The Creator's Sabbath Rest:

or the Clue to Genesis 1

by Stanley L. Jaki

*A chapter of perplexities*

Genesis 1 or the first chapter of the Book of Genesis was probably the last addition to it. In fact that chapter postdates much of the Book itself by several hundred years, perhaps by as much as half a millenni­um. To make matters even more curious, the Book of Genesis might not be called Genesis today without that chapter. For if one removes from the Book of Genesis its present first chapter and the first four verses of its second chapter, one is left with precious little about the origin or genesis of the world itself in the so-called second creation story that fills chapters 2 and 3. That little merely describes the original condition of the soil "at the time when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens" in the following terms: "As yet there was no field shrub on earth and no grass of the field had sprouted, for the Lord God had sent no rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil, but a stream was welling up out of the earth and was watering the surface of the ground" (Gen 2: 5-6). All this is introductory to the formation of the first parents and to their fall. The story of their progeny, including the story of the Deluge and of the Tower of Babel is told in chapters that precede chapter 12 where the story of the patriarchs begins and takes up the remaining three fourths of the Book. All that is a sort of genesis, obviously with interest to anthropologists, but hardly to cosmologists. Insofar as they speak of the genesis of the cosmos, they do so because that first chapter attached a cosmogonical meaning to the word "genesis."

The Book itself, which to the Jews is "Bereshit" or "In the begin­ning," has become known as Genesis, precisely because its first chapter seems to give the very genesis, or primeval story, of the universe itself. Because of the primeval story, the coming about of almost anything has become labeled as a genesis. The expression, "the genesis of the human race," which sums up the second creation story in Genesis 2-3, might be known today as "the forma­tion of man and woman," had it not been for the cosmic story given in Genesis 1. In fact that story, or that chapter, is easily the most widely remem­bered chapter in all the Bible. Even those who have never read the Bible seem to know something about that chapter which certainly has a sweeping grandeur to it. There is something uniquely impressive in the words, "In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth." If the thought of each good beginning is a well­spring of confi­dence, this should be especially so of an overall beginning that resounds again and again with the categorical assertion that whatever was made by God, and all was made by Him, was good and indeed very good.

At the same time, it cannot be denied that of the well over a thousand chapters of the Bible none gives such a headache to its intelligently devout readers as Genesis 1. Inimitably expres­sive of such headaches was the remark of a Protestant minister, a Navy chaplain for many years, who sighed: "If only that chapter had never been written!" He must have had in mind uncomfort­able debates carried on by "village atheists," all eager to provoke futile discussions, especial­ly in such close quarters as aboard sh­ip where no one can give them a wide berth. On the Catholic side it is just as telling to recall the observation of a famous worker priest, the Abbé Michon­neau. Living among factory workers in the proletarian outskirts of Paris, he found that their exploitation by capitalists did not motivate them as strongly against religion as did the alleged conflict between science and Genesis 1. Those from whom they learned to argue could readily find "famous" men of science who spoke as did Fred Hoyle who charac­terized the cosmic story in Genesis 1 as a "mere daub" when compared with the cosmogenesis given by modern science.

*The genesis of a principle*

In fact the greatest minds among Christians could not dissimulate some uneasiness as they came to grips with Genesis 1 even when they felt sure about having taken an unobjectionable approach to that chapter. For no one in his right mind, whether a believer or an unbeliever, can object to a principle laid down by Augustine of Hippo: whenever the human mind has estab­lished something reliably about the physical world, the correspond­ing dicta of the Bible must be reinterpreted accord­ingly. The unbeliever must at least admit that in laying down such a principle the believer has shown an uncondi­tional readiness to respect the rights of reason. As to the believer himself, he, of course, has no choice to do otherwise as long as he believes in an infinitely rational God, the source of all reason.

But when one takes Augustine's principle in the concrete circumstan­ces in which it was laid down, it becomes easy to see an enor­mous difference. It was, even for Augustine, relatively easy to state a principle; it was another to give it particular applications fully consistent with the principle itself. Augustine is all the more a case in point because more than any Church Father, indeed any Christian theologian for now almost two thousand years, he had been exercised with an overriding concern. It was to find an explana­tion of Genesis 1 that fully satisfied the rights of reason while leaving intact the veracity of that chapter as part of the revealed word of God. Augustine's long book, *De genesi ad litteram*, including his grappling with the literal truth of Genesis 1, was being written for over two decades. Clearly, what Augus­tine said there, he said after long and hard thinking.

He showed no hesitation to dispose of the difficulty which results from the difference between the biblical and the scientific views of the earth itself. In the former the earth resembles a fairly flat disk, floating on waters, which is a far cry from a spherical earth of which the oceans themselves are a part and a relatively small part, confined to its surface. During all Patristic times only two or three writers insisted on taking the biblical notion of a flat earth for an unques­tionable truth. The fact that the truth of a spherical earth, established by Greek astronomers, had been widely shared among the educated, made it easy for Augustine to apply his principle in that particular respect. It is especially easy to make such applications when practically no one is expected to raise objections to them.

It should not have been particularly difficult for Augustine to dispose of the firmament in the same way in which he did the biblical flatness of the earth. He knew full well that Ptolemy's astronomy left no room for entertaining the notion of a sky no different from a hard bowl. Such was the firmament, the *rakia* of Genesis 1. It was in fact an even more curious piece when taken with details which the Bible asserted about it elsewhere. The firmament support­ed the upper waters, or God's river in heaven, some of which came down as rain, when He opened the gates or trapdoors on that firma­ment. This was a very primitve notion already in August­ine's time and therefore nothing could have been easier for him than to lay to rest the firmament as a ghost of primitive imagination.

But this is not what happened. On reading the Bible's many emphatic references to the firmament, he conclud­ed that there has to be really some firmament some­where up there. He found it in an imaginary layer of vapor which the cold body of Saturn would produce in its passage in the sky. The idea underly­ing this was plain and good physics. Some condensation of the air always appears in the wake of a very cold body, especially if it is ice cold. Whether Saturn was such a cold body was another matter. No less an astrono­mer-astrologer than Ptolemy, who lived two and a half centuries before Augustine, spoke in this vein of Saturn. Here then, so it appeared to Augustine, was an opportunity to establish a harmony, a concordance, between science and religion. Such was the first egregious instance of an ultimately disastrous approach to the Bible, that of concord­ism, wherein Genesis 1 is, above all, viewed through the eyes of science.

