works. Hebrews 11:3 has more about his works than about God himself. It says first of all that the doctrine of creation is not to be understood by empirical observation, but by faith. For this reason attempts to demonstrate the Christian view of nature on the basis of

scientific experimentation are futile. The second laws of thermodynamics, or hypotheses that the sun will explode or freeze, and such like, are all irrelevant. We understand by faith. Secular thinkers regularly reject faith; unfortunately some Christians reject understanding. Both misinterpret faith. As John Owen, the great Puritan writer says in his Commentary on Hebrews at this point, faith is our assent to the truths of revelation. Then the verse makes a puzzling statement, denying one particular type of cosmology. The unfamiliar translation above was made in order to arrest the student's attention. Strange though it be to our ears and memory, it is a sufficiently accurate translation. But some exegesis is required.

If what is seen, i.e. visible objects such as trees and rivers, did not arise from phenomena, or, more in accord with the order of the words in the text, if visible objects -- even if tous aionas is taken to refer to historical ages, the age of Abel, of Enoch, of Noah, the phrase includes visible objects -- if, to repeat, visible objects arose from what is non-phenomenal, one may ask, What is the identity of that non-phenomenal from which the sensory objects were made? To say simply that they came from nothing seems to ignore a possible contrast that this verse suggests by the word phenomena. Delitzsch says that the sense of the verse must be completed by adding to the phrase not from phenomena the contrast "but from noumena."

Plato and Philo

Hodge (Vol. I, p. 560) objects that "This is Platonism, and foreign to the Scriptural modes of thinking and teaching." But it is not Platonism, and there are other Scriptural texts to support Delitzsch's suggestion. Unlike Biblical monotheistic trinitarianism, Plato posited three eternal independent principles. The supreme principle was the World of Ideas. This Ideal world

consisted of the Ideas of man, animal, beauty, justice, etc., and at the very top the Idea of the Good.

Some Platonic scholars, both Christian and secular, would understand these Ideas much as recent physicists view the laws of physics. This view of the world of Ideas as an impersonal set of laws is made more plausible by including the numbers of arithmetic among them. The latter point and its relation to Neoplatonism is much too technical to discuss here; but the dialogue Sophist makes it fairly clear that for Plato the world of Ideas was not a dead, impersonal set of laws, but a living mind. However, it was not the maker of heaven and earth.

Second to the world of Ideas was the unbegotten Demiurge, the divine Soul who formed, forms, and will form the visible world according to the patterns of the Ideas. A tree is a tree and a man is a man because the Demiurge made it like the Ideal Tree and Ideal Man. The third principle, also independent, is chaotic, recalcitrant Space out of which the Demiurge fashions the visible cosmos, or upon which he forcibly imposes the Ideal pattern. This is Platonism.

Philo, a Jewish philosopher and an older contemporary of Christ, was indeed influenced by Platonism; but he saw that this basic part of the system did not accord with the Old Testament. Hence he put the maker of heaven and earth, Jehovah, in the supreme position and placed the Ideas in God's mind. These are the noumena, the objects God thinks.¹

The difference is this: Plato distinguished between the highest principle and the Soul who fashions the visible world. The latter, though independent, has no part in making the Ideas what they are. They do not exist because he thinks them; but he thinks them because they exist - independently of him. In Christianity, however the supreme philosophic principle and the

¹ Cf. Thales to Dewey, Gordon H. Clark, pp. 195-210

Creator are one and the same. The Bible also eliminates the chaotic Space or matter on which the Forms are imposed. Therefore it is not Platonism to maintain with Delitzsch that there are noumena from which the phenomena derive their characteristics. This view is Philonic or Biblical.

The other Scriptural evidences for such noumena, which Hodge says do not exist, are everywhere that ascribes to God a plan of the universe. Not only is there an all inclusive plan with a foreordained end - a matter to be considered in a moment with reference to God's purpose in creation -- but the Scripture also refers to these noumena when speaking on very small matters. God created man according to the blueprint (so to speak) eternal in his mind. Exodus 25:9 says that God showed to Moses the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture. Numbers 8:4 mentions the pattern of the candlestick, including the flower design. See also Heb. 8:5. These patterns are the Ideas. Therefore the cause or explanation of the visible objects Moses made, and all other phenomena, is the ideal pattern that does not appear to the senses.

There is another reason, not so immediately connected with the doctrine of creation, that requires the positing of divine noumena. In the late middle ages there appeared nominalistic philosophers who asserted that only sensory individuals are real. John and James are real; but man is not. Nominalism is a widely held position in this century also. Oswald Spengler said, There are men, there is no Man. Contemporary disciples of Berkeley and Hume reduced "abstract ideas" to linguistic peculiarities. Pussies that meow are real, but cat is just a sound. All abstract nouns, like cat, dog, man have no existence other than vibrations in the air. But if this

nominalism were so, how could a Christian mean anything by words such as justification, imputation, or even sin? These are no sensory individuals, Reality is largely non-sensory. This is not paganism. It is Christianity.

4. Materialism.

If enough has now been said about creation ex nihilo according to the Ideas in God's mind, the discussion may now pass on to the representation of those Ideas in space. Since this means the visible or physical universe, the subject impinges on matters of secular science. One most important contrast between secular views and the Biblical position is the contrast between purposeless materialism or mechanism and divine teleology. This contrast can be introduced by another reference to Hodge's distaste for Platonism.

