CHAPTER I

Creation

GENESIS 1–4

The Bible does not constitute an ideological monolith. This fact is often overlooked. Ancient Israel encountered the world in many different ways and its varying responses to the stimuli of cosmic phenomena gave rise to several cosmologies or descriptions of the manner in which the world and its contents came into being.[1] Not all are equally prominent in biblical literature and some are merely fragmentary. Yet it is clear that the Bible reflects different notions current in Israel, some of which awaken memories of ancient Near Eastern mythologies.

The most famous is to be found in Genesis 1:1–2:a.[2] It opens with the phrase, "when God began to create the heaven and the earth," and it closes with the formula, "such is the story of heaven and earth as they were created." Within this literary framework are described the divine activities within a seven-day period. The creative process is successively unfolded in the following stages: 1) light, 2) sky, 3) earth, seas and vegetation, 4) luminaries, 5) living creatures in the sea and the sky, 6) animal

life on earth and man "created in the image of God." The account culminates in the Sabbath, or divine cessation from creation which, to the Torah, is as much a part of the cosmic order as is the foregoing creativity.

The second biblical account of Creation (2:4b–24) opens with the formula, "When the Lord God made earth and heaven," and goes on to tell how the entire surface of the earth was watered by a flow that would well up from subterranean springs. But the main topic in this account is the formation of man and his placement in the Garden of Eden. The narrative ends with the creation of woman because of divine recognition of the human need for companionship.

From many scattered allusions in biblical literature—prophetic, poetic and wise—it is certain that there were prevalent in Israel other notions about the events connected with the creation of the world. Among these is the popular belief that in days of old, prior to the onset of the cosmogonic process, the forces of watery chaos, variously designated Yam (Sea), Nahar (River), Leviathan (Coiled One), Rahab (Arrogant One) and Tannin (Dragon), were subdued by God.[3] There does not seem to be any unanimity in these accounts about the ultimate fate of these creatures. According to one version, they were utterly destroyed.[4] According to another, the chaotic forces, personalized as monsters, were put under restraint.[5] It must be remembered, however, that this combat myth, once fully developed, appears in a very attenuated and fragmentary form in the biblical sources and the several allusions have to be pieced together into some kind of coherent unity. Nevertheless, there is ample witness to the fact that the myths to which these allusions refer found literary expression in ancient Israel and were sufficiently well known to be used as reference points in literary compositions.[6]

Not science

It should be obvious that by the nature of things, none of these stories can possibly be the product of human memory, nor in any modern sense of the word scientific accounts of the origin and nature of the physical world.

Biblical man, despite his undoubted intellectual and spiritual endowments, did not base his views of the universe and its laws on the critical use of empirical data. He had not, as yet, discovered the principles and

methods of disciplined inquiry, critical observation or analytical experimentation. Rather, his thinking was imaginative, and his expressions of thought were concrete, pictorial, emotional, and poetic.[7] Hence, it is a naive and futile exercise to attempt to reconcile the biblical accounts of creation with the findings of modern science. Any correspondence which can be discovered or ingeniously established between the two must surely be nothing more than mere coincidence. Even more serious than the inherent fundamental misconception of the psychology of biblical man is the unwholesome effect upon the understanding of the Bible itself. For the net result is self-defeating. The literalistic approach serves to direct attention to those aspects of the narrative that reflect the time and place of its composition, while it tends to obscure the elements that are meaningful and enduring, thus distorting the biblical message and destroying its relevancy.

The purpose of the narrative

Whether the Hebrew Genesis account was meant to be science or not, it was certainly meant to convey statements of faith. As will be shown, it is part of the biblical polemic against paganism and an introduction to the religious ideas characteristic of the whole of biblical literature. It tells us something about the nature of the one God who is the Creator and supreme sovereign of the world and whose will is absolute. It asserts that God is outside the realm of nature, which is wholly subservient to Him. He has no myth; that is, there are no stories about any events in His life. Magic plays no part in the worship of Him. The story also tells us something of the nature of man, a God-like creature, uniquely endowed with dignity, honor and infinite worth, into whose hands God has entrusted mastery over His creation. Finally, this narrative tells us something about the biblical concept of reality. It proclaims the essential goodness of life and assumes a universal moral order governing human society.

To be sure, these affirmations are not stated in modern philosophical terms. But, as we have already pointed out, the audience of the biblical writers had its own literary idiom. Therefore, to understand them properly we must not confuse the idiom with the idea, the metaphor with the reality behind it. The two have to be disentangled from each other and the idea conveyed must be translated into the idiom of our own day. If

this is to be successfully accomplished, the biblical narrative has to be viewed against the background of the world out of which it grew and against which it reacted.[8]

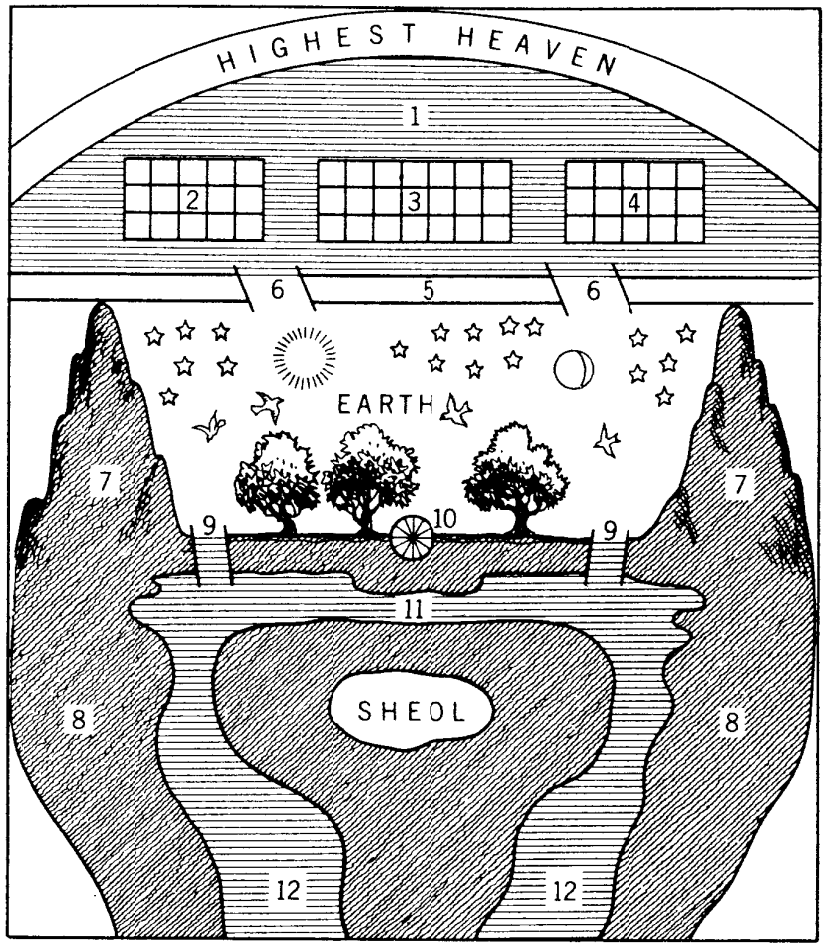
A comparison with Near Eastern cosmogonies shows the degree of indebtedness of the Israelite version to literary precedent, even as Shakespeare was greatly obligated to his predecessors. Yet, at the same time, the materials used have been transformed so as to become the vehicle for the transmission of completely new ideas.

Enuma Elish

One of the most famous myths emanating from the ancient world is the Babylonian epic known by its opening words, *Enuma Elish* ("when on high"). For the purposes of our study this particular cosmology is the most important of all since it has been preserved more or less in its entirety, and because it belongs to the same ancient Near East of which ancient Israel was a part.[9]

The Babylonian creation epic tells how, before the formation of heaven and earth, nothing existed except water. This primal generative element was identified with Apsu, the male personification of the primeval sweet-water ocean, and with his female associate Tiamat, the primordial salt-water ocean, represented as a ferocious monster. From the commingling of the two waters were born the divine offspring. These, in turn, gave birth to a second generation of gods and the process was repeated successively. Then came a time when the young gods, through their unremitting and noisy revelry, disturbed the peace of Tiamat and Apsu. The latter decided to destroy the gods, but the evil design was thwarted by the quick action of the all-wise Ea, the earth-water god.