The problem, lay, of course, deeper than the revisability of a scientific consensus about this or that part of the physical world. Such a consensus, no less than other cases of consensus in human affairs, can indeed be, on occasion, very transitory indeed. But the consensus can also be the anticipation of its being even more reliably established. This posed the real problem to those who tried to demonstrate a harmony, a concordance between science and religion, and in particular between science and Genesis 1. A case in point related to the shape of the earth, which according to the Bible was essentially flat. But Greek astronomy, Eratosthenes in particu­lar, showed convincingly, and with a remarkable accuracy of about 95 percent, that the shape of the earth was essentially spherical. Subsequent measurements only increased the accuracy of this conclusion. As to the fixity of the earth in the center, as asserted in the Bible again and again, science eventually showed its utter fallacy. It had to be recognized that the earth itself went around the sun and at a breakneck speed at that. The fixed stars turned out to be far from being fixed in a firmament.

*Challenged by science*

Indeed not a single detail in the cosmogenesis of Genesis 1 remained at safe remove from the remorseless advance of science. The coming of plants on the third day before the appearance of the sun on the fourth turned out to be a sheer impossibility. The same had to be recognized about the coming of visible light on the first day, three "days" before the appearance of the sun. There were, of course, those who, a century and a half ago, found comfort in the newly discovered electromagnetic nature of light. Could it not be, they asked, that the "Let there be light" of the first day referred to a general form of electromagnetic radiation, which appeared only in the fourth day in the spectrum's visible range? Such minds could not come around even under the impact of most reliable advice. Surely, Maxwell, the great discoverer of electromag­netism, who was also a devout Christian, had a credibili­ty in respect to both science and religion. He cautioned a bishop of the Church of England against seeking a resolution of the apparent contradic­tion along these lines. It is another matter whether M­axwell's considered view would have made a proper impact even if made widely known. Nothing can, so it seems, give second thoughts to those who today seek the same solution in the 2.7°K cosmic background radiation.

They are, of course, the ones who still hold on to the "day" in Genesis 1 as if it could be something better than a plank from the ship­wreck of a concordist exegesis of Genesis 1. For even if that "day" could be taken for an age, for an epoch, for an aeon, there remains the num­ber six of such "days" in Genesis 1. Numbers, though they are words before they become understood as numbers, are not like other words. Even the most elementary arithmetic operations must be explained in words in order to be understood, warned a famous mathematical physicist, Hermann Weyl, earlier in this century. In a much wider sense than one may suspect, in the beginning was the word.

Still, numbers are very special words, because they relate to quantities. As such, numbers have a special edge, a special preci­sion which no other words possess. To numbers or quantities alone is it impossible to apply the phrase "more or less," which can readily qualify all other words. While a quality, such as goodness, can be more or less, no given number can be "more or less" than that very number. Be they six ages, the six days of the cosmo­genesis of Genesis 1 are six, neither five nor seven. They are just plain six. To verify that there were just six, no more and no less, geological ages is the business of scientists and not of exegetes, let alone of poetizing theologians.

Geologists or other men of science become indeed the ultimate arbiters once a quantita­tive proposition is made about the physical world. And such proposi­tions are severally on hand whenever a single passage in Genesis 1 is taken in a sense that invites, however implicitly, a scientific verification. Clearly, if the words, that all plants and animals were produced "according to their kinds," are taken scientifically, there is no way of escaping the obligation to give similarly scientific slant to any other phrase in Genesis 1. Consistency is what makes reason and reasoning, especially if reason is the chief factor that makes man a being shaped in the image of God.

Christians who refused to take this seriously are the ones who made Darwin a chief victim of theirs and also their chief antagonist. Darwin was, of course, very misguided in looking for a cheap excuse for his materialism in the patently untenable doctrine of a special creation of each and every species. But as a scientist he knew that he had to take nature as something fully consistent in its operations and processes. At the same time he failed to suspect that the ultimate source of that convic­tion about nature which animated him and other scientists was a super-natural Revelation of which the Bible was an authentic expression provided it was properly authenti­cated. For a long time before 1860, when *The Origin of Species* was pub­lished, scientists could derive full conviction on that score with their eyes solely fixed on science. By then for almost two hundred years (Newton's *Principia* was published in 1687), science had existed in a robust full-grown state in which it could but progress in terms of its own laws, especially in terms of the three laws of motion. All those laws were quantitative and they had a univer­sal validity about all bits of matter insofar as the quantitative aspects of their manifold motions are concerned.

*The need for a new explanation*

With this we come to the crucial point of this essay on Genesis 1. Is it possible to give it an explanation, an interpreta­tion, an exegesis, that puts that chapter at a safe remove from any and all quantitative consideration? For if not, then science remains the supreme arbiter over Genesis 1, with disastrous consequences for its credibility even as a piece of literature, to say nothing of it as a piece of God's revealed word. No escape from this consideration is given by fuzzy exegesis, such as that which presents Genesis 1 as a myth. No exegete, and there have been really some big names among those who built that sort of escape hatch, has come up with a clear definition of what is meant by myth and what Genesis 1, in particular, tells, when taken for a myth, to its reader.

Approach to Genesis 1 as a myth would be difficult to implement even if it meant nothing more than the counsel that modern man should try to recover something of ancient man's mythopoeic abilities. Such a recovery, even if successful, might not breed more than purely personal opinions and impres­sions, all of which are busily tacked onto a given text, which may turn out to be no myth at all. In fact—and here no vague mythopoeic abilities should seem impor­tant, let alone decisive—Genesis 1 as a piece of composition resembles anything but a myth. An honest perusal of widely available anthologies of ancient cosmogonical myths should convince one, even if not an expert in judging literary *genres*. It convinced one prominent exegete, who certainly wished that Genesis 1 were a myth, a sort of a legend. For in such an outcome he would have found a strong support for his modern­ism.

The exegete was none other than A. Loisy. No less tellingly, the recognition that Genesis 1 was a "scholastic treatise," the most scholastic of all chapters of the Bible, came to him about the time, the turn of the century, when H. Gunkel came up with the idea that Genesis 1 was a myth. Those times were the halcyon days of concordism, for at least those who did not want to see its cata­strophic pitfalls, although by then more than one concordist interpretation of Genesis 1 had seen its shameful demise. But the same times were also those of modernism that tried to save the semblance of religion by disavowing its essence. Modernism was a welcoming catch-all for all those who looked for justification for their modish moods as they read religious literature, ancient or modern, sacred or profane.

Gunkel's ideas were given warm accolades within Liberal Protestantism, though partly for the right reason. There the failure of concordism had for some time been admitted, although mainly because nothing else but science was held to be admitted in talking about religion. There was no room there for supernatural revelation, no room for miracles, and much less for the divinity of Christ. There everything was to be enveloped in myths, rearticulated, of course, in the "scientific" terms of anthropology, archeology, psychology, and sociology. A generation later G. von Rad's explana­tion of Genesis 1 as a myth could establish itself as the final word even among believing Protestants, partly because he pruned the erstwhile mythologization of Genesis 1 from a patently rationalist matrix.