If the assertion of Ideas in God's mind is Platonism, then the assertion of a purpose in nature must be Platonism too, for Plato's Ideas were purposes. Plato only dimly anticipated by Heraclitus and Anaxagoras, was the first philosopher to emphasize teleology, i.e. the fact that the world must be explained in terms of purpose. In this twentieth century almost all non-Christian philosophers deny universal purpose and describe nature in mechanical terms. This resulted from the success of Renaissance scientists, such as Galileo, in contrast with the futile Aristotelian teleology of the Middle Ages. Descartes (1590-1650) still acknowledged that God had purposes; but men could give only mathematical or mechanical explanations of natural phenomena. Later scientists simply dropped God and purpose.

Sometimes this view is called materialism, especially when it was extended to cover the behavior of animals and men. Now, in ancient Greek and in nineteenth century Germany there

were materialists properly so-called. Democritus pictures the universe as a complex of atoms in empty space. These indivisible and impenetrable bodies collided with one another, and their combinations are the visible world. In Germany Vogt and Büchner wrote on Kraft und Stoff, and explained how one motion caused another motion according to the Newtonian laws. But hardly anyone today thinks of the the world as a collection of discrete particles. This rejection of atomism or materialism was not based on the recent splitting of the “atom.” To be sure, nuclear physics has destroyed the atomic theory of last century; yet it could still have posited smaller three dimensional bodies. But even before nuclear fission, Mach and Haeckel discarded atoms and substituted sensations, spirits, or perhaps point centers of force. Space was no longer empty; it was both a plenum and a continuum.

Ernst Nagel in his presidential address to the American Philosophical Association in 1954, more materialistic than Haeckel, declared that the causal primacy of organized matter, the contingency of events on the organization of spatio-temporally located bodies, is one of the best tested conclusions of experience. He is particularly emphatic that there is no place for an immaterial spirit or for the survival of personality after the body decays. These principles, he repeats, are supported by compelling, conclusive evidence.

If this was intended to deny that Energy is the ultimate and single constituent of the universe, and to assert the ultimacy of three dimensional bodies, however small, it may be called materialism. But this is not the majority view of top level physicists; and maybe Nagel deliberately said “bodies” instead of particles because he clearly had in mind only macro-physics and anti-theology.

Newtonian and ancient materialism is gone. The twentieth century has produced a profusion of new ideas, some restricted and some quite general. If there is anything sure besides death and taxes, it is that science will continue to change, not only in details, but in general. Therefore it is bad policy for Christian theologians to take contemporary science too seriously. No doubt the populace or the Christian populace wants some clarification as to how atheistic science can be countered. But it should always be remembered that science is constantly changing and that, after the long reign of the Newtonian synthesis ended not quite a century ago, the theories that took its place have changed and been replaced with much greater rapidity.

5. Mechanism

Since the promulgation of Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy about 1930, some scientists and some philosophers have accepted a theory of free will and a disordered universe. Strictly speaking, although Heisenberg's work was an important advance in physics with reference to the position and velocity of tiny particles, his indeterministic philosophy does not validly follow from his experimentation. For this reason the theory which in the main has replaced materialism, and which controls scientific investigation, is mechanism. This theory is conjoined, sometimes, with a metaphysics that postulates a continuum, i.e. a stuff, substance, or matter, or, better, an electro-magnetic field that is not atomic or composed of discrete particles, but is unitary or homogenous in its infinite extent; or, sometimes, and even less "materialistic" substance that consists of "experience" or sensations. Ernst Haeckel in The Riddle of the Universe (pp. 20-21), has said, "Matter, or infinitely extended substance, and spirit (or energy) or sensitive and thinking substance are the two fundamental attributes ... of the all embracing

divine essence of the world, the universal substance.” Ernst Mach (1838-1916), one of his contemporaries, with better scientific credentials, more thoroughly resolve the universe into sensations. However, when “experience” is made basic, it does not follow that “experience” is mental. John Dewey and other reject both materialism and mentalism, though here, as also with Spinoza, whose substance possessed all attributes, it is hard to understand what precisely the stuff of the universe is. In any case the resultant physics is mathematically deterministic. Given the positions and velocities of points, their future positions and velocities can be predicted by means of differential equations.

The theologians of last century were particularly unfortunate in living at a time when science seemed monolithic. Addressing themselves to their day, they made several blunders. Part of Hodge’s refutation of materialism depends on the assumption that the product of infinity and zero is zero. (Vol. I, p. 211). Strong (Vol. II, p. 371), seems to accept the definition of force as “energy under resistance.” The actual definition of force in Newtonian science was “the product of mass and acceleration.” Strong also (Vol. I, pp. 90, 91) says, “Deprive atoms of force and all that remains is extension, which = space = zero.” Just how space equals zero, he does not explain. But if it does, then he says, “If atoms are not extended, then even an infinite multiplication and combination of them could not produce an extended substance.” Here is a plausible fallacy: plausible but not the less fallacious. The unexpressed premise of this argument is that the qualities of a compound must be found in its elements. This is the assumption underlying the Eleatic Zeno’s criticism of Democritus’ view of sensation. If a great ocean wave crashes with a thunderous roar on a rocky coast, the finest particles of spray must have made a small noise, for an addition of no noises equals no noise. Now, if no ocean waves are handy, the

experimenter may take a flake of ground pepper, stand on a step ladder, and let the flake fall to crash upon the kitchen floor. The sound will be zero -- he will hear nothing at all. It follows that a whole is not often the sum of its parts. And Leibniz was not stupid when he attempted to construct extended bodies from unextended monads.