Tiamat now planned revenge and organized her forces for the attack on the gods. The latter, for their part, requested Marduk to lead them in battle. He acceded provided that he be granted sovereignty over the universe. To this condition the assembly of the gods readily agreed and Marduk, invested with the insignia of royalty, thereupon became their champion and took up the cudgels against Tiamat and her helpers. After a fierce battle in which he defeated the enemy forces and slew Tiamat, Marduk sliced the carcass of the monster in two and created of one half the firmament of heaven and of the other the foundation of the earth.



The work of creation having thus begun, Marduk then established the heavenly luminaries, each in its place. This activity is described in the fifth tablet of the epic which, unfortunately, is fragmentary. However, from what follows it would appear that the gods complained to Marduk that, each having now been assigned his or her fixed place and function in the cosmos, there would be no relief from unending toil. Accordingly, Marduk decided to create man to free the gods from menial labor and this he proceeded to do, fashioning a human being out of the blood of Kingu, Tiamat's second husband and captain of her army. The gods showed their gratitude to Marduk by building for him a great shrine in the city of Babylon, "the gate of god." The epic ends with a description of a testimonial banquet tendered by the gods at which they recite an adulatory hymn of praise to Marduk that confirms his kingship for all eternity.

The meaning of myth

Before we proceed to analyze this epic, a word must be said explaining the meaning of myth and its function.[10]

The power of self-consciousness, the ability of the human mind both to contemplate itself and to apprehend the world outside itself, is what most distinguishes man from the beast. Since time immemorial man has used his faculty of detached thinking and his propensity to introspection to reflect upon the nature of the world about him, to wonder about the origin of things and to record in literary form his answers—be they mythical or speculative—to the mysteries of existence.

In the popular mind the word myth has come to be identified with fairy tale and associated with the imaginary and the fantastic. But to the Greeks, "mythos" meant originally nothing more than "the thing spoken," that is, a tale. More specifically, it came to be used in describing the deeds of the gods in their relations with one another, their associations with man and their roles in the cosmos. It is in this sense that "myth" is used throughout this book.

Myths, then, in the final analysis, have as their subjects the eternal problems of mankind communicated through the medium of highly imaginative language. A myth may be a vital cultural force. It can be a vehicle for the expression of ideas that activate human behavior, that reflect and validate the distinctive forms and qualities of a civilization, that signify a dynamic attitude to the universe and embody a vision of society.

This functional aspect of myth is well illustrated by its intimate association with ritual. Myth was "not merely a story told, but a reality lived . . . believed to have once happened in primeval times and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies."[11] Myth, therefore, in the ancient world was mimetically re-enacted in public festivals to the accompaniment of ritual. The whole complex constituted imitative magic, the effect of which was believed to be beneficial to the entire community. Through ritual drama, the primordial events recorded in the myth were reactivated. The enactment at the appropriate season of the creative deeds of the gods, and the recitation of the proper verbal formulae, it was believed, would effect the periodic renewal and revitalization of nature and so assure the prosperity of the community.

The function of Enuma Elish

The Babylonian epic we have summarized above is but one of many versions of cosmogony current in the ancient Near East. But its importance transcended all others, for it became the great national epic of Babylon. Recorded in seven tablets, it was solemnly recited and dramatically presented in the course of the festivities marking the Spring New Year, the focal point of the Babylonian religious calendar. It was, in effect, the myth that sustained Babylonian civilization, that buttressed its societal norms and its organizational structure.[12]

The epic performed several functions. First, it was theogonic. It described how the generations of the gods, whose names were so familiar to the people of Mesopotamia, came into being. Second, it was cosmological. It provided an explanation of cosmic phenomena and gave answers to human speculations about the origins of things. Both of these themes were naturally appropriate to the New Year festival. Still more important, the conception of the universe in *Enuma Elish* as a kind of cosmic state corresponded to the structural forms of Babylonian society. The position and function of man in the scheme of creation paralleled precisely the status of the slave in Mesopotamia, while the receipt of authority by Marduk and his consolidation of power by the exhibition of overwhelming force were symbolic of the Babylonian conception of the human rulership of the state.

At the same time, the epic served to validate Marduk's assumption of the divine government of the universe by explaining his ascendancy from

relative obscurity as the city-god of Babylon to a supreme position in the Babylonian pantheon, "the king of all the gods." As a concomitant to this, it also reflected Babylonian imperialism and gave support to Babylon's claim to political pre-eminence in the ancient world.

Finally, and not least important, was the cultic-functional aspect of the *Enuma Elish*. The conflict between Tiamat and Marduk was expressive of the war between the forces of cosmic order and the forces of chaos. This struggle was believed to be repeated constantly in the annual life-cycle of the earth, particularly since the periodic and catastrophic upheavals of nature in Mesopotamia readily gave credence to such a belief. Hence, the mimetic New Year reenactment of the story was in reality ritual drama. At the critical time of the vernal equinox, when nature seemed to be suspended between inanimation and animation, between inertia and creativity, the ritual recitation served as an analogical repetition of the primordial victory of cosmic order. The participation of society in the struggle between the forces of death and those of revival portended and indeed, to the Babylonian mind actually effected, the renewal of communal life and its reinvigoration.[13]

The function of the Genesis narrative

If we have devoted so much space to a discussion of the role of *Enuma Elish* in Babylonian civilization, it is only because of the importance of the subject for the proper understanding of the biblical Genesis account and the perennial significance of its message.

It must be remembered that the Mesopotamian and Hebrew cosmogonies, each in its own way, express through their symbolism the world-views and values that animated the civilization each represents. The opening chapters of the Bible unveil the main pillars upon which the Israelite outlook rests. The characteristic trends of the religion of Israel assert themselves in Genesis as powerfully as does the rationale of Mesopotamian society and religion in *Enuma Elish*.

However, a vital and fundamental distinction must be made at once between Israel and Mesopotamia. The theme of creation, important as it is in the Bible, is nevertheless only introductory to what is its central motif, namely, the Exodus from Egypt. God's acts in history, rather than His role as Creator, are predominant in biblical thought.

The Bible opens with the account of Creation, not so much because

its primary purpose is to describe the process of cosmogony, nor because its chief concern is with the nature of the physical world or the origin and constitution of matter. Genesis is but a prologue to the historical drama that unfolds itself in the ensuing pages of the Bible. It proclaims, loudly and unambiguously, the absolute subordination of all creation to the supreme Creator who thus can make use of the forces of nature to fulfill His mighty deeds in history. It asserts unequivocally that the basic truth of all history is that the world is under the undivided and inescapable sovereignty of God. In brief, unlike *Enuma Elish* in Babylon, the Genesis Creation narrative is primarily the record of the event which inaugurated this historical process, and which ensures that there is a divine purpose behind creation that works itself out on the human scene.

The biblical Creation account is non-political and non-cultic

This playing of the cosmological theme in a relatively minor key in biblical literature points up other basic distinctions between Genesis and *Enuma Elish*. The former has no political role. It contains no allusion to the people of Israel, Jerusalem or the Temple. It does not seek to validate national ideals or institutions. Moreover, it fulfills no cultic function. The inextricable tie between myth and ritual, the mimetic enactment of the cosmogony in the form of ritual drama, which is an essential characteristic of the pagan religions, finds no counterpart in the Israelite cult. In this respect too, the Genesis story represents a complete break with Near Eastern tradition.

The Creation account is non-mythological[14]

The reason for this detachment of cosmogony from the ritual is not hard to find. The supreme characteristic of the Mesopotamian cosmogony is that it is embedded in a mythological matrix. On the other hand, the outstanding peculiarity of the biblical account is the complete absence of mythology in the classical pagan sense of the term. The religion of Israel is essentially non-mythological, there being no suggestion of any theo-biography. The Scriptures themselves do not openly betray a true

understanding of mythological paganism. In fact, as a result of their thorough-going monotheism the picture they paint of the religion of the contemporaries of Israel is really a distortion. The Bible shows no consciousness of any connection between the pagan gods and mythological motifs, no realization of the close relationship that existed between mythology and the cult. There is not a single biblical reference to the natural or mythological qualities of the pagan gods. There is not even a biblical term for "goddess." Actually, in its overt polemic with paganism Scripture never combats mythology. It frequently exposes the folly of idolatry, but never gives a hint of the true nature of the cult associated with it. A case in point is the not uncommon reference to the goddess Ishtar under the guise of "Ashtoret." [15] We may search the Bible in vain for any clear statement of her character. Who would know that in the Assyro-Babylonian literature she is the great goddess of love, fertility and productiveness, but also the cruel patroness of war? Who could guess from the scriptural sources that into this divine figure has been blended a rich and complex mythology, varied strains of thought and diverse religious concepts? Pagan representation of the gods by pictures and images, and its use of icons in worship, are conceived by the biblical writers to be nothing more than fetishism. In short, so remote are the biblical writers from the religious atmosphere of the pagan world that they are unable to present a true picture of it.