A generation later Catholic exegetes joined the bandwag­on of turning Genesis 1 into a myth. Thus the introductory essay to the Book of Genesis in the *New American Bible* explains Genesis 1 as a myth, without explaining what myths are with respect to physical reality. The Oedipus story, for instance, may have a valid message even if Oedipus was never a real being. Genesis 1 makes, however, no sense if the world spoken of there, does not stand for the real world as understood by the Hebrews of old. But then the question arises as to the sense in which a cosmic tent, as taken for real by them, can stand for much wider and far more correct conceptions about the physical world as a totality. A cube is always a cube, whether small or enormously large, but a cosmic tent is not a sphere; it is not a wheel-type system of planets, and much less a four-dimensional space-time manifold into which modern scientific cosmology casts the gravitational interaction of a huge number of galaxies. The problem posed thereby is philosophical before it becomes scientif­ic and will not obtain a solution from mythologi­cal ruminations. These can only dull the intellect into evasions.

Champions of Genesis 1 taken for a myth have shown no taste for philosophy and hardly any expertise in science. But they have no excuse whatever for not having displayed a discriminat­ing taste in respect to literary styles. They still must face up to the question of whether Genesis 1 as a literary piece really looks like a myth. That it does not look like a myth readily transpires when presented parallel to any old creation myth. Its differences with respect to style are striking in comparison with its alleged prototype, the famed Babylonian creation myth *Enuma elish*. Whereas Genesis 1 is a brief, sober, methodical recital of statements that directly refer to the physical world, the *Enuma elish* is a long-winded story-telling much of which has no relation whatsoever to that world. Insofar as Babel relates to Babylon, *Enuma elish* is a genuine babel, an epitome of confusion worthy of its provenance.

*A Babylonian myth*

Nothing should indeed seem so patently misleading as to hint that Genesis 1 reflects a great deal *Enuma elish*, which is not so much a creation story as a myth about vague origins. An unbridled exercise in gory fantasiz­ing, with no touch of that sober realism that sets the tone of Genesis 1, *Enuma elish* begins with the rising, from the primeval couple, Apsu and Tiamat, of several generations of gods, who eventually turn against Tiamat, the great mother. This disturbs Apsu, who is then slayed by Ea, a fourth-generation god, who, through his wife, Damkina, produces his first-born, Marduch. Whatever the possible identifica­tion of the salt water and of the fresh water with Apsu and Tiamat, only the wildest imagination can see here anything tangible about a cosmogenesis.

Nor is the visible world in sight in any form as *Enuma elish* continues. Tiamat decides to avenge the slaying of Apsu, where-upon Ea organizes a group of gods to wage war, under the leader­ship of Marduch, against Tiamat. The next phase of the conflict shows the two camps in their armaments, with praises heaped upon Marduch for his "creative" powers. The gods sit down and feast on sweet wine to subdue their fear. Marduch then is formally en­throned and goes on to confront the terrifying Tiamat. He slays her, dismembers her body, and fashions the world's main parts from her limbs.

The main parts of the world are, of course, the same as the ones in Genesis 1, whose author did not have to learn about them from *Enuma elish.* It was enough for him to look around. Had he taken *Enuma elish* for a pattern, he would have referred to the signs of the Zodiac that prominently figure in *Enuma elish* as Marduch continues his world making. It is only as an afterthought that Marduch turns to the formation of man. His aim for doing so is to secure his and his fellow gods' leisure who would be served by men as so many slaves. To complement the making of the world, Babylon is built and the gods celebrate there. Finally, various activities, aimed at securing livelihood, are described, as they are implemented by incantations.

It should be clear that the two stories cannot even be put in parallel columns as much of the *Enuma elish* has no counterpart in Genesis 1. Unlike Genesis 1, *Enuma elish* is not a story set in the framework of one week's work. Another very important difference is the fact that neither in Genesis 1 nor anywhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures is there a hint of that anxiety which was in full evidence during the Akitu festival, when the Marduch story was recited in a solemn form. For the victory of Marduch was not something about which his devotees could be sure. Theirs was a culture, reflective of their cult as best capsulized by the Akitu festival. It was a cultic reenactement of chaos in the form of a three- day orgy, so that assur­ance might thereby be gained for the re-emer­gence of order for another year at least. Of such "liturgy" there is no trace whatso­ever in Old Testament festivals.

That, nevertheless, a parallel between Genesis 1 and *Enuma elish* appeared convincing to some was in part due to the popularity of a German term, "Chaoskampf," in vogue now for about half a century. German words have their own magic even in Germany, let alone elsewhere. It is enough to think of the magic which the expression "Sitz im Leben" has exercised in theological circles. Its use could amount to a dispensation from raising any further question as to what is meant by that term in a given context or as part of an argumen­ta­tion. Yet, the mere fact that although in some psalms there are traces of a "Chaoskampf," in the sense of illustrat­ing Yahweh's definitive subjugation of some violent forces of nature, nothing of that sort appears in Genesis 1. This difference is all the more telling because those psalms almost certainly antedate Genesis 1, which is a post-exilic document.

Whether its author came back directly from Babylon or was a second- or third-generation descendent of the original repatri­ates, may never be known. But one can certainly assume that in either case he was familiar with *Enuma elish,* this most gory of all gruesome cosmogonical myths. And this fact alone turns the table on those who take *Enuma elish* for the model which the author of Genesis 1 had in view. Since a modest familiarity with comparative literature would reveal the narrow limits of literary originality, one may safely take the view that humanly speaking it would have been almost impossible for the author of Genesis 1 to keep his diction free from details harking back to *Enuma elish,* had he taken it for a model. Only some­thing more than mere human inspiration could enable him to give a strikingly original narrative. He could do this partly because it was not his aim at all to give an account of a part by part construction of the world.

*The sabbath rest*

His aim was the putting on the highest pedestal the idea of the sabbath rest, a most original biblical idea. For all the digging for clay tablets, and for all the deciphering of papyri, for all the canvass­ing of ancient literature coming from the Mideast or from well beyond, no one has yet found a trace of a systematica­lly observed sabbath rest, although the seven-day week was known near and far. The reservation of the seventh day for a rigorous rest, sabbath, is unique with the Old Testament, because it is centered on a unique God.

The Jews them­selves had to rediscover both that God of theirs as well as the importance for them of the sabbath rest once they lived through the trauma of the first destruction of Jerusalem, and the possible loss of their identity in the Babylonian captivity. Among those who came back with a new or rather renewed aware-n­ess of the impor­tance of the sabbath rest for conserving their identity, was Nehemi­ah. In addition to having been set up as the leader of the Jews in and around Jerusalem, he was also the author of the last histori­cal book of the Old Testament. The last chapter of that book is no less unique than the chapter which eventually became the Bible's first chapter. Both are unique essentially for the same reason.