Equally peculiar is the apparent blindness of the theologians in thinking that causality as used in nineteenth century physics is similar to the divine causality in creating the world. Therefore they bristled when the philosopher Hume exploded the concept of cause and showed that experience gives no basis for the idea of necessary connection. Kant then sought to defend Newtonian physics by reintroducing cause as an apriori form of the mind. But for Kant and the scientists every event was both a cause and an effect. Every cause was a motion of a physical body. Hume's arguments therefore did not touch divine causality, nor did Kant's arguments support it; for neither the philosophers nor the scientists were discussing the kind of cause the theologians had in mind. Conversely, the theologians misunderstood what the scientists were talking about. Since the God of the Bible is not an effect, and therefore cannot be a cause, the theologians' arguments were often beside the point. Whatever those theologians thought they could discover about causality from their naive consciousness, it would have been better, had they read Notes on Causality by Herbert Feigl, The Causal Character of Modern Physical Theory by Ernest Nagel, or Der Kausalbegriff in der Physik by Max Planck.

There are two lessons here for theologians to learn: first, not to take science too seriously; and yet, second, not to misunderstand the meaning of scientific terms. In addition to misunderstanding the term cause, the nineteenth century theologians used the law of gravitation to explain miracles. To quote, "One law is superseded by another. When I support an apple in my

hand, the law of gravitation does not cease to act, but another power prevents the apple from falling. So when an aeroplane flies among the clouds, or a steel vessel floats, or a ram forces water to run up an incline. The natural laws are operative all the time, but human contrivances effect their purpose while no law of nature is suspended or violated.” But this reduces miracles to ordinary complexities among the laws of Newton. Since today the Newtonian synthesis has been discarded, atomism entirely repudiated, and instead of bits of matter the stuff of the universe is called Energy, to which only an operational definition can be given, we should not fall into the same trap of depending on contemporary science or philosophy. Operationalism seems to be the best method of dealing with physics, but if there is anything certain about physics, it is that the physics of today will be discarded tomorrow. The law of gravitation does not conform to the observational material; the concepts of causality and uniformity of nature play no role in physics; and what previous theologians thought was obvious common sense cannot be relied upon. Our ideal should be to adhere to the Biblical data and pay no attention to extraneous ideas. This is more difficult than it sounds, however; all of us are affected by our environment and it is hard to purge our minds of our secular education. But perhaps it is easier to do so now than it was a hundred years ago. Since today science is seen to be changing rapidly, it no longer seems so absurd to suppose that science never has and never will describe the process of nature. Had Hodge not been so antagonistic toward Plato and so friendly toward Aristotle as to accept the latter’s view that science arrives at absolute truth, he might have given more credit to the former philosopher’s view that science is always tentative. It was not only the philosopher Hume (Einstein comes in a moment) who said,

“Hence we may discover the reason why no philosopher, who is rational and modest, has ever pretended to assign the ultimate cause of any natural operation, or to show distinctly the action of that power, which produces any single effect in the universe. It is confessed, that the utmost effort of human reason is to reduce the principles, productive of natural phenomena, to a greater simplicity, and to resolve the many particular effects into a few general causes, by means of reasonings from analogy, experience, and observation. But as to the causes of these general causes, we should in vain attempt their discovery; nor shall we ever be able to satisfy ourselves, by any particular explication of them. These ultimate springs and principles are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry. Elasticity, gravity, cohesion of parts, communication of motion by impulse; these are probably the ultimate causes and principles which we ever discover in nature; and we may esteem ourselves sufficiently happy, if, by accurate inquiry and reasoning, we can trace up the particular phenomena to, or near to, these general principles. The most perfect philosophy of the natural kind only staves off our ignorance a little longer: as perhaps the most perfect philosophy of the moral or metaphysical kind serves only to discover larger portions of it. Thus the observation of human blindness and weakness is the result of all philosophy, and meets us at every turn, in spite of our endeavours to elude or avoid it.”

If anyone disparage philosophers and say scientists should be quoted, he surely must pay attention to Einstein. Chaim Tschernowitz quotes Einstein in a conversation: We know nothing about it at all. Our knowledge is but the knowledge of school children. ... We shall know a little more than we do now. But the real nature of things -- that we shall never know, never” (Readers Digest, Aug. 1972, p.28).

A Christian theologian ought therefore to be cautious in refuting anti-theistic views on the basis of some scientific theory. It can indeed be shown that the philosophy of mechanism is not derived by any valid argument from the data of laboratory experimentation. It can also be shown that every law of physics is false, if taken as a description of the processes of nature. But though all science be false, mechanism for all of that might still be true.² Whether one adopts mechanism or teleology depends on the first principles a man chooses. The Bible claims that God acts for a purpose, and now the discussion turns to that purpose.