Nowhere is this non-mythological outlook better illustrated than in the Genesis narrative. The Hebrew account is matchless in its solemn and majestic simplicity. It has no notion of the birth of God and no biography of God. It does not even begin with a statement about the existence of God. Such speculation would have been unthinkable at this time.[16] To the Bible, God's existence is as self-evident as is life itself. The Hebrew concept of God is implicit in the narrative, not formulated abstractly and explicitly. The whole of biblical literature is really the attestation of the experiences of individuals and of a nation with the Divine. Genesis, therefore, begins immediately with an account of the creative activity of the pre-existent God.

Far different is the Mesopotamian account. Theogony is inextricably tied up with cosmogony. The gods themselves had to be created. Even Marduk, the head of the pantheon, is not pre-existent. The first supernal beings are demons and monsters, while the god of creation is only born at a fairly late stage in the theogonic process. Moreover, his creative activity is introduced almost casually and incidentally.

Mythology, magic and God's freedom

This absence or presence of the theogonic motif had profound consequences for the development of the religions of Israel and her Near Eastern neighbors. The birth of the gods implies the existence of some primordial, self-contained, realm from which the gods themselves derive. The cosmos, too, is fashioned from this same element, personified in *Enuma Elish* as the carcass of Tiamat. That is to say, both the divine and the cosmic are animated by a common source. Moreover, the concept of the immanence of the gods in nature was one of the basic convictions of the religions of the pagan world. It meant the existence of divine powers, operative in nature, upon whom the well-being of man and society depended. The periodic changes in nature were conceived as episodes in the lives of the gods. Nature and man belonged to the same realm. Hence, the goal of man on earth was to integrate himself harmoniously into the cosmic rhythm.[17]

This all-pervasive dependence upon the material explains the prominence in polytheistic religion of the tales of the personal lives of the gods, their subjection to birth, growth, sex, hunger, disease, impotence, senescence and even death.[18] Now, if there are many gods and these gods are dependent upon physical existence, then they can have neither freedom nor omnipotence. Their immanence in nature limits their scope. Their sovereign powers are circumscribed by the superior forces inherent in the primordial substance of existence. Since, according to pagan concepts, man's destiny is controlled by two separate forces, the gods and the powers beyond the gods, it was inevitable that magic became an integral part of pagan religion. Man had to be able to devise the means of activating those forces superior even to the gods. Religion, as a consequence, became increasingly concerned with the elaboration of ritual designed to propitiate the numerous unpredictable powers that be.

Anyone who reads the Hebrew Bible, especially the Book of Psalms, is aware that the ancient Israelite was as struck by the majesty of natural phenomena as was any of his pagan neighbors. But unlike them, he did not profess to see God within those phenomena. The clear line of demarcation between God and His creation was never violated. Nowhere is this brought out more forcefully than in the Hebrew Genesis account. Here we find no physical link between the world of humanity and the world of the divine. There is no natural connection between the Creator and his handiwork. Hence, there is no room for magic in the religion of

the Bible. The God of Creation is eternally existent, removed from all corporeality, and independent of time and space. Creation comes about through the simple divine fiat: Let there be!

"Let there be!"

It has been maintained that this notion of the creative power of the word is known to us from elsewhere in the ancient Near East.[19] But the similarity is wholly superficial, for wherever it is found it has a magical content. The pronouncement of the right word, like the performance of the right magical actions, is able to, or rather, inevitably must, actualize the potentialities which are inherent in the inert matter. In other words, it implies a mystic bond uniting matter to its manipulator.

Worlds apart is the Genesis concept of creation by divine fiat. Notice how the Bible passes over in absolute silence the nature of the matter—if any—upon which the divine word acted creatively. Its presence or absence is of no importance, for there is no tie between it and God. "Let there be!" or, as the Psalmist echoed it, "He spoke and it was so,"[20] refers not to the utterance of the magic word, but to the expression of the omnipotent, sovereign, unchallengeable will of the absolute, transcendent God to whom all nature is completely subservient. Such a concept of God and of the process of creation added a new dimension to human thought and marked a new stage in the history of religion. It emancipated the mind from the limitations of mythopoeic thinking, and it liberated religion from the baneful influence of magic.

"Male and female He created them"

This notion of creation by the divine will presents us with yet another radical departure from paganism. In polytheistic mythologies creation is always expressed in terms of procreation. Apparently, paganism was unable to conceive of any primal creative force other than in terms of sex. It will be remembered that in *Enuma Elish,* Apsu and Tiamat represent respectively the male and female powers which, through the "commingling of their waters" gave birth to the first generation of gods. The sex element existed before the cosmos came into being and all the gods were themselves creatures of sex.[21] On the other hand, the Creator in

Genesis is uniquely without any female counterpart and the very association of sex with God is utterly alien to the religion of the Bible. When, in fact, Genesis (1:27; 5:2) informs us that "male and female He created them," that God Himself created sexual differentiation, it is more than likely that we are dealing with an intended protest against such pagan notions.

The same may be said in regard to the place of the element of water in the Hebrew cosmogony. The latter shares with *Enuma Elish* the idea of the priority of water in time.[22] Just as Apsu and Tiamat, the two oceans, exist before all things, so in Genesis the existence of water is taken for granted. The darkness is over the surface of the deep; the wind,[23] or the breath of God, sweeps over the waters and the primordial waters are divided into two. Now this concept of the priority of water is fairly widespread among many unrelated mythologies. It most likely arose from the fact that, being amorphous, water seems clearly to represent the state of affairs before chaos was reduced to order and things achieved fixed form. However, since in lower Mesopotamia the earth actually came into being through the sinking of the water level and deposits of silt, it is more than probable that we have in our Genesis account, which gives priority in time to water and envisages the dry land as emerging from it, Babylonian coloration. This is particularly so in view of the contrast between the rich alluvial plains of the Euphrates-Tigris valley and the hilly, rocky soil of Palestine, dependent for its fertility upon seasonal rainfall.[24]

However, the similarity ends here. For in pagan mythologies water is the primal generative force—a notion utterly foreign to the Book of Genesis. Here God wills and the waters obey. At His command they divide.

> God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water,
> that it may separate water from water." . . . And it was so.
> (1 : 6–7)

In conformity with His will the waters gather into one area so that the dry land may appear. If they spawn forth swarms of living creatures, it is not due to any inherent, independent, generative powers they may possess, but is solely in response to the divine command. For the first time in history, therefore, we have a totally new conception of cosmogony and one, strangely enough, that in its literary form has not hesitated to make use of some of the symbols of its ideologically incompatible predecessor. This is a characteristic of the Genesis narrative that we shall encounter again and again.

Man the pinnacle of creation

Perhaps nowhere is the contrast between the mythological and the Israelite conceptions more striking and more illuminating than in their respective descriptions of the creation of man. Yet at first glance this statement may seem to be quite paradoxical, for the Hebrew story bears close resemblance to a Near Eastern mythic pattern.

In the opening chapter of Genesis we are told simply that God created man "in His image," (1:27) nothing being stated of the matter used in the act of creation. But in the subsequent narrative it is related how God "formed man from dust of the earth."[25] Now if we note that the word here translated "dust" is used quite often in biblical Hebrew as a synonym for clay,[26] we may recognize at once a theme frequently encountered in Scripture.[27] Here, again, we are confronted with a familiar motif, the shaping of man out of clay.[28] In *Enuma Elish* man is created from the blood of the rebellious Kingu.[29] But in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* of which we shall learn more in the next chapter, the goddess Aruru "washed her hands, nipped off clay" and fashioned it into Enkidu.[30] An Old Babylonian myth, paralleled in an Assyrian version, explicitly describes the creation of the first men from clay.[31] That this motif is of very great antiquity may be shown by its presence in a Sumerian composition of the third millennium B.C.E.[32] Conforming to the same conceptual pattern are the Egyptian paintings which depict the god Khnum sitting upon his throne before a potter's wheel busily fashioning men.[33]

Yet this very similarity between the Bible and Near Eastern mythology affords us an excellent example of the superficiality of parallels if a single feature is wrenched from its cultural moorings and treated independently.