In that last chapter of the Book of Nehemiah, one finds various precepts laid down, all of them serving the purpose of preserving the spiritual and ethnic identity of the Jews. A section of a mere eight verses (13:15-22) deserves special attention if for no other reason than that they contain ten references to the sabbath rest. Such is a very special exercise in the art of securing emphasis by a rapid repetition of the same expression. The section begins with Nehemiah's observation that men of Judah were tread­ing wine-presses on the sabbath as well as bringing in, by using beasts of burden, sheaves of grain, together with wine, grapes, figs, and every other kind of burden, into Jerusalem on the sabbath (13:15-16). He therefore warned the men of Judah to sell to none those victuals brought to Jerusalem on the sabbath day. Then on seeing the men of Judah do business with Tyrians who resided in Jerusalem and were bringing in fish and other kind of merchan­dise, Nehemiah warned his compatriots: "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the sabbath day? Did not your fathers act in this same way, with the result that our God has brought all this evil upon us and upon this city? Would you add to the wrath against Israel by once more profan­ing the sabbath?" (13:17-18)

No less importantly, Nehemiah followed up his warning with action. Before the sunset marked the beginning of the sabbath day he ordered the gates of the city to be shut and forbade their opening until after the sabbath was over. He posted some of his men to assure that no beast of burden might enter through the gates all day long. Clearly, there was reason for this kind of vigilance as he noticed various merchants waiting outside the walls so that they might take advantage of the cover of darkness: "Why do you spend the night alongside the wall? If you keep this up, I will lay hands on you." He registered with obvious relief that from that time on, they did not return on the sabbath. In his concern for the sabbath, he also "ordered the Levites to purify themselves and to go and watch the gates, so that the sabbath day might be kept holy." His last comment was an act of prayer: "This, too, remember in my favor, O my God, and have mercy on me in accordance with your great mercy!" (13:22).

In this passage one sees a leader of Israel who at a critical stage of its existence finds it supremely important that the obser­vance of the sabbath be meticulously carried out by any and all. This is, of course, not his only concern. Among other things Nehemiah laid great stress on the elimination of marriages between Israelites and foreigners. Still his concern for the sabbath observance could not have been stronger. He certainly played an important part in making the sabbath observance one of the two main pillars of post-exilic Judaism. The other pillar was the avoidance of intermar­riage with the Gentiles. Underpinning both was the rule of circumci­sion. In Nehemiah's concern for the observance of the sabbath there is a specific reference to something which Jeremiah and other prophets had already made all too clear: the widespread desecration by the Israelites of the sabbath by servile work was a chief reason why God resorted to such dire punishment as the destruc­tion of Jerusalem and allowed the leading classes to be dragged into captivi­ty. Clearly, the observation of the sabbath rest was in Nehemiah's eyes a matter of national survival, a matter of life or death.

*God as a role model*

With such a concern for the sabbath rest, few things may appear so natural as the emergence in Nehemiah's mind of setting up a supreme role model for the observance of the sabbath. As the leader of the people, he had to educate them. Then as now nothing was more effective in educating than the availability of an impres­sive role model. Combined with the fact that Genesis 1 is clearly a post-exilic document, the assumption should seem reasonable that Genesis 1 was indeed composed either by Nehemi­ah or by some learned rabbi in his entourage for precisely that purpose.

This, of course, will forever remain a hypothesis, but its implications can be presented in rather concrete terms. Once the author of Genesis 1 entertained the idea of setting up God as a role model for the observance of the sabbath, his choices were rapidly narrowing. Since the sabbath rest is consequent to six days of work, the work assigned to God also had to be divided into an undertak­ing carried out in six consecutive days. As to the kind of work assigned to God, it obviously had to be the highest conceiv­able work. Such was certainly the making of the universe, or the all. God could not be assigned a less than truly comprehensive job.

In thinking of the all or the universe, the author of Genesis 1 could think of it only in terms of a huge tent-like structure, with a fairly flat earth as its floor and a firmament, or *rakia* (a hard bowl), as its cover. Such were the main parts of the all as it appered to the Hebrews of old and to their contemporaries elsewhere. And like other people, they too conveyed the notion of all by listing its main parts. Thus "heaven and earth" became synonymous with that all which is the universe, so much so that the Hebrews did not find the need to coin a word to denote specifically that all.

There is, however, much more than meets the superficial eye in the phrase, "In the beginning God made the all." What is significant here is not the phrase, "in the beginning," which is a grammatical anomaly in the Hebrew. The phrase can be translated as "in a certain beginning," as "in the beginning" of God's creating and even as "when" God created the heaven and the earth. The hallowed "in the beginning" is the grammatically least convinc­ing translation of *beresith*. More important is the anomaly of the declaration right at the very beginning that God made the all. Clearly if Genesis 1 were a sort of technical account of the construc­tion part by part, step by step of the world edifice, it would not have been logical to anticipate the process of construc­tion with the declara­tion that God made the all. It would have been more natural to describe God as one who very reason­ably began by providing light, as do all contractors even today. The first thing that goes up on a construction site is a pole with a floodlight on it. Or to remain within the biblical context, the poor widow who lost her last coin, first lit a lamp before she started searching for it.

*The all in terms of its parts*

But the making of light does not come first, although it comes on the first day. Prior to that comes the flat declaration that God made all as if to suggest in advance that this will indeed be all that Genesis 1 would say about the construction of the world. Indeed nothing would appear so Semitic as the rest of Genesis 1 being a repetitive assertion that God made all, that his work is the making of the all, or the universe. This repetitive assertion is in fact what we find in Genesis 1 once the attention is riveted on the rhetorical device used in verse 1. The device might be best designated as *totum per partes*, although this is not the way it is listed in books on rhetoric. In fact, very little is said about it in spite of the fact that it is an age-old and univer­sally used device. It is commonly found in idiomatic phrases, such as "lock, stock, and barrel," "hook, line and sinker," "on land and sea," and so forth. In all these cases a totality is denoted in terms of its main constituent parts.

The use of the device is prominent in the Bible. Quite methodi­cally does this use appear in Psalm 148 whose twelves verses can readily be summarized in a single exhortative phrase: In the heavens everybody and everything, on the earth everything and everybody praise the Lord! For *all* inhabitants of the heavenly part of the world are meant by a reference to God's angels and his hosts who are the principal figures there. And *all* things in heaven are meant by the listing of the sun, the moon, the stars and the waters which are the principal constitutents of the heavenly region. As to the terrestrial regions, *all* things there are evoked by the listing of such of their main classes as oceans, fire, hail, snow, mist, winds, mountains, hills, fruit trees, cedars, beasts, reptiles, and birds. As to the beasts in particular, their two main kinds, wild and tame, are named, obviously to convey that all of them were meant. Concern­ing the inhabitants of the earth, the totality is repeatedly empha­sized by listing various main classes of them: rulers and people, old men and children, young men and maidens.