6. Biblical Teleology

Since the subjection of purpose is so important and leads into the doctrine of the divine decree, a list of references somewhat longer than usual will be given. The verses vary in specificity and universality; and some exposition will therefore follow.

II Sam. 17:14 For the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom.

Jer. 26:3 If so be they will hearken ... that I may repent me of the evil which I purpose to unto them.

Jer. 36:3 ... All the evil which I purpose to do unto them ...

Jer. 51:29 Every purpose of the Lord shall be performed against Babylon.

² Gordon H. Clark The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God

John 13:13 I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.

Acts 26:16 I have appeared unto thee for this purpose.

Rom. 8:28 We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.

Rom. 9:11, 17 that the purpose of God according to election might stand ... Even for this same purpose have I raise thee up ...

Eph. 1:11 Being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will.

Eph. 3:11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

II Tim. 1:9 According to his own purpose.

I John 3:9 For this purpose the Son of God was manifested.

Some of these verses state quite particularly that God had a purpose with respect to a certain individual or a certain dated event: Ahithophel and Absalom, Babylon, Judas, and Paul. If, now, God is a God of Wisdom, and if predictions must be fulfilled by intermediate events, we

can conclude that God has a purpose for every person. We could also infer that he has a purpose for every animal, since it is explicitly stated that not a sparrow falleth to the ground without the Father's notice. Obviously the Father's notice is not restricted to sparrows: it extends to squirrels, elephants, coyotes, and Jonah's big shark.

An unfriendly physicist might complain that this is no reason for saying nature as a whole has a purpose, for it is possible to construct a mechanistic system in which there are purposes though the whole has none. The unfriendly physicist by the same reasoning will also say that the Scriptural references do not support the Platonic position that all concepts must be defined teleologically. To which a Christian may reply that the Scripture assigns purposes to inanimate objects, since God made the sun for the purpose of "ruling over the day" and with the moon and stars to measure the seasons.

To maintain a teleological view of nature, it is not necessary to include teleological concepts in the definition of force. Force can still be mass times acceleration, and the product of ohms and amperes can still be volts. This is all the more the case if scientific terms are operational -- and that for two apparently opposite yet actually complementary reasons. First, operational physics has nothing to say about the constitution of nature. Therefore its terms may be devoid of purposive intent without denying purpose in the world. Then, second, in operationalism the purpose is very clearly located in the scientist himself. Science therefore furnishes no evidence against a teleological concept of nature as a whole; and the Christian position on its own base remains untouched.

Now, in addition to the statements concerning particular events and individual persons, some of the verses in the list make more general assertions. Romans 8:28 speaks of all things. It

is not as if things worked. There is a reading attested by manuscripts p 46, A, and B, that says, "God works all things." This may not be the best reading, but it is the best sense, for there is nothing in the Bible to suggest that things work independently of God. In any case, Eph. 1:11 says that we are predestinated according to the previous resolve of him who works all things after the counsel of his will. This totally universal proposition says clearly that it is God who works or controls every last item in the universe of physics and history. It is God's decision that fixes the number of hairs on our heads and makes it rain on the fourth of July for the benefit of them that love him.

This is not to say that the only purpose God has in mind is the good of those who love him. Purposes regularly come in series. A man gets dressed in order to leave the house, in order to take the bus, in order to ride down town, in order to get to the department store, in order to buy a present for his wife's birthday yesterday. God preserved Noah in order to make a covenant with Abraham, so that there could be a people over whom David. was to rule, in order to prepare for the Messiah, so that Paul could preach the gospel in Corinth. God does indeed work all things for the good of his saints, but the purpose of creation, the purpose of the act of creation, goes beyond this, important as this is to us.

7. The Glory of God.

It is proper, it is important, and it is very necessary to say that God does all things for his own glory. The glory of God is the final and full purpose of everything.

Isa. 48:11 For mine own sake, for mine own sake, will I do it; for how should my name be profaned? And my glory will I not give to another.

Ezek. 20:9 I wrought for my name's sake ...

Rom 11:36 For of him, and through him, and unto him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen.

I Cor. 15:28 ... then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him, that God may be all in all.

Col. 1:16 All things have been created through him and unto him.

Rev. 4:11 Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory ... for thou didst create all things, and because of they will they were and were created.

Undoubtedly God intended to benefit his saints by the course of history; but why did he choose to have saints in the first place? The answer is, for his own glory. The universe is of him, by him, and to him. Who has instructed him? Who has first given him anything? Mankind is as a drop in a bucket or the fine dust on the scales (Isa. 40:15). All things are unto him; he is their end; and because of his will, or good pleasure, the universe was created. That the glory of God is the ultimate and original purpose for which everything was made is an idea of the greatest importance. A few pages later much of this will be summarized under the concept of the sovereignty of God. It must not be underestimated. Yet the Scripture also gives another purpose for the creation of the world, subsidiary to the ultimate purpose, yet nearer the ultimate cause than the benefit of the saints. Its importance is greater than the lesser purposes and it is

particularly useful to know because it gives a key to the understanding of the logical order of the parts of the eternal decree.

