

A CREATURE FACES CREATION

RAPHAEL GILLIS, O.P.



CREATION! What a depth of meaning does that word connote! The production of the universe from nothing awes one no more by the gigantic scope of the operation than by the power and majesty that it presupposes in the Creator. Awe and wonder impel us to attempt to reconstruct the scene of creation, to turn back the pages of the history of the world to that moment when time began,—“In the beginning, God created heaven and earth.” We may even attempt to picture the void preceding the work of the six days. With a growing semblance of accuracy we might attempt to reassemble in phantasy the beauty and order of the Garden of Paradise, dominated by the first man in all the perfection of the state of original justice. Inaccurate and fantastic though our imaginings be, they seem definitely clear, when we attempt to imagine the operation of the Omnipotent God in bringing all these things about. Our imaginations utterly fail in attempting to fathom the depths of that Infinitely Spiritual Being,—there, only Faith and reason are of any avail.

One's views on creation are founded on, formed and perfected by the breadth of his vision of the world about him. The atheistic-materialist point of view sees nothing but matter, varying according to size and shape, but without any purpose or reason. It perceives no trace of order—no evidence of the Supreme Intelligence at work. Matter is their standard, and they conclude that matter is the only existing thing,—matter eternal and unproduced. To the materialist, creation is a misnomer, a myth. He scoffs at the mention of the Supreme Intelligence, Creator of all things, because immersed in matter he cannot rise above it.

Less negative but none the less opposed to the Christian teaching is the doctrine of the pessimist on creation. He admits of an Absolute Being, but in such a distorted sense that it diametrically opposes right reason. Edouard von Hartmann, disciple of Schopenhauer, has designated God as the “ens inconscium,” thus denying to the Creator any intelligence whatsoever. Why? Because the pessimist sees life as a succession of frustrated desires and a continual hungering after unattainable good; hence for him self-annihilation

is the one good act of a human existence. Indeed to one in this position, it was a sorry day that saw the creation of this world of ours, for von Hartmann has called creation "the sin of the absolute."

To an observer, however, who sees the world about him in somewhat broader scope and who will not jeopardize right reason by entertaining