This sole example, to which many others could be added, should convey the natural resonance of the Hebrew mind to the rhetorical device of *totum par partes*. The author of Genesis 1 could therefore have no doubt that he would be properly understood by his use of days 2 and 3 to restate the idea that God's work is the making of the greatest whole or the universe. On day 2 the making of the firmament, or the more noble of the two parts, is asserted—a curious fact if Genesis 1 were a construction story. Then the author would have hinted at some reason for casting God into an illogical procedure: no reasonable builder would begin with the roof. Perhaps he would have said that God begins with the upper part as being nobler because it is closer to his abode. But not even that much explanation is given in a chapter so systematically succinct.

*God as the Maker of all*

Since no such explanation is given, the author of Genesis 1 must be assumed to pursue an idea which is not that of a construc­tion. He merely wants to say again that the work assigned to God is the making of the all. Therefore it does not matter to him whether any logic proper to construction would be seen in his taking the firmament first and then the ground. He seems assured that a logic or consider­ation superior to that of construction can be resorted to without any further ado. He simply assumed that his fellow Israelites would readily follow him in taking the work of those two days as something equivalent to the original assertion in verse 1 that God's work is the making of the all.

A further indica­tion of this is the fact that if Genesis 1 were a typical construction narrative, it would contain something about the

provenance of the waters, this apparent erstwhile building material. The remark that God's spirit hovered over the waters merely suggested that they were wholly subject to Him. There is no trace of effort in Genesis 1 or elsewhere in the Bible to indicate what physical factor or means can contain those waters. Surely, this was not the way the Greeks looked at the primeval waters. Thales who tried to derive everything from water was careful to claim that a solid sphere contained everything.

Nothing of the provenance of the waters transpires as it is stated in Genesis 1 that the making of the firmament separates them into an upper and a lower part. Instead of suggesting something about the prove­nance of waters, the author of Genesis 1 concen­trates on the firmament as one of the principal parts of the cosmic tent and he does the same with respect to the emergence of the dry land, the floor of that cosmic tent. That with the dry land come all the plants is a mere afterthought, though certainly attractive for an audience living in quasi-desert surroundings.

Clearly the mind of the author of Genesis 1 is driven in a direction very different from that of a construction narrative. He seems to be satisfied that the rhetorical device on hand enables him to imple­ment his purpose, which is to drive home the point that the making of the all was the work he assigns to God. By making the

.

p. 18 diagram

main parts of the tent, God can be thought of as having made all of it. By the same logic the same idea should emerge if one states that all the main parts of the two principal parts were also made by God. And this is the perspective in which the author of Genesis 1 casts the work of days 4 and 5.

Once more he first takes the firmament which he makes complete by fixing on it its main particulars, the sun, the moon, and the stars. Then he takes the ground area where the corresponding main particulars are present­ed, in order to convey the notion of totality. The air and the oceans are filled with birds and fish, or the main particulars of the principal lower part of the cosmic tent. This now stands completed, although the same logic would have demanded that on the same day the land animals also appear. But it is more important for the logic of Genesis 1, a logic which is concerned more with God than with man, to present the animals as the proper backdrop against which man's excellence as the manager of God's work may stand out all the more. For that work is not only the making of the all, but also a work which is done well, indeed very well. Therefore as all good edifices do, it must have a manager, or else the builder would not appear fully logical. So logical or methodical is this procedure that it lends itself to a starkly simple schematic presentation as shown in the diagram on the facing page.

The generalization, "thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed" (Gen 2:3), made exegetical history partly because the Vulgate's translation of the Hebrew *cbi* (array or hosts) as *ornatus*. It became a standard device for Scholastic interpreters (and others well after them) of the creation story to specify its main parts as *opus divisionis* (days 2 and 3) and *opus ornatus* (days 4 and 5). These two expres­sions strongly suggested that Genesis 1 was a construction story and therefore acted as the kind of blindfold that prevents one from seeing the forest by focusing on the particular trees. This in spite of the fact that the forest, the big picture, the essence, was stated in a systematic (in that sense "scholas­tic") way three times in that chapter, namely, that God made *all*, that his work was the making of the *all*.

*An effortless Maker*

That Genesis 1 was not perceived in this light, the light of the rhetorical device of *totum per partes,* was due to the lure of concord­ism. But before considering that lure, attention should be paid to God's resting on the seventh day. Few exegetes cared to point out the anthopomorphism latent in assigning this posture to God. Of course, it is far from being one of those crass anthropomor­phisms that now and then plague the Bible. The anthropo­morphism of God's resting is mitigated by the fact that in Genesis 1 he works mostly with his mere command, but not entirely. He makes, he shapes, and, last but not least, he slices or divides. With this we come to the famous verb *bara*, often presented by exegetes as a verb reserved in Hebrew to denote exclusively God's action. Some exegetes even say that it is the Hebrew equivalent to *creatio ex nihilo.*

The verb *bara* basically means to cut, to slash, to divide. In almost all the fifty or so cases when it occurs in the Hebrew Bible *bara* denotes an action of God. The action time and again has no semblance to cutting or to dividing. It is simply an action, a generic form of making. In at least three certain readings *bara* denotes action done by man. In two cases (Joshua 17:15, 18) *bara* refers to the cutting down of trees. In another case (Ezekiel 23:47), it conveys the action whereby the bodies of two harlots are cut to pieces. The fact that those two books are separated from one another by at least half a millennium shows that the use of *bara* to denote an action done by man remained a permanent linguistic possibility for the Hebrews, regardless of their concern for reserving one of their verbs for actions performed by God. In two more cases the reading is uncer­tain.

It is also a fact that the verb *bara* is not tied to human action in tenses in which it denotes God's action. But grammarians have still to show that Hebrew verbs take on markedly new nuances when shifted from one tense to another. But unless there is such a grammatical pattern, the change of meaning should be ascribed to the context and not to the change in tense. There is indeed a limit to which standard Hebrew lexicons can be quoted to extol the specially divine connotation of *bara*. The limit is indeed no less drastic than the precept that forbids the putting of the cart before the horse.

To be sure, there can be no doubt that Old Testament writers had from early on devel­oped a special respect for the verb *bara* as a verb that is best reserved to denote God's action. But why was *bara* chosen for that role? What is it in that verb that lent itself to being a carrier of such respect? Is it the fact that the act of cutting, especially of slashing, carried with it the meaning of a single swift and effective action? Could it be that *bara* conveys somehow what is conveyed in English when one speaks of acting with a flourish (with the mere waving of one's hand), that is, swiftly and effortless­ly? Effortless indeed should be any of God's actions, especially the one whereby he makes something utterly novel.