8. Four Parts of God's Purpose.

God's purpose, as has been made obvious; embraces many, indeed all events. But some events, some of God's choices or determinations, are more important than others; and theologians have wondered how these decrees, as they are called in the plural, depend on one another. Of course, very literally, one could speak of the decree to call Abraham, to make David king of Israel, to rebuild Jerusalem, and so on. But the four more general decrees usually selected for study are creation, the fall of man, the decree to save some and reprobate others, and the decree to provide salvation for the elect. The two chief views relative to the logical order of these decrees are called infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism, depending on whether the decree to elect presupposes and therefore comes under or after the fall, or whether conversely election is prior.

The exponents of both views agree that the order of the decrees is not a temporal or chronological order since they are all eternal in God's mind. It is the logical order that is sought. But neither party is too clear as to what the term logical order means. In fact, the infralapsarian view seems to be simply chronological: creation, fall, provision for salvation, and the election of those saved. Some infralapsarians make a slight change and list them as: creation, the fall, election, and the provision for those elected.

The supralapsarian view, at least as sometimes stated, is also chronological except that the decree of election is put first. H. B. Smith (p. 118) describes it as follows: "The

Supralapsarian says that the divine purpose in respect of sin was subsequent to the divine purpose for salvation and punishment, i.e. in the order of decrees, the logical order, the first decree is that God will set forth his glory, the second that he will do this by saving some and condemning others, and the third is the decree of the fall, the Lapsus.” Smith favors the infralapsarian position, but takes a defeatist attitude and concludes, "the whole subject of the divine decrees is above man's comprehension."

Such seeming humility has often been used when a theologian cannot see how to solve his problem. But actually it is a form of conceit. It means in the first place that if Dr. X cannot think of a solution, no one else can. In the second place, it means that Dr. X. has so thoroughly understood everything from Genesis to Revelation that he can assert with complete infallibility that the Scripture contains not a single hint from which a solution can be deduced or even guessed at. And if this means, as it certainly seems to, that some Scripture is unintelligible, it contradicts God's Word, which tells us that all Scripture is profitable for doctrine.

These remarks do not deny that exegetes make mistakes, nor that man's ignorance is greater than his knowledge. Nor do they deny that God has given us only a partial revelation. But when a problem is presented by the Scripture itself, it seems wiser and more humble to admit that one has failed to understand than to assert that no one else can understand it.

The particular problem on the order of the decrees is not nearly so difficult as many think. H. B. Smith's defeatism, the two forms of infralapsarianism, the oddities advanced for one view or the other, are mainly the result of not having a clear notion of what is meant by logical as opposed to chronological order. Other oddities may have a different origin.

Turretin argued against supralapsarianism by saying that, “Of a non-ens nothing can be determined;” hence the decree to create an ens must precede the fall and election. This is bad scholasticism. It would entail the impossibility of God’s decreeing anything in advance. For example, on this view, God could not have decided to destroy Absalom through bad advice until after Absalom had been born. Or, more to the point, God could not have decreed to create man as a rational being, since before the actual creation man would have been a non-ens about which nothing could be determined. In fact, all four of God’s decrees in eternity relate to non entia. Turretin’s argument therefore seems to imply that God decreed nothing.

Various writers object to supralapsarianism because the Scriptures often picture the saints as having been saved out of the mass of fallen humanity. The saint is “a brand plucked from the burning” (Zech. 3:2). “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2) “Save yourselves from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40). But such verses and other like them are irrelevant to the present problem. The Scriptures proceed historically, chronologically. They describe the threatenings of the prophets and the exhortations of the apostles. Naturally the Scriptures say that Christ came to “deliver us out of this present evil world.” But this obvious chronology is not intended to state the logical order of the decrees. Nevertheless the chronological account gives us a hint as to the logical order.

9. The Particular Purpose of Creation.

Let us examine Eph. 3:10.

The main exegetical problem of Ephesians 3: 10 is the identification of the antecedent of the purpose clause: "in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known, by means of the Church, to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." Something happened in the preceding verses for the purpose of revealing God's wisdom. What was it that had this purpose?

There are three and apparently only three possible antecedents: (1) Paul was called to preach in order that, (2) The mystery was hid in order that, and (3) God created the world in order that.

First, I should like to eliminate from consideration the second of these possibilities. This interpretation would hold that God kept a certain secret hidden from the beginning of the world in order to reveal it in New Testament days. The only textual support for this exegesis, aside from the fact that the event of hiding is mentioned prior to the purpose clause, is the word now. By emphasizing the word now, one may say that the mystery or secret was kept hidden for the purpose of revealing it now. It is true that the emphatic position is given to the verb might be made known, and hence a contrast with the previous hiding is pointed out. The word now, however, is not particularly emphatic and cannot bear the burden of this exegesis. The burden is considerable, for while it is possible to hide something in order to make it known at a later date, it is more probable that the revelation is the purpose of Paul's preaching or of God's creation of the world. Hiding is a more or less negative idea, and it seems reasonable to expect some definite and outward event that has the purpose stated here.

Let us then consider the next possibility. The interpretation that Paul was called to preach in order that God's wisdom might be made known seems to fit in very well with the preceding context.