The very fact that the creation of man in the Genesis description is an exception to the rule of creation by divine fiat, and that solely in the case of man is the material from which he is made explicitly mentioned, implies emphasis upon a unique position for man among created things and a special relationship to God. This, indeed, is reinforced in many and varied subtle ways. It is as though for the climactic preformance the usual act of will was reinforced by an act of divine effort. Man, alone, has the breath of life blown into his nostrils by God Himself. Only by virtue of this direct animation did man become a living being, drawing directly from God his life source. The creation of nothing else in the cosmogonic process is preceded by a divine declaration of intention and purpose, "Let us make man" (Gen. 1:26). Man, in fact, is the pinnacle of creation and the entire story has a human-centered orientation.

This situation contrasts strongly with the story of the creation of man in *Enuma Elish*. There he is almost incidental, fashioned as a kind of afterthought as a menial of the gods to provide them with nourishment and generally to satisfy their physical needs. The Book of Genesis seems to be emphasizing the antithesis of this, for the very first communication of God to man—

> See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food . . . (1 : 29f.)

> Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat. (2 : 16)

—is an expression of divine concern for man's physical needs and well being.

So much does the Torah wish to signify the special status accorded man in the cosmos and to stress that the relationship between man and God is *sui generis*, that it employs certain unusual literary devices in the story. Three times in the course of a single verse it repeats the verb *bara'*, used in Hebrew exclusively to denote divine creativity. Furthermore, it reiterates the theme of man being actually created in the "image of God" (1:26-27; cf. 5:1; 9:6):

> And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (1 : 27)

The phrase "in the image of God" is a difficult one and its origin and exact import have not been satisfactorily explained.[34] But it must be connected with the immediately following divine blessing:

> "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, and birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth." (1 : 28)

This exclusive distinction endows man with power over the animal and vegetable worlds and confers upon him the right, nay the duty, to exploit the resources of nature for his own benefits. In this setting, the idea of man "in the image of God" must inevitably include within the scope of its meaning all those faculties and gifts of character that distinguish man from the beast and that are needed for the fulfillment of his task on earth,

namely, intellect, free will, self-awareness, consciousness of the existence of others, conscience, responsibility and self-control. Moreover, being created "in the image of God" implies that human life is infinitely precious. Such, indeed, is the meaning given to the phrase in Genesis 9:6:

> Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God was man created.

The Bible's concept of the divine image in man thus constitutes another revolutionary break with its contemporary world. The pagan bond between man and nature has been severed once and for all. No longer is man a creature of blind forces, helplessly at the mercy of the inexorable rhythms and cycles of nature. On the contrary, he is now a being possessed of dignity, purpose, freedom and tremendous power.

Yet the pre-eminence of man over beast is not the same as total independence. This is where the vivid picture of the clayey origin of man comes into play once again. The figure is suggestive of the activity of a potter molding the malleable raw material into the desired shape. The very verb used in the second account of the creation of man by God—*yaṣar* (2:7, 8)—is the same from which the Hebrew word for "potter" is drawn. Most significantly, the terms for "creator" and "potter" may be expressed in Hebrew by one and the same word *(yoṣer)*. This figure is a well-known biblical symbol evocative of the notion of God's absolute mastery over man,[35] so that through the ingenious employment of a common mythological motif, the Hebrew writer has subtly and effectively succeeded, not just in combatting mythological notions, but also in conveying, all at once, both a sense of man's glory and freedom and the feeling of his inescapable dependence upon God. Human sovereignty can never quite be absolute. It must always be subject to the demands of a higher law,the divinely ordained moral order of the universe.

The nature of God

This emphasis upon the uniqueness of man follows, of course, from the moral nature of God as conceived in the Bible. That God is moral is not accidental, for it is the fundamental difference between polytheism and monotheism. We are not dealing here simply with a matter of arithmetic; the cleavage between the two systems goes much deeper.

We shall soon take fuller note of the phenomenon of conflict inherent

in the polytheistic system. Here we are concerned with the fact that the idea of many gods inevitably engendered a multiplicity of ethical values and moral standards. It is perfectly true that there were gods in the polytheistic pantheon who were guardians of justice and who demanded righteous conduct from man. However, their ethical quality was but one of many diverse and contradictory attributes and was neither inherent in the idea of the godhead nor absolute. Anyone who reads the *Enuma Elish* is struck by the moral indifference of the gods, and much the same is true of the Homeric epics. The pagan worshiper had no reason to believe that the decrees of his god must necessarily be just, any more than he could be convinced that society rested upon a universal order of justice. According to the pagan world-view the fate of man was not determined by human behavior. The gods were innately capricious, so that any absolute authority was impossible.[36]

This capriciousness of the gods is diametrically opposed to the biblical view. The God of Creation is not at all morally indifferent. On the contrary, morality and ethics constitute the very essence of His nature.[37] The Bible presumes that God operates by an order which man can comprehend, and that a universal moral law had been decreed for society. Thus, the idea embedded in Genesis of one universal Creator has profound ethical implications. It means that the same universal sovereign will that brought the world into existence continues to exert itself thereafter making absolute, not relative, demands upon man, expressed in categorical imperatives—"thou shalt," "thou shalt not."

It is not to be wondered at that Mesopotamian society suffered from a malaise which scholars have characterized as "overtones of anxiety." The nature of the gods could give no feeling of certainty and security in the cosmos. To make matters worse there were also environmental factors that had to be taken into account. Man always found himself confronted by the tremendous forces of nature, and nature, especially in Mesopotamia, showed itself to be cruel, indiscriminate, unpredictable. Since the gods were immanent in nature, they too shared these same harsh attributes. To aggravate the situation still further, there was always that inscrutable primordial power beyond the realm of the gods to which man and gods were both subject. Evil, then, was a permanent necessity and there was nothing essentially good in the pagan universe. In such circumstances there could be no correlation between right conduct and individual or national well-being. The universe was purposeless and the deities could offer their votaries no guarantee that life had meaning and direction, no assurance that the end of human strivings was anything but

vanity. History and time were but a repeating cycle of events in which man played a passive role, carried along relentlessly by the stream of existence to his ineluctable fate.[38]

Far different is the outlook of Genesis. One of its seemingly naive features is God's pleasure at His own artistry, the repeated declaration, after each completed act of creation, that God saw how good His work was (1:4 etc.). Following the creation of living things, we meet with the climactic observation that God saw all that He had made and found it to be "*very* good" (1:31). But this naiveté of idiom cloaks a profundity of thought that marks off the mood of Hebrew civilization from that of Mesopotamia in a most revolutionary manner. The concept of a single directing Mind behind the cosmic machine, with all its ethico-moral implications, emancipated Israel from thralldom to the vicious cycle of time. In place of a fortuitous concatenation of events, history has become purposeful and society has achieved direction. A strong streak of optimism has displaced the acute awareness of insecurity. The all-pervasive pagan consciousness of human impotence has given way to a profound sense of the significance of man and the powers he can employ. Contemplating the awesome majesty of cosmic phenomena, the Psalmist can yet extol the glory and dignity with which God has adorned man and the authority He has placed in his hands.[39]

This basic belief in the essential goodness of the universe was, of course, destined to exert a powerful influence upon the direction of the religion of Israel and to affect the outlook on life of the people. It found its expression in the concept of the covenant relationship between God and His people and ultimately achieved its most glorious manifestation in the notion of Messianism—two uniquely Israelite contributions to religion. The God of Israel, being a deity whose will is absolute and incontestable and whose word is eternal, was able to give assurances that human strivings were decidedly not in vain. Israelite society did not suffer from "overtones of anxiety."

The sabbath

This unshakable conviction in the essentially benign nature of divine activity, is reflected, too, in the description of the cessation from creativity. We are told God

> ceased on the seventh day from all the work which He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation which He had done. (2 : 2f.)

The institution of the sabbath will be discussed at greater length in a subsequent volume. Here, we can only address ourselves to the questions raised by this passage.