Interestingly enough, the use of *bara* in Genesis 1 is not consistent in this respect. Three times when the novelty of the product would have called for the use of *bara,* the "ordinary" verb *asa* (to make) is used instead. Such cases are the making of the firmament and the making of the luminaries. Further, it is not *bara* but *badal* that is used in reference to the separation of the upper from the lower waters. All these exceptions and inconsisten­cies should suggest that the author of Genesis 1 did not really need the verb *bara* to achieve his immediate purpose. This consisted in his showing that God's work was the making of the *all*. He knew full well that his reliance on the rhetorical device, *totum par partes* was sufficient for that aim. This aim was, of course, subordinate to the purpose of presenting God as the model of observing the sabbath rest, which is not at all the same purpose as the presumed intention of instructing one about how to go about constructing, especially if the construction's object is so unusual as a cosmic tent. Focusing on the true purpose of Genesis 1 would effective­ly draw attention from spurious purposes ascribed to that magnifi­cent chapter. In fact, as has been argued above, the methodically repeated assertion in Genesis 1 that God's work is the making of the all is not an invitation to worry about details of the method of constructi­ng the parts.

*The lure of concordism*

As was already noted, Genesis 1 was not seen in this truly biblical and Semitic light, but in the very dubious light of concord­ism. Its lure was felt almost irresistibly by Jewish and Christian exegetes alike once they were exposed to Hellenistic culture. The first main Jewish figure in this respect was Philo, who went into fantastic allegorical exertions to show that Moses, as author of Genesis 1, was thinking along unmistakably Platonic lines. In first-century Alexandria, the intellectual capital of the Mediterrene­an, it would have been almost superhuman to do otherwise. It is another matter whether Philo had not only pleased some Jews there with his Platonizing but also had converted some pagans to belief in one God, the Creator of all.

For Christians Eusebius led the way into concordism in his great work *Preparatio evangelica*. There, and with an emphasis on Genesis 1, Eusebius claimed that Plato and the other Greek sages owed their learning to Moses. However, if Greek science, among other things, was supposed to be found in Genesis, and in particu­lar in its first chapter, the drift into the blind alley of concordism was inevitable. Although Augustine formulated a very sound principle, which in matters concerning physical nature asserted the supremacy of human reason, he felt unable to apply the principle to each and every dictum of the Bible about the physical world. He felt that the firmament had to be real if the Bible asserted its existence so realistically. Had he known Hebrew, a little pondering of the meaning of *rakia* might have made him realize that an imaginary vapory layer could hardly be taken to be equivalent to it. Yet to grasp the real point in Genesis 1 hardly required versatili­ty with Hebrew. In fact, first-rate mastery of it did not necessarily help. The case in point is Jerome, the first great Christian Hebraist, who showed no special interest in Genesis 1.

Quite a difference from such older contemporaries of Jerome as Basil and Ambrose, both of whom composed a special commen­tary on the six-day creation story, or hexaemeron. Both proceeded (Ambrose was much influenced by Basil's work) on the premise that Moses wrote for the common folk. This was true enough, because even if Moses meant to write for literates like Aaron he would not have claimed that the physical world for him did not look like a big tent, with a sort of firmament forming its roof, and that wherever there was soil and water, plants invariably sprouted up. But even if ordinary perception was faulty, or at least incom­plete on many points, it was still the basis for any more refined conclusion. Therefore, if one asserted as Basil and Ambrose did (and after them countless others) that Moses had in mind a world as shown by ordinary perception, the task still remained as to what was the kernel of lasting truth in Moses' dicta about the cosmic tent and its making by God. In other words, by saying that Moses wrote to satisfy ordinary perception, the perspective of concordism was not eliminated at all. In fact, it invited inconsistencies which any careful reader then or later could readily spot. On that basis it was not possible to separate the chaff from the wheat in Moses' dicta about the universe, and it was certainly inconsistent to praise Moses now and then for setting forth some truths about the physical universe so that the biblical narrative of creation might appear all the more credible.

A little less than a thousand years later, when Western Christendom recovered from the havoc of the migration of Goths, Huns, Franks, Vandals, Normans, and Teutons, it also discovered Aristotle. Interpretations of Genesis 1 began to bristle with expres­sions like prime matter, substantial forms, potentialities, empyrean heavens, ethereal spheres, and the like. The trend reached dazzling and dizzying heights in Cajetan's commentaries which few ordinary mortals could follow. Worse, in all such approaches to Genesis 1 its world picture was taken to be equivalent to Aristotle's cosmology. Wishful thinking rarely asked for more.

Corrective to this could not come simply from a call to return to the study of Hebrew and Greek, a call which became quite resounding through the work of Nicholas of Lyra. This is not to suggest that Nicholas, first a Franciscan and eventually an arch­bishop, had not written very informatively on many a biblical topic. Luther was one of those who owed much to their reading of Nicholas' works. Of course, he read it, as everyone reads others' works, primarily through his own eyes, and the eyes of Luther, a very strong individual, would have well exemplified the Aristote­lian theory of light and vision: It was the eye that emitted light rays so that objects may be bathed in it and therefore become visible. Luther raised the flag of rank subjectivism in biblical scholarship and he illustrated this in many ways, certainly in his commen­taries on Genesis. Around 1530 or so, he could not, of course, claim that the physical account of the world in Genesis 1 was good physics. In fact Luther found it absurd. But he also insisted that one must subject his reason to absurdities so that the light of faith coming from the written word of God may fulfill its saving function. Tertullian's incidental phrase, *credo quia absurdum*, now became a program.

As one would expect it, Calvin struck a different tone, appar­ently the tone of reason, although it was not reasonable on his part to give the impression in his commentaries on Genesis that nobody before him warned that Moses wrote for the uneducated people. Had Calvin not showed scant appreciation for the writings of the Church Fathers (he could take lightly even the Nicene Creed), he would have, with his undoubted acumen, perceived the inconsisten­cies in Basil's and Ambrose's commentar­ies on Genesis 1 and note thereby his own. He might have also noted that both were caught in those incon­sisten­cies precisely because they failed to weigh carefully the implications of Moses' way of writing. No wonder that in coming to grips with the sun's coming on the fourth day, Calvin speaks from both corners of the mouth. After stating that Moses need not be taken literally, Calvin takes him in precisely that sense, obvious­ly because the Church as he reformed it had a special stake in the inerrancy of the literal interpretation of the Bible.

The Galileo case would quite likely never have occurred had leading Catholic churchmen not taken the view that Protestants should be vanquished on the field chosen by them, the field of the Bible's literal truth. Not that Genesis 1 had figured in the encounter between Galileo and Bellarmine, or between Urban VIII and Galileo. But the fixity of the earth in the center was part of the biblical world picture of which Genesis 1 was a classic expression. Whether Galileo wanted mainly to promote the interest of the Catholic faith or rather his own interest will never be fathomed. But soon there loomed large the rightful interest of the rising science, ready to take on that robust form which can be studied in Newton's *Principia*, published in 1687.