In verse 8 Paul had just referred to the grace God had given him for the purpose of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. From this point the long complicated, sentence continues to the end of verse 13. Even further back, as early as verse 2. the idea of Paul's preaching had been introduced. Therefore no one can doubt that Paul's preaching is the main idea. or at least one of the main ideas, of this passage. Whether or not Paul's personal ministry recedes from its main position as the paragraph approaches its end, and what other subordinate ideas may be found in verses 9-11, must of course be determined by direct examination. But the idea of Paul's preaching is without doubt prominent.

We now ask the question whether or not the revelation of God's wisdom to powers in heaven is the purpose of Paul's preaching.

Charles Hodge thinks it is. Aside from his objections to other views, which we shall study presently, his positive argument is as follows: "The apostle is speaking of his conversion and call to the apostleship. To him was the grace given to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, and teach all men the economy of redemption, 'in order that' through the Church might be made known the manifold wisdom of God. It is only thus that the connection of this verse with the main idea of the context is preserved. It is not the design of creation, but the design of the revelation of the mystery of redemption, of which he is here speaking (*Commentary, in loc.* p. 119).

For the moment the only objection to Hodge's exegesis is the seemingly peculiar notion that Paul's preaching on earth reveals God's wisdom to the powers in heaven. One would not be surprised if Paul's preaching on earth revealed God's wisdom to men. But Paul did not preach to angels, demons, or whomever these powers may be. Admittedly, Paul's preaching and the founding of the Church can be said to reveal God's wisdom to these powers, if we suppose that God directed their attention to what was going on. In this case Paul's preaching would have this purpose, but it would be a purpose one or two steps removed. Immediately it would seem more natural to connect Paul's preaching with its effects on men, rather than on angels or demons.

However, since no decisive grammatical reason can be advanced against this interpretation, it is presumably impossible to disprove it.

On the other hand, there is a third interpretation, also grammatically possible, one that seems to have weightier reasons in its favor, and which does not suffer under the objections raised against it. Grammatically, in fact, this third interpretation is not merely equally good, but somewhat preferable.

When we say that God created the world for the purpose of displaying his manifold wisdom, we connect the purpose clause with the nearest antecedent. As anyone can see, the reference to Paul's preaching lies several clauses further back. The immediate antecedent is creation, and this position, we hold, is of some value in deciding the matter.

Since therefore the syntax is at least somewhat in its favor, the best procedure is to examine objections against so understanding it.

We turn again to Hodge for these objections. The view that God created the universe in order to display his manifold wisdom is, as Hodge says, the supralapsarian view. Against this interpretation Hodge urges four objections: (1) This passage is the only passage in Scripture adduced as directly asserting supralapsarianism, and supralapsarianism is foreign to the New Testament. (2) Apart from doctrinal objections, this interpretation imposes an unnatural connection upon the clauses. The idea of creation is entirely subordinate and unessential: it could have been omitted without materially affecting the sense of the passage. (3) The theme of the passage concerns Paul's preaching; only by connecting the purpose clause with Paul's preaching can the unity of the context be preserved. (4) The word *now*, in contrast with the previous *hiding*, supports the reference to Paul's preaching. It was Paul's preaching that had now put an end to the secret's hiddenness. Such are Hodge's four objections.

Let us consider the last one first. Admittedly, it was Paul's preaching that founded the Church, and the founding of the Church made known God's wisdom to the powers in heaven. The supralapsarian interpretation does not deny that Paul's preaching played this important part in God's eternal plan. But even so, Paul's preaching was not the immediate cause of the revelation of God's wisdom. It was the existence of the Church that was the immediate cause. Yet grammar prevents us from saying that the Church was founded in order that God's wisdom might be revealed. It is true that the Church was founded to reveal God's wisdom, but this is not what the verse says. Now, if several events had occurred, leading up to this revelation of God's wisdom, including the founding of the Church, Paul's preaching, and of course the death and resurrection of Christ which Paul preached, the word *now* in the verse cannot be used to single

out Paul's preaching in contrast with other events mentioned in the passage. Hodge's fourth objection is therefore poor.

Next, the first objection: this is the only passage in Scripture adduced as directly asserting supralapsarianism, and supralapsarianism is foreign to the New Testament. The latter half of this objection is of course a *petitio principii*, i.e., Hodge begs the question. If this verse teaches supralapsarianism, then the doctrine is not foreign to the New Testament. We must first determine what the verse means; then we shall know what is in the New Testament and what perhaps is not.

To be sure, if this one verse were indeed the only verse in the Bible with supralapsarian overtones, we would be justified in entertaining some suspicion of the interpretation. Hodge does not say explicitly that this is the only verse; he says it is the only verse adduced as directly asserting supralapsarianism.

Well, really, even this verse does not directly assert the whole complex supralapsarian view. Very few verses in Scripture directly assert the whole of a major doctrine. Therefore we must recognize degrees of directness, partial and even fragmentary assertions of a doctrine. And with this recognition, regularly acknowledged in the development of any doctrine, it is evident that this verse does not stand alone in suspicious isolation.