It will doubtless have been noted at once that the statement about God here cited contains no mention of the sabbath as a fixed, weekly institution. It refers only to the seventh day of Creation, to the divine cessation from creation, and to the blessing and sanctification of that day. But the name "sabbath" is not to be found, only the cognate verbal form *shabat*, meaning, "to desist from labor." Yet the connection between the weekly sabbath day and Creation is explicitly made both in the first version of the Ten Commandments:

> For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it. . . . (EXOD. 20 : 11)

as well as in another passage emphasizing the sabbath as an external sign of the covenant between God and Israel.[40] In other words, while Genesis ignores the weekly sabbath-day, these texts understood this self-same passage as being the source of the institution.[41]

As a matter of fact, there are no biblical sources recounting the founding of the weekly sabbath-day. The antiquity of its existence is presupposed in all the legislation and even in the narratives. Just one month after the departure from Egypt, and before the Sinaitic revelation, the sabbath is assumed to be already established.[42] Moreover, the very formulations of both versions of the Decalogue—"Remember/observe the Sabbath day"—take for granted an existing institution.[43] There cannot be any doubt that the sabbath belongs to the most ancient of Israel's sacred days.[44]

The questions now assert themselves. What is the origin of the sabbath, and why does our Genesis text speak only of the seventh day of Creation, hinting at, without specifically mentioning, the sabbath institution? The answers to these questions involve us, once again, in the world of ancient Near Eastern belief and practice.

From very early times, a seven-day period as the basic unit of time calculation was current among West Semitic peoples.[45] In the Mesopotamian lunar calendar the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first and twenty-eighth day of certain months, corresponding to the four phases of the moon, were all regarded as unlucky days. The nineteenth day, being the forty-ninth day ($=7 \times 7$) after the new-moon of the previous month, was called a "day of wrath."[46] These days were thought of as being controlled by evil spirits, and special fasts were prescribed. One ritual text forbids the king from eating cooked flesh, from changing his clothes, from offering sacrifice, from riding in a chariot, and from rendering legal decisions on these days. A seer may not give an oracle, nor may a physician attend to the sick. Curses uttered against enemies are ineffective.[47]

From all this one may learn that each seventh day of the lunar month possessed a special, if baneful, character. In addition, we also know that the day of the full-moon was known in Mesopotamia as the *shapattu*, described in the cuneiform texts as the "day of the quieting of the heart (of the god)." The meaning of this phrase has not been fully established, but it seems to indicate a day of good omen when certain rituals were performed, designed to appease the gods.

Many scholars see in the Mesopotamian calendar the origin of the biblical sabbath. They point to the significance attached to every seventh day of certain lunar months and to the similarity between the words *shapattu* and the Hebrew *shabbat*. It has to be remembered, however, that while the philological association is certainly feasible,[48] there is no evidence that the Mesopotamian *shapattu* was a day of cessation from labor. Nor was there any connection between the *shapattu*—the full-moon—and the four seventh days. These four special days are never designated *shapattu*. Moreover, the abstentions prescribed for these days did not apply to the entire population, but only to certain classes of people and there is no proof that any general curtailment of business activities was required. If, indeed, the biblical sabbath does owe anything to ancient Near Eastern culture, it is only to the basic concept of a seven-day unit of time.[49]

It is not at all unlikely, however, that our Genesis narrative telling of God's cessation from creation on the seventh day is, in its literary presentation, a reaction against the contemporary Near Eastern religious calendar. The careful avoidance of the use of the nominal form *shabbat* or of any reference to a fixed institution may well have been designed to

exclude the possibility of confusion with the *shapattu* festival, while the use of the verbal form *"shabat"* was intended to hint at the connection with the later Israelite institution. The same tendency to dissociate the biblical sabbath from Near Eastern practice would perhaps be present in the threefold repetition of the phrase "seventh day." This seems to emphasize that the day derives its special character solely from God, and is to be completely divorced from, and independent of, any connection with the phases of the moon. The seventh day is what it is, because God chose to "bless it and declared it holy." Its blessed and sacred character is part of the divinely ordained cosmic order. It cannot, therefore, be abrogated by man, and its sanctity is a reality irrespective of human activity. Being part of the cosmic order, this day must, like all other divinely created things, be essentially good and beneficial to man. Hence, it is a "blessed" day, the very antithesis of the Mesopotamian notion of evil or ill-omened days. Finally, its connection with the drama of Creation makes the day universal in character. It is not to be wondered at that this combination of blessedness and universality soon expressed itself in the religion of Israel in socio-moral terms, so that the privileges of the sabbath rest were extended equally to all members of the family, to the slave and the stranger, to the beast of burden and to the cattle in the field.[50] Whatever its origins, the biblical sabbath was a unique institution, transformed beyond recognition from any Near Eastern antecedents it may have had.[51]

The cosmic battle

We have already stressed the fact that the notion of conflict was inherent in the pagan view of the cosmos. Implicit in the notion of a multiplicity of gods is a plurality of wills which, by human analogy, is bound, in turn, to engender strife. The internecine strife of the gods, the personified forces of nature, is an outstandingly characteristic feature of polytheistic cosmogonies. That is why polytheistic accounts of creation always begin with the predominance of the powers of nature, and invariably describe in detail a titanic struggle between two opposing forces. They inevitably regard the achievement of world order as the outgrowth of an overwhelming exhibition of power on the part of one god who, through a monopoly of violence, manages to impose his will upon all others.[52] This theme of the cosmic battle is the underlying motif of *Enuma Elish*. The existence

in Israel of residual fragments of a popular version of this combat myth was pointed out earlier in this chapter.[53] The Book of Genesis itself has no direct reference to the notion of creation in terms of struggle. Indeed, the very idea is utterly alien to the whole atmosphere of the narrative. Yet one has the feeling that the narrator was not unaware of the place of the combat myth in pagan cosmogony, for he emphatically tells us that God created the "great sea monsters" (1:21), that these mythological beings, which elsewhere are counted among those who rebelled against God[54] were not at all pre-existent rivals of the one Supreme Creator, but His own creatures.

There is other evidence to indicate a knowledge of the Babylonian myth. We are told that when God began to create the heaven and the earth, darkness covered the surface of the deep (1:2). This latter word is the usual English translation of the Hebrew original *Tehom*, which is, in fact, the philological equivalent of Tiamat. This is the name, it will be remembered, of the female dragonesque personification of the primordial salt-water ocean in *Enuma Elish*. Note, moreover, that the Hebrew term *Tehom* is never used with the definite article, something which is characteristic of proper names. Although *Tehom* is not feminine by grammatical form, it is frequently employed with a feminine verb or adjective. Finally, several other biblical passages have preserved a reminiscence of the mythical origin of the term in such phrases as "*Tehom* that crouches below"[55] and "*Tehom* cried out" in panic at the angry approach of God.[56]

Another point of contact with the Babylonian myth may be found in the distinction made between the phenomenon of light, that was created on the first day, and the heavenly luminaries that did not come into being until the fourth day (1:14–19). This same situation is presupposed in *Enuma Elish*,[57] for Apsu there tells Tiamat that he finds neither relief by day nor repose by night from the noise of the gods, whereas the luminaries were set in the sky by Marduk only after his great victory over this same Tiamat.[58]

Despite the familiarity of the Hebrew account with some of the motifs of the cosmogonic myths of the ancient Near East, all notion of a connection between creation and cosmic battles was banished from Genesis with extreme care. The idea of strife and tension between God and nature is unthinkable. To emphasize the point, the words "and it was so" are repeated after each divine fiat.

Furthermore, it is highly significant that the biblical fragments of a

cosmogonic combat myth have survived solely as picturesque metaphors exclusively in the language of poetry, something which strongly indicates a minimal impact upon the religious consciousness of Israel. Never once are these creatures accorded divine attributes, nor is there anywhere a suggestion that their struggle against God in any way challenged God's sovereign rule in the universe.