*In the ban of concordism*

With that a new age opens in the exegesis of Genesis 1, an age in which Genesis 1 is found in the ban of concordism. What was to come had been amply signalled when in 1595 Kepler calculated the exact day and hour of creation: April 27, Monday (a day of the week which he thought was according to everybody the day of creation) in the year that preceded by 5572 years that year 1595. The hour was 11 am, Prussian time, he added. Some prominent exegetes found this supraconcordist approach to Genesis 1 most promising for gaining accolades. The great Hebraist at Cambridge, John Lightfoot of *Horae hebraicae* fame, set the moment of creation for October 23, 4004 BC at 9 am. This was in 1642. In another eight years Archbishop Ussher made this dating semioffi­cial by inserting it on the margin of his edition of King James Bible. Later, recourse was made to celestial mechanics to explain why the sun and the moon appeared together. In one such explanation it was claimed that on the fourth day the length of the day in the southern hemisphere was 36 hours. Nobody remembered Cardinal Baronius' remark, made just before Galileo emerged on the scene, that the Bible was given to teach the art of going to heaven and not the science of the heavens going around.

Few if any realized that the efforts to make Genesis 1 appear respect­able by harmoniz­ing it with Newto­nian science could only devolve to the discredit of God's revealed word. More of this was in store with any further expan­sion of the reach of Newton's physics. Laplace's nebular hypothesis, geology, compara­tive anatomy, and other branches of learning have not failed to appear in commentaries of Genesis 1 published during the nineteenth century, the golden age of concordist interpretations. In fact for decades such interpretations were taught in seminaries as the definitive truth about Genesis 1.

Around the turn of the century, Fr. Knabenbauer, the learned

Jesuit exegete, undertook a historical survey of past interpretations of Genesis 1. The survey, covering about 30 pages in his commen­tary of Genesis 1, came to a close with his exclama­tion: "Finally, let there be light!" This was his recognition of the sad fact that after so many centuries there was no explanation of Genesis 1 that would satisfy reason, without letting natural reason dictate what can or cannot be revealed supernaturally. Knabenbauer's own solution showed the extent to which the key to Genesis 1 could not be seen although dangling before one's very nose. The six days' creation story was, according to Knabenbauer, something that Moses saw in a vision, in a dream. Still if it was true that Moses saw something about the physical world, whether in dream or not, one could raise the question: What did Moses see, and what could be kept from what he saw?

The acuteness of the question may be best gauged from an instruction which the Biblical Commission issued about that time concerning Genesis 1. On the one hand the instruction acknowledg­ed that Genesis 1 was not ordinary history, still it imposed the duty that its Catholic interpreters treat it as if it were history. The instruc­tion did not say how history could be history and yet not history in the ordinary sense of that word. This ambival­ence certainly reflected the perplexity of the situation in which the interpret­ation of Genesis 1 found itself after so many years of frustrating recourse to a stronger or a weaker form of concordism.

One of the latter was proposed also about that time by Fr. Lagran­ge who laid down two guidelines. For one, Genesis 1 was not to be taken for an instruction in the natural sciences. For another, Thomas Aquinas' exposition of Genesis 1 as composed of an *opus divisionis* and of an *opus ornatus* was to be taken to be fully satisfacto­ry. This was not, of course, the reason why Fr. Lagrange was advised by Rome not to write any further on Old Testament topics. One wonders whether he would have found the key in the sabbath rest and in the device of *totum per partes*. Perhaps these and their combination were too simple to satisfy biblical scholarship where the cult of complexities often prevents the sighting of the obvious. The conclusion of a modern book on Genesis 1, where the idea of separation dominates everything, comes to mind.

Complexities certainly abounded in rationalist exegesis within which H. Gunkel tried, about that time, to chart a new approach, that of taking Genesis 1 for a myth. Complex diction he certainly invited, but no answer to questions that could not be removed just by declaring them, implicitly at least, to be non-existent. He and his followers did not do better than those who invoked Moses as one who spoke in terms of ordinary perception. Just as these failed to specify what was to be salvaged from the picture given by that perception, the propo­nents of Genesis 1 as a myth still have to disclose what was really asserted by that chapter and in what sense it was necessary for its author to refer to the real world.

That the taking of Genesis 1 for a myth did not put to rest legitimate questions raised by the realism of Genesis 1 can be seen in the eagerness with which some new data of science are seized upon to shore up the credibility of Genesis 1, although concordism should have long ago been recognized as a hopeless and hapless enterprise. The extraordinary outburst of radiations that was consequent to the Big Bang as contained in the Abbé Lemaitre's theory of the "primeval atom" was taken by Pius XII for an evidence of the truth of "Let there be light!" in Genesis 1. The pope made that remark in an address given in 1950 to the Pontifical Academy of Science, with Lemaitre present as its President, who incidentally was not happy. Possibly he took comfort from the defined character of papal infallibility. As such it is definitely within strictly defined limits.

But many millions of readers of that papal speech, available in scores of translations and inexpensive pamphlet forms, readily concluded that science really brought out the truth of Genesis 1. Moreover there was no lack of scientists who struck similar chords. Arno Penzias, a Nobel Laureate, claimed in 1978 in the front page of *The New York Times* that modern scientific cosmology reads quite like Genesis 1. On verifying the high degree of homogeneity in the 2.7°K cosmic background radiation George Smoot quipped, "It's like the finger of God." This was as recently as 1994.

Science cannot, of course, prove creation out of nothing simply because the "nothing" is not measurable, or else it would be something. Science therefore cannot prove the beginning of motion (and time), because in order to do so it would have to verify experimen­tally an immediately previous state that, by definition, does not exist. In fact science cannot prove that there is a universe, a totality of consistent­ly interacting things. In order to do so scientists would have to move beyond the universe to observe and measure it. While one can move beyond a galaxy, beyond a group of galaxies, what is beyond all such groups or the universe is a no man's land for science. ­Even the most successful cosmological model does not necessarily stand for that totality. But within that totality science rules supreme when it comes to quantitative specifics. Biblical statements are no excep­tions to this rule. Insofar as it subjects the Bible to servitude to science, co­ncordism must therefore be banned.

*What Genesis 1 is about*

At the same time, since the style of Genesis 1 is so realistic, a purely spiritual or allegorical use of it certainly fails to satisfy the right interests of reason. Clearly an approach is needed which does justice to that realist tone and at the same does not make it a prisoner of the scientific method. Such an approach may be the one outlined here. Within it the realism of Genesis 1 is restricted to the statement, reiterated there three times in different forms, that God made all, that the making of the all is the work which the author of Genesis 1 assigned to God. The author of Genesis 1 used objects of common sense perception as the means to symbolize a totality which as such could be well beyond what could be registered about it at that time and indeed could remain far beyond even the latest penetra­tion into the cosmic reaches. This assertion of totality as the work of God served the purely cultic purpose of observing the sabbath, which again is no business of science.