Supralapsarianism, for all its insistence on a certain logical order among the divine decrees, is essentially, so it seems to us, the unobjectionable view that God controls the universe purposefully. God acts with a purpose. He has an end in view and sees the end from the beginning. Every verse in Scripture that in one way or another refers to God's manifold wisdom, every statement indicating that a prior event is for the purpose of causing a subsequent event,

every mention of an eternal, all-embracing plan contributes to a teleological and therefore supralapsarian view of God's control of history. In this light Ephesians 3:10 clearly does not stand alone.

The connection between supralapsarianism and the fact that God always acts purposefully depends on the observation that the logical order of any plan is the exact reverse of its temporal execution. The first step in any planning is the end to be achieved; then the means are decided upon, until last of all the first thing to be done is discovered. The execution in time reverses the order of planning. Thus creation, since it is first in history, must be logically last in the divine decrees. Every Biblical passage therefore that refers to God's wisdom also supports Ephesians 3:10.

Next comes objection number two. Hodge claimed that the supralapsarian interpretation of this verse imposes an unnatural connection upon the clauses. The idea of creation, he said, is entirely unessential and could have been omitted without materially affecting the sense of the passage.

Is it not evident that Hodge does not know how to handle the reference to creation? He claims that it is unessential, a chance and thoughtless remark that does not affect the sense of the passage. Such careless writing does not seem to me to be Paul's usual style.

For example, in Galatians 1: 1, Paul says, "Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead." Why now did Paul mention that God raised Jesus Christ? If it were a chance remark without logical connection with the sense of the passage, a remark intended only to speak of some aspect of God's glory, Paul could as well have said, God who created the universe.

But it is fairly clear that Paul had a conscious purpose in selecting the resurrection instead of the creation. He wanted to emphasize, against his detractors, that he had apostolic authority from Jesus Christ himself. And Jesus Christ was able to give him that authority because he was not dead, but had been raised up by God.

So, as Paul chose the idea of resurrection instead of creation in Galatians 1:1, he also chose creation instead of resurrection in Ephesians 3:9 because the idea of creation contributed some meaning to his thought. Certainly the supralapsarian or teleological interpretation of Ephesians 3:10 accommodates the idea of creation, and contrariwise an interpretation that can find no meaning in these words is a poorer interpretation.

The remaining objection is that only by making Paul's preaching the antecedent of the purpose clause can the unity of the context be preserved. The reverse seems to be the case. Not only does Hodge fail to account for the mention of creation, and thus diminish the unity, but further the stress on purpose, running from creation to the present unifies the passage in a most satisfactory manner. The teleological understanding of God's working in fact enables us to combine all three of these interpretations, including the second which in itself has so very little in its favor, in a unified thought. Since God does everything for a purpose, and since whatever precedes in time has in a general way the purpose of preparing for what follows, we may say that God kept the secret hidden in order to reveal it now, and also that Paul preached the gospel in order to reveal it now. But if God had not created the world, there would have been no Paul to preach, no Church by which the revelation could be made, no heavenly powers on which to impress the idea of God's manifold wisdom. Only by connecting the purpose clause with the

immediate antecedent concerning creation, can a unified sense be obtained from the passage as a whole.

Therefore, in conclusion, although the other interpretation is grammatically possible, the idea that God created the world for the purpose of revealing his wisdom makes much better sense.

The doctrine of the divine decrees must again be considered in the discussion on sin and atonement. But perhaps sufficient has been said for a chapter on creation.

10. Immutability and Creation.

It would not do, however, to omit from this chapter a discussion of an extremely difficult point that besets the doctrine of creation. The difficulty lies in the apparent antithesis between divine immutability and the single, once-for-all act of creation, from which God rested on the seventh day. The history of theology has not overlooked this difficulty, but the solutions proposed are sometimes painfully superficial.

Augustine did his best with the problem: How can the eternal and immutable produce the temporal and changing? The famous Passage in the Confessions (XI, 10, or 12) begins with the question of the Manichaeans: "What was God doing before he created the heaven and the earth? If he were lazy and inactive, why, they ask, why did he not remain so for the rest of time, the same as before, doing nothing? If a change occurred in God, a new volition, to create what he had not yet created, how could there be a true eternity, when a volition occurred that had not occurred previously? Indeed, the will of God is not a creature; it precedes every creature; nothing is created without the preexisting will of the creator. The will of God belongs to the very

substance of God. If in the divine substance, something comes forth that did not previously exist, that substance cannot be truly called eternal. And if God has always willed the existence of the creature, why is not the creature also eternal?" (cf. City of God, XI, 4-5).

The way the Manichaeans and Augustine understood the problem results in a solution that depends on a theory of time. The first word of Genesis, "in the beginning," indicates a moment at which creatures first began to exist. Since, now, change defines time, time itself is a creature and began in the finite past. Hence it is wrong to picture God as doing nothing for a long time and then after this time creating the world. There was no time before creation. God is eternal, not temporal. A time preceding creation would pose the question, Why did God choose one moment, rather than an earlier or later moment, in which to create? In an infinite void time, every moment would be indistinguishable from every other. No one more than any other would contain a reason for choosing that one to be the moment of creation. This irrationality therefore precludes an infinite past of empty time. Similarly there could be no infinite empty space, for the same question reappears: Why did God create the world here rather than there?