But the real qualitative difference between the pagan cosmogonic combat myth and the Israelite fragments is evidenced by the use to which the latter are put in biblical literature. They practically always appear as a literary device expressing the evil deeds and punishment of the human wicked in terms of the mythical conflict of God with the rebellious forces of primeval chaos. The plunderers and despoilers of Israel are compared to the noisy seas and the turbulent, mighty, chaotic waters which flee at the divine rebuke.[59] The sinful ones of the earth, the objects of divine wrath, are designated by the names of the mythological monsters,[60] while the defeat of the creature *Yam* in ancient times is cited as evidence of God's overwhelming power in dealing with the wicked.[61] Similarly, God's decisive overthrow of His mythical primeval enemies is invoked as an assurance of His mighty power for the redemption of Israel through a like victory over the present historical enemies of the nation.[62]

The gross polytheism of the combat myth, in all its implications for religion and society, was excluded from biblical literature. The motif itself underwent radical transformation. In Israelite hands, a backward-looking myth of the dim past re-enacted mimetically in the cult became a symbolic affirmation of the future triumph of divine righteousness in human affairs. Evil in the world is no longer apprehended metaphysically, but belongs on the moral plane. The events of pre-history have become in the Bible the pattern for history. The Lord of creation who wholly controls nature is by virtue of that fact an unfailing source of confidence that His word is eternal and His incursions into history effective; so that His absolute power over the forces of chaos carries with it the assurance of the historical triumph of righteousness over evil.[63]

The Garden of Eden

The biblical conviction of an essential principle of good in the world was diametrically opposed to the contemporary pagan concept of an in-

herent primordial evil. But so revolutionary a doctrine was not without its difficulties; for evil, after all, was seen to be a reality of life, and the contradiction between conviction and reality was far too serious to be ignored. The story of the Garden of Eden is the answer of Genesis to this problem. It wishes to indicate very simply that evil is a human product, that God created the world good but that man, through the free exercise of his will in rebellion against God, corrupts the good and puts evil in its place.

The allegory of the Garden of Eden which was chosen as the vehicle for these teachings is complicated by its rich symbolism expressed in fragmentary form, and by its being an interweaving of many and varied mythic strands. Several of these are redolent of well-known ancient Near Eastern motifs, while some appear to be distinctly Israelite.

There cannot be any doubt that some popular Hebrew story about a "Garden of God" existed in early times.[64] Frequently in the Bible this phrase is used in a purely metaphorical sense.[65] The prophet Ezekiel twice cites the legend, bringing a wealth of detail not to be found in Genesis and sometimes at variance with it.[66] Furthermore, the Genesis version itself still bears traces of an earlier edition. The language and style contain several classical features of rhythm, phraseology and parallelistic structure characteristic of Hebrew poetry. The use of the definite article with the first mention of "the tree of life," "the tree of knowledge" (2:9), "the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword" (3:24), indicates an allusion to something already well-known to the reader.

As a matter of fact, this situation should not really be surprising, since the notions of paradise and a garden of God are familiar themes in the literature of the biblical world. The Sumerians,[67] that highly gifted non-Semitic people of unknown origin who were already well settled in the lower Tigris-Euphrates Valley as early as the fourth millennium B.C.E., have left us the myth of Enki and Ninhursag.[68] This story tells of an idyllic island of Dilmun, a "pure," "clean" and "bright" land in which all nature is at peace and where the beasts of prey and the tame cattle live together in mutual amity. Sickness, old age and, apparently, death also, are unknown. It was to this place that Ziusudra, the hero of the Sumerian flood legend, came after being translated to the realm of the gods.

It is interesting that this paradise legend tells that only fresh water was wanting on the island of Dilmun and that the sun-god Utu brought it up from the earth to turn the place into a veritable garden of the gods. This

notion of supernatural irrigation as the ideal state is familiar to readers of the Creation story, for before the advent of rain "a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth" (2:6).[69]

The Genesis version, however, has refined the entire "garden of God" motif. In the first place, it is highly significant that, unlike Ezekiel, and despite its metaphorical usage elsewhere, our Genesis writer never employs the phrase "garden of God." As if further to emphasize his rejection of the notion in its literal sense he observes that the garden was planted by God Himself for man, and only after the creation of man, that he might till it and tend it and not merely enjoy it. Moreover, in its description of the four rivers that branched off from Eden,[70] the narrative mentions the presence of gold, bdellium and lapis lazuli in the land of Havilah. If we look at the "garden of God" myth in Ezekiel[71] we find jewels, precious stones and metals as part of the landscape, while a glance at the Gilgamesh epic of Babylon shows mention of a magic, idyllic garden in which the trees bear jewels.[72] Genesis, through the seemingly irrelevant description of the land of Havilah, has quite clearly sought to naturalize a mythological aspect of the garden.

The two outstanding features of the Garden of Eden are the "tree of life" and the "tree of knowledge of good and evil." The former of the two, whether it be a tree or other plant, is a motif widespread throughout the ancient Near East that played an important role in Mesopotamian myth and ritual.[73] The biblical wisdom literature frequently uses the phrase in a metaphorical sense.[74] In Babylonian mythology the "plant of life" is closely connected with the "water of life," which constantly nourishes it. It is not unlikely that a reflex of this latter motif is to be found in the Genesis mention of the river that passed through Eden. Here again, it is significant that two of the branches of this river are the Tigris and Euphrates, so familiar to all biblical readers. The naturalizing tendencies of the writer are once more apparent.

The same is true, and even more so, in the treatment of the two trees. They possess no magical properties which operate independently of God. They are in no wise outside of the divine realm, and their mysterious powers do not exist apart from the will of God. The eating of the fruit of the "tree of knowledge" did not endow the man and his wife with any special supernatural powers. They were unable to hide from God or to conceal their sin. They made no effort to oppose the divine judgment, and the absolute sovereign will of God is never called into question. The magical element is entirely and conspicuously absent.

However, the most remarkable break of all with Near Eastern mythology lies in the subtle shift of emphasis. As far as is known, the "tree of knowledge" has no parallel outside of our biblical Garden of Eden story. Yet it is upon this tree, and not upon the well-known "tree of life," that the narrative focuses its main attention. The divine prohibition makes no mention of the "tree of life." The dialogue of the serpent and Eve likewise ignores it, as, too, does God's questioning of Adam after the latter had eaten from the forbidden fruit. It is mentioned again only at the end of the narrative in explaining the expulsion from Eden. All this cannot be accidental, particularly in view of the great prominence of the "tree of knowledge" idea outside of the Bible. We shall shortly offer an explanation of this phenomenon, but first we must turn our attention to the symbolism of the serpent.

This reptile figures prominently in all the world's mythologies and cults.[75] In the Near East the serpent was a symbol of deity and fertility, and the images of serpent-goddesses have been found in the ruins of many Canaanite towns and temples.[76] This tradition probably explains why the serpent is introduced in our story as simply one of "the wild beasts that the Lord God had made" (3:1).[77] It is not an independent creature; it possesses no occult powers; it is not a demoniacal being; it is not even described as evil, merely as being extraordinarily shrewd. This reduction of the serpent to natural, insignificant, demythologized stature, is further pointed up in the difference between God's dialogues with Adam and Eve and his monologue to the serpent. God does not interrogate the serpent, and the voluble reptile utters not a sound in the presence of the Deity. The role of the creature is that of seducer, laying before the woman the enticing nature of evil and fanning her desire for it. The use of the serpent symbolism in this situation has most likely been conditioned by the place of the serpent in the old cosmic combat myth described earlier in this chapter. There, be it noted, the serpent is one of the epithets of Leviathan, one of the chief opponents of God and the representative of cosmic chaos.[78]

This brings us back to the shift of focus from the "tree of life" to the "tree of knowledge." The quest for immortality seems to have been an obsessive factor in ancient Near Eastern religion and literature. The preoccupation with death was the most characteristic feature of Egyptian civilization to the prominence of which the mighty pyramids still bear eloquent testimony.[79] The Gilgamesh legend of Mesopotamia, to name but one, is the best known literary expression of this recurring theme

in that part of the world.[80] By relegating the "tree of life" to an insignificant, subordinate role in the Garden of Eden story, the Bible dissociates itself completely from this pre-occupation. Its concern is with the issues of living rather than with the question of death, with morality rather than mortality. Its problem is not the mythical pursuit of eternity, but the actual relationships between man and God, the tension between the plans of God and the free-will of man. Not magic, it proclaims, but human action is the key to a meaningful life.

The sin of Adam and Eve thus has implications far beyond the immediate context of the narrative. The conversation between the serpent and the woman shows that the most seductive attraction that the creature could offer was the potentiality of the forbidden fruit to make humans like God.

> ". . . as soon as you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God. . . " (3 : 5)

Now the imitation of God is indeed a biblical ideal. Man was fashioned in the divine image and "to walk in God's ways" is a recurring admonition of the biblical writings.[81] But true godliness is an expression of character, an attempt to imitate in human relationships those ethical attributes the Scriptures associate with God. The deceptive nature of the serpent's appeal lay in its interpretation of godliness which it equated with defiance of God's will, with power, rather than with strength of character.

Yet God Himself testifies that "man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil" (3:22).[82] In other words, man does possess the possibility of defying the divine word, and therein lies the secret of his freedom. The Garden of Eden incident is thus a landmark in the development of the understanding of the nature of man, his predicament and destiny. Man is a free moral agent and this freedom magnifies immeasurably his responsibility for his actions. Notice how each of the participants in the sin was individually punished. Freedom and responsibility are burdens so great for man to bear that he is in vital need of discipline. Significantly, the very first divine command to Adam pertains to the curbing of the appetite.[83] But man is free to disregard the moral law, should he wish to, though he must be prepared to suffer the consequences. In short, we are being told by the Garden of Eden story that evil is a product of human behavior, not a principle inherent in the cosmos.

Man's disobedience is the cause of the human predicament. Human freedom can be at one and the same time an omen of disaster and a challenge and opportunity.

Cain and Abel

This revolutionary principle, the endowment of man with moral autonomy and the stress upon the human aspect of evil, is illustrated, once again, in the story of Cain and Abel, the Bible's first naturally born human beings.

Cain was a tiller of the soil, Abel a shepherd. Both brought offerings to God from the products with which each dealt. Abel's animal sacrifice was acceptable, but to Cain's gift of fruit God paid no heed. It has been customary in modern times to interpret this narrative as reflecting the traditional rivalry between the nomad and the farmer, and to see in God's preference for Abel, the shepherd, the motif of the nomadic ideal in Israel.[84] This interpretation is untenable.

In the first place, the evidence for the existence of such an ideal in biblical literature is extremely flimsy.[85] Secondly, even if it could be shown to exist, it could hardly be present in our story. There is no hint of any disparagement of the occupation of tiller of the soil. On the contrary, it is regarded as the natural occupation of Adam in the Garden of Eden and after his expulsion.[86] There is also not the slightest suggestion of any comparative evaluation of the vocations of the two brothers, only of the offerings they brought. That Cain does not represent a type, either ethnic or occupational, which was regarded by Israel with enmity or distrust, is evidenced by the fact that the punishment is restricted to Cain himself, that his sons are not vagrants like him, that no discrimination is made between the offspring of Cain and those of his brother Seth, and that the three pillars of semi-nomadic culture—cattle-rearing, music and metal work—are actually said to have originated with the descendants of Cain.[87] The story, therefore, must be examined on its own terms, and not as the reflection of a historical situation.

As a story, however, it is tantalizingly incomplete. The narrative of events is extraordinarily terse and sketchy. No reason is explicitly given as to why Cain's offering was unacceptable, nor is it related how the brothers became aware of God's response. To what, or to whom, could

Cain have referred when he expressed the fear that anyone who met him might kill him? Alone in the world, supposedly, with his mother and father, Cain's fears could not possibly have been grounded in reality. Yet God took his words seriously enough to utter a curse upon a would-be avenger and to give Cain a protective mark "lest anyone who met him should kill him" (4:15). Where was the mysterious "land of Nod" in which Cain settled, and how did he find a wife (4:17)?

All these unanswered questions lead to one inescapable conclusion: the story of Cain and Abel must once have existed as an independent, full-bodied tale.[88] The gaps and inconsistencies now apparent arose when it was incorporated into the Torah literature and interwoven with the preceding narrative. But these literary problems were of minor significance, for the Bible's primary concern was to use the bare bones of the tale as a vehicle for the expression and inculcation of certain fundamental truths about some of life's most searching questions.

The story opens with a report ascribing sacrifice and offering to the first humans born of woman. We are not told that God demanded this of Cain and Abel or that some religious festival required it. This absence of motivation is instructive, for it assumes the willingness to sacrifice and worship to be innate in man, to be the utterly natural, instinctive and spontaneous expression of the spirit of religious devotion. But the story also tells us that man has it in his power to corrupt even the purest and noblest of emotions. God did not pay heed to Cain's offering. The descriptions of the brothers' gifts implicitly tell us why. Cain brought simply "from the fruit of the soil." Abel "brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock." By contrasting the details the Bible is saying that Abel demonstrated a quality of the heart and mind that Cain did not have. Abel's act of worship was an inward experience, an ungrudging, open-hearted, concentrated devotion.[89] Cain's noble purpose was sullied by the intrusion of the self, a defect that blocked the spiritual channels with God. The Bible is thus, in its treatment of the very first recorded act of worship, formulating two basic concepts that characterize the religion of Israel.

The first is that the individual is the ultimate religious unit. In his relationship to God, man is a conscious personality who retains his distinctiveness within the community. Later on, the Bible is to add the new dimension of community to this religious individualism, so that society, too, is elevated to the status of a religious unit. But this principle can be

operatively successful only because there must always be present an underlying tension, religiously speaking, between the individual and the collectivized mass.

The second concept postulated by the Cain and Abel story is the necessity of relating worship to piety. Throughout the Bible there is an acute awareness of the fact that human nature being what it is, the needs and demands of each may be in conflict. The prophets are to deal with this problem in its most extreme form and to formulate in clearest terms the application of the moral criterion as the only valid way of resolving the tension. Here, through our story, the Bible is expressing one of the most profound, if saddest, truths in the history of religions when it shows how an originally well-intentioned act of divine worship could become the cause of the first murder committed by man.

As to the crime itself, it will surely be noticed that the length of the dialogues between God and Cain contrasts strongly with the brevity of the narrative description. God gives a warning about the possible dangerous consequences of Cain's state of mind.

> "Why are you distressed,
> And why is your face fallen?
> Surely, if you do right,
> There is uplift.
> But if you do not do right
> Sin is the demon at the door,[90]
> Whose urge is toward you,
> Yet you can be his master."
> (4 : 6f.)

Despite the obscurity of some of the Hebrew original, the import of the divine declaration is beyond dispute. Man has been endowed with moral autonomy, with freedom of choice which enables him to subdue evil temptation through an act of will. This story thus reinforces the ideas expressed in the Garden of Eden legend about the nature of the human predicament.

One of the unusual stylistic features of our tale is the emphasis upon the fraternal relationship. No less than seven times the obvious fact is stressed that Abel was Cain's brother;[91] yet the very nature of the biblical Creation story automatically excludes any other possibility. The reason for this stress becomes clear when we recall Cain's response to the divine questioning.

> The Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And he said—"I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"
> (4 : 9)

The Bible wishes to establish emphatically the moral principle that man *is* indeed his brother's keeper and that all homicide is at the same time fratricide.

It is of interest that the culpability of Cain rests upon an unexpressed assumption of the existence of a moral law operative from the beginning of time.[92] That is why God intervened, for no man can hope to escape His all-embracing sovereign rule. Again and again, the Bible returns to this theme, unique to Israelite thinking. Cain had violated the God-endowed sanctity of human life. His crime was an offense against society. Hence, he was to be banished from society to become a "restless wanderer on earth" (4:14), a social pariah. But he had also sinned against God, the source of all morality, in the biblical world-view. Hence, Cain laments,

> I must avoid your presence . . ." And Cain left the presence of the Lord.
> (4 : 14, 16)

A crime against man is a sin against God. Divine law had been disobeyed and the spiritual ties uniting man with God severed.

Why did not Cain suffer the supreme penalty for his crime? It is not just that God mitigated the effects of the punishment He imposed by placing on Cain a protective mark. Why did he not have Cain killed in the first place? It may be surmised that in the original, independent tale, the circumstances of the homicide were more fully described. If our present text is a guide, then there is no evidence that Cain's attack upon his brother was premeditated. Furthermore, it must be remembered that according to the biblical story no one alive had yet known the experience of death, so that Cain had no way of determining that his blow against Abel could extinguish his life. Cain's deed would, therefore, hardly fall within the category of premeditated murder.

Finally, a brief word must be said about the notion expressed in God's rebuke,

> "Hark, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground."
> (4 : 10)

The Hebrew verb employed here is the same as that used on many another occasion when the cry of the oppressed comes before God.[93] The idea is that injustice sets in motion countervailing forces that must ultimately prevail because they are sustained by God. This is the confident assurance that the religion of Israel was able to offer as a direct concomitant of its concept of cosmogony.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. See Gaster in *IDB*, I, p. 702ff.
2. Followers of the documentary hypothesis have assigned this section to the P source and the second account to the J source.
3. Cf. ISA. 27:1; 51:9–10; JOB 26:12–13. See below pp. 21ff. for a discussion of the "cosmic battle."
4. See the biblical sources cited in the previous note.
5. Cf. PS. 104:9; PROV. 8:27; JOB 25:10; 38:8–11.
6. See H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung u. Chaos;* U. Cassuto, *Knesseth*, VIII (1943–44) pp. 121–42; *Adam*, pp. 20–23, 30f.; *Exodus*, pp. 119–25.
7. For a comprehensive study of this subject, see J. Pedersen, *Israel.*
8. For a review of the speculative thought in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, see *Before Philosophy.*
9. For English translation of *Enuma Elish* and other Mesopotamian creation stories, see Heidel, *BG;* Speiser, *ANET*, pp. 60–72.
10. For recent thinking on this subject, see *Daedalus*, Spring, 1959.
11. B. Malinowsky, *Magic, Science and Religion*, p. 100.
12. For a detailed study of the Babylonian new year festival, see Pallis. Cf., also, Hooke,

BAR, pp. 48ff. and esp. pp. 101–123. For its role in Mesopotamian civilization, see T. Jacobsen in *Before Philosophy*, pp. 182–199.

13. See T. H. Gaster, *Thespis;* M. Eliade, *Cosmos and History*.
14. This is the central theme of Kaufmann's *Toldot*, abridged as *RI*. For a summary of his views and arguments on this particular problem, see his article in *JBL*, LXX (1951), pp. 179–197. See also on this subject, H. Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis*, p. 15f.; B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the O.T.*
15. Cf. I KINGS 11:5, 33; II KINGS 23:13.
16. On this subject in general, see A. B. Drachman, *Atheism in Pagan Antiquity*.
17. See E. Voegelin, *Order and History*, p. 41f.; Moscati, *FAO*, p. 78f.
18. Cf. E. O. James, *The Ancient Gods*, pp. 239, 260.
19. Kramer, *HBS*, p. 79f.
20. PSS. 33:9 (cf. v. 6); 148:5.
21. On the notion of the "sexualization of the world," see M. Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible*, pp. 34–42; Jacobsen in *Before Philosophy*, pp. 158f., 170ff.; N. O. Brown, *Hesiod's Theogeny*, pp. 8, 19.
22. See Jacobson in *Before Philosophy*, p. 159f.
23. GEN. 1:2, 6f. On the "wind from God," see H. M. Orlinsky, *JQR*, XLVIII (1957), pp. 174–182.
24. See L. Woolley, *PEQ*, LXXXVIII (1965), p. 15f.
25. For an explanation of the creation of woman out of Adam's rib, see Kramer, *HBS*, p. 146.
26. GEN. 11:3 (cf. LEV. 14:41f.); JOS 10:9; 27:16; 30:19.
27. JOB. 4:19; 10:9; 33:6; cf. ISA. 29:16; 45:9; 64:7.
28. For primitive, Near Eastern and classical parallels to this motif, see Frazer, *Folklore*, I, pp. 3–44.
29. *Enuma Elish*, VI:1–34.
30. Gilgamesh, I:II:34f.
31. *ANET*, p. 99f.
32. See Kramer, *HBS*, p. 108f.; *SM*, pp. 68–75; Jacobsen in *Before Philosophy*, p. 176.
33. *ANEP*, pp. 190, 318, No. 569.
34. See the remarks of H. H. Rowley, *The Unity of the Bible*, pp. 74f., 186, nn. 53, 55.
35. ISA. 29:16; 45:9ff.; JER. 18:21.
36. On this subject, see the remarks of M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, p. 150; Frankfort, *Kingship*, p. 277f.; J. J. Finkelstein, *Commentary*, Nov., 1958, p. 438f.; E. A. Speiser, *Centennial Review*, IV. 2 (1960), p. 219.
37. Cf. GEN. 18:25; ISA. 5:16.
38. Jacobsen in *Before Philosophy*, p. 137; H. Frankfort, *The Birth of Civilization*, pp. 54, 63.
39. Cf. PS. 8:4–9.
40. EXOD. 31:12–17.
41. See Cassuto, *Adam*, p. 39ff.
42. EXOD. 16:5, 22–30.
43. *Ibid.*, 20:8; DEUT. 5:12.
44. See N. M. Sarna, *JBL*, LXXXI (1962), p. 157, and the literature cited there in n. 11.
45. See H. and J. Lewy, *HUCA*, XVII (1942–43), pp. 1–152[c].

46. See Hooke, *BAR*, p. 53.
47. Cited by G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible*, p. 258f.
48. See de Vaux, *AI*, p. 475.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 476ff.
50. EXOD. 20:10f.; 23:12; DEUT. 5:14.
51. See Kaufman, *Toldot*, I, p. 579; II, p. 491.
52. See Jacobsen in *Before Philosophy*, pp. 139f., 153–7, 187–199; N. O. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 40ff.
53. See above p. 2 and n. 6.
54. ISA. 27:1; 51:9.
55. GEN. 49:25; DEUT. 33:13.
56. HAB. 3:10.
57. *Enuma Elish* I:38.
58. *Ibid.* V:1ff.
59. ISA. 17:12–14.
60. ISA. 27:1.
61. JOB 38:4–15.
62. ISA. 51:9f.; HAB. 3:8–15; PS. 74:12–18.
63. See N. M. Sarna, *op. cit.*, p. 161f.
64. U. Cassuto in *Schorr*, pp. 248–258; *Adam*, 44ff.
65. GEN. 13:10; ISA. 51:3; EZEK. 36:35; JOEL 2:3.
66. EZEK. 28:11–19; 31:8–9, 16–18.
67. On the relationships between Sumerian culture and the Bible, see A. M. Van Dijk in *L'Ancien Testament*, pp. 5–28; S. N. Kramer, *SBO*, III (1959), pp. 185–204.
68. *ANET*, pp. 37–41; Kramer, *HBS*, pp. 144ff.; *SM*, 54ff.
69. E. A. Speiser, *BASOR*, 140 (1955), pp. 9–11; cf. Kramer, *HBS*, p. 145; *SM*, p. 56.
70. On the location and identification of the four rivers, see E. A. Speiser in *Festschrift Johannes Friedrich*, pp. 473–85.
71. EZEK. 28:13; cf. GEN. 2:11f.
72. Gilgamesh, IX:V:47ff.; *ANET*, p. 89.
73. See G. Widengren, *The King and the Tree of Life*.
74. PROV. 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4. On these passages, see R. Marcus, *JBL*, LXII (1943), pp. 117–120.
75. See J. Campbell, *The Masks of God*, pp. 9–41.
76. See W. G. Graham and H. G. May, *Culture and Conscience*, pp. 81–90. Cf. J. Finegan, *Light From the Ancient Past*, pp. 163f., 168, 171.
77. On this theme, see Childs, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–48.
78. ISA. 27:1; JOB 26:18.
79. See H. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, chap. 4.
80. See A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic*, pp. 137–223.
81. GEN. 1:26f. Cf. LEV. 19:2; DEUT. 13:5; PS. 86:11.
82. On this passage, see R. Gordis, *JBL*, LXXVI (1957), pp. 123–138.
83. GEN. 2:16f.
84. On this theme, cf. *ANET*, p. 40; Jacobsen in *Before Philosophy*, pp. 180ff.; Kramer, *SM*, pp. 49ff., 53.
85. On the supposed nomadic ideal in Israel, see Kaufmann, *Toldot*, II, pp. 65, 625;

RI, p. 339, n. 13; de Vaux, *AI*, p. 13f.; H. L. Ginsberg, *JBL*, LXXX (1961), p. 346, n. 16.

86. GEN. 2:15; 3:19, 23.

87. *Ibid.*, 4:17ff; 5:6ff.; 4:20ff.

88. See *GnG*, pp. 40–49; cf. *SkG*, p. 101; Cassuto, *Adam*, p. 118.

89. On the subject of devotion, see M. Kadushin, *Worship and Ethics*, p. 185.

90. For the justification of this translation, see *SpG*, p. 32. See also, Tur-Sinai, *LS*, II, pp. 199–203. G. R. Castellino, *VT*, X (1960), pp. 442–45; M. Naor in *Sefer Karl*, p. 78f.; M. Ben-Yashar, *Beth Mikra*, XVI (1963), pp. 117ff.

91. GEN. 4:2, 8–11.

92. See Kaufmann, *Toldot*, II, p. 69.

93. See *VRG*, p. 102.