In this approach to Genesis 1 one has to focus one's attention on its principal and subordinate purposes and messages. This should open up a truly liberating perspective. Within that perspec­tive any effort to look for a concor­dance between science and Genesis 1 will appear outright irrelevant and indeed leading to hapless mental exertions. For a debacle is in store for anyone who reads any piece of literature in a perspective not intended by its author. Only the naive would seek solid scientific information in science fiction. Only the naive would take Dickens' novels for source books on nineteenth-century English social conditions. Only the naive would take Scott's novels for textbooks on Scottish history. Miserable would indeed be any military historian who would take the author of *Les Miserables* for a guide.

Especially illuminating would be to recall efforts to read the Gospels in a perspective not intended by their authors, who certainly did not aim at presenting a biography of Jesus. Those who sought such a biography in the Gospels were in various ways disap­pointed. One such disappointment, relatively harmless, was registered by P. Lagrange, the greatest Catholic biblical exegete of this century. After some years of working hard on a synopsis of the Gospels, he came to realize that it cannot be done in such a way as to serve as a basis for a "Life of Jesus" taken in the sense of a "biogra­phy." Far worse disappointment was in store for those who took the Gospels as if they had been written to satisfy the "critics," who failed to secure more than handful of Jesus's statements as "authent­ic." The rest they had to ascribe to the compilers of logions, or worse, to the creative imagination of the community of the faith­ful. Focusing on the purpose for which something was written remains basic to its proper understanding.

Unfortunately, the purpose for which Genesis 1 was written drifted out of focus. Something of that drift would have come about even if its sole reason had been the shift from Saturday to Sunday as the day to be made holy by Christians. They no longer felt that their chief duty was to abstain from manual work, indeed from countless small exertions as specified by Talmudists. Christians rather had to sanctify the Sunday with a liturgical remembrance of an effortless act, Christ's resurrection that introduced a new creation.

Yet, within orthodox Jewish tradition, where the old outlook on what constituted the sabbath was rigidly kept, no healthy approach developed as to what to do with with questions raised by science about Genesis 1. Liberal Jewish tradition showed not enough interest in Revelation in order to be concerned about the relation of science and religion. Meager has been Conservative Judaism's interest in Genesis 1 as it related science. Within Chris­tian tradition commentaries on Genesis 1 certainly served for restating and developing a number of theologi­cal questions, such as the omnipo­tence of God, the absence of a rival principle, the goodness of creation, the eminent role of man in creation and the like. But all these remained interwoven with misguided efforts to reconcile the world-picture and the world-making in Genesis 1 with the science of the day.

*Never too late*

These efforts were mistaken and disastrously so. Nothing in fact has brought so much discredit to the Bible as the continued efforts to reconcile it with science. The sooner they are abandoned the better for all concerned, whether they take the Bible for the revealed word of God or not. As to those in both these groups, who wonder why an erroneous approach to Genesis 1 could prevail for so long, they should not overlook the fact that errors, at times long-standing errors, are part of intellectual progress in every field. Revelation was not given in order to dispel at one fell swoop any partial or imperfect grasp of such truths which its purpose was to provide. The task of interpret­ing the Bible or to do its exegesis is as ongoing a process as any other worthwhile enter­prise. The fact that a satisfac­tory solution comes relatively late to a problem should bother only immature minds. They are the ones who fail to see the enormous, indeed superhuman insight of the parable according to which the Kingdom of Heaven is similar to a field into which the Enemy keeps sowing tares that continue to appear together with the wheat. This was the parable which Paul VI held to be the one most appropriate for our times. It is indeed a timeless parable, valid in most varied ways until the end of time.

As to biblical studies proper it was not until the close of the last century that fragments of papyri were found in the sands of Egypt that proved "experimentally" the traditional dating of John's Gos­pel. It was not until early this century that a marble epitaph was unearthed which finally provided an undispu­table proof that the expression "first born" does not necessarily mean that other children too were born to the same woman. The epitaph bemoaned the death of a young mother who died giving birth to her first born. The evidence did not, of course, mean the death of a patently wrong interpreta­tion of Luke's statem­ent about Mary as the one who gave birth to her first-born.

It was not until about the same time that a marble tablet provided independent evidence about the existence of a Quirinius, mentioned by Luke as the governor of Syria, when the census, ordered by Caesar Augustus, was taken.

Some papyri collected in Egypt about a hundred years ago did not reveal their enormous significance until relatively recently. It is not that they contain passages from Matthew's Gospel, but rather that the style of the calligraphy suggests a date for them which precedes the destruction of Jerusalem by perhaps a decade or so.

It was not until about our mid-century that a cave in some cliffs above the Dead Sea revealed by sheer accident a vast trove of scrolls that proved to be half a millennium older than the then oldest scrolls of the Old Testament. Studies of those scrolls gave the lie to persistent contentions that the transmission of the sacred texts was an unreliable affair.

Archeological and geological explora­tion of the Holy Land that began intensively around the mid-19th century turned up a plethora of evidence that had not been previously available to those who insisted on the veracity of sundry data in the Holy Writ. Clearly, it is never too late for those who are confident that truth will prove itself, even if at times it does so only in the very long run.

The case about Genesis 1 holds a far more important lesson yet. It is about the pitfalls into which those are bound to fall who try to meet more than half-way the demands of secular culture. The lure of concordism has always found its strength in the weakness of Christians reluctant to be satisfied with a built-in limitation of revealed truth. This truth has been given to promote a Kingdom which is not of this world and to spare that Kingdom from the standards of a world that deeply resents anything otherworldly.

One can never ponder often and long enough that many of those who never had any doubt on that score and indeed were fully committed to it, failed to see the real purpose of Genesis 1. The solution given in these pages was born out of a careful study of the entire record stretching over two millennia, before it was set forth in a series of lectures and then published right away in 1992, to be republished in a revised and enlarged form six years later.[[1]](#footnote-1) May this summary of the problems and their solution set forth there help in a broader way to overcome that dispirit­ing experience in which the only thing man learns from history is to never learn from history. One should learn more than that from Genesis 1 which, with its starting words, "In the beginning," should serve as the beginning of that wisdom that has its source in the reverence due to the Creator of *all*.

In fact that *all* contains also that science which for the last several hundred years has been pitted against Genesis 1. The beginnings of that science, the Newtonian science of motion, can be traced to a medieval Christian reflection on "In the beginning".[[2]](#footnote-2) But this too was learned much, much later, but perhaps none too late. Yet once this is learned, little remains of the alleged opposition between science and religion. For how could a science be a real antagonist to that Creed which provided its only viable matrix?

1. *Genesis 1 through the Ages* (2d rev. ed.; Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press; Royal Oak: MI: Real View Books, 1998), x + 301pp. This book contains the documentation concerning various details in this essay. See also my *Bible and Science* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1997) for more general considerations. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See on this my book, *The Savior of Science* (Washington, DC: Regnery-Gateway, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)