Augustine locates the difficulty in our mistaken attempt to compare two heterogeneous types of duration -- if indeed duration is at all proper in this case. These two 'durations' are based on two heterogeneous types of being. He then seems to conclude (not obviously in harmony with his strong anti-skeptical insistence that we most surely know God) that since we do not know the being of God, we cannot solve the problem.

Thomas Aquinas' solution is much the same, in that it depends on considerations of time and motion; its technicalities, however, make it more difficult to understand. He recognizes that a delayed volition seems to presuppose some modification or change in God causing him to

initiate the action. If therefore God immutably wills the world, the world must always have existed. This difficulty, Thomas argues, results from applying to the First and Universal Cause conditions applicable only to particular causes acting in time. A particular cause is not the cause of the time within which its action takes place; but God, on the contrary, is himself the cause of time. What is true of particular causes in their interlocking relationships, one part of the universe with another, is not true of the production of the universe as a Whole. Furthermore, Aquinas argues, creation is not a change or motion. For a thing to move, it must be first in a certain place (or condition), and then it must get to another place. But in creation, there is no point of departure. This does not mean that creation is impossible, as opponents aver, but only that creation is not a motion. Our imaginations, depending as they do on sensory experience, must always picture creation as a motion; but in reality it is something quite different beyond the range of human experience. In the Summa Theologica (I, Q. 45, Art. 2) he says, "Creation is not change, except according to our way of understanding. For change means that the same thing should be different now from what it was previously. Sometimes it is the same actual reality which is different now from what it was before, as happens when the motion is according to quantity, quality and place; but sometimes it is the same being only in potentiality, as in substantial change, the subject of which is matter. But in creation, by which the whole substance of a thing is produced, the same thing can be taken as different now and before only according to our way of understanding, so that a thing is understood as first not existing at all, and afterwards as existing. But *as action and passion coincide as to the substance of motion*, and differ only according to diverse relations, it must follow that, when motion is withdrawn, there remain only the diverse relations in the Creator and in the creature. But because the mode of signification

follows the mode of understanding, as was said above creation is signified as a change; and on this account it is said that to create is to make something from nothing. And yet *to make* and *to be made* are more suitable expressions here than *to change* and *to be changed*, because *to make* and *to be made* import a relation of cause to the effect, and of effect to the cause, and imply change only as a consequence.”

This argument hardly carries conviction, not only because of its difficult scholastic terminology, but because, while it may show that creation is not a motion of the created object, it fails completely to show that a once-for-all volition is not a change in an immutable God.

But evangelical theologians are even more unsatisfactory: either they do not see precisely what the difficulty is, as Augustine so clearly did, or they deny that God is immutable. For example, Stephen Charnock and, about sixty years later, John Gill, said much the same thing. The latter wrote, "Nor is the immutability of the divine nature to be disproved from the creation of the world, and all things in it; as when it is suggested, God, from a non-agent, became an agent and acquired a new relation, that of a Creator, from which mutability is argued. but it should be observed, that God had from all eternity the same creative power, and would have had, if he had never created anything; and when he put it forth in time, it was according to his unchangeable will in eternity, and produced no change in him; the change was in the creatures made, not in him the Maker; and though a relation results from hence, and which is real in creatures, is only nominal in the Creator, and makes no change in his nature." (Book I, chapter V). Not only does this evade the problem; it asserts that creation is a change in the created object, and on this point Aquinas has the better of it.

Charnock and Gill in effect deny that God is immutable. Not that they intended to. In the same section from which the quotation above was taken, Gill says, "Immutability is an attribute which God claims ... Mutability belongs to creatures, immutability to God only; creatures change, but he does not. ... He is unchangeable ... in his nature and essence, being simple and devoid of all composition ... God being an infinite and uncreated Spirit, and free from composition in every sense, is intirely [sic] and perfectly immutable ... Time doth not belong to him, only to a creature ... his eternity is an everlasting and unchanging now."

The conclusion must be that Gill did not have as clear an understanding of the problem as did Augustine and Aquinas, and that he therefore fell into a contradiction.

J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., in his A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion (pp. 40, 42, 47-48, 52-53)) solves the present problem by denying what previous theologians have called immutability. Buswell of course asserts that God is eternal, but he denies that eternity is timelessness. He objects to the idea of an eternal now, and disapproves of Augustine and Aquinas. Although he asserts that God is "unchangeable in his being," he repudiates "a timeless mental and spiritual immobility." He denies that God is "fully actualized," and asserts that God is (partly at least) potential; from which we must conclude that Buswell is conceiving of God as in a state of development. He says, "The implications of the doctrine that God is 'pure act,' 'fully realized', that in him there is 'no potentiality (dunamis)' are devastating."

Naturally there is no antithesis between a temporal, potential, developing God and an act of creation preceded by time.

First lessons in theology, no matter how elementary, do not dare to omit the Scriptural material on omniscience, immutability, and creation. But it would be unfair to the student to

leave the impression that all is elementary and easy. While it is conceit to assert that the problem here is insoluble, for no one knows enough to set limits to the implications of Scripture, it is not conceit, it is not even modesty, it is but frustrating fact to acknowledge that even the better attempts to solve this problem leave much to be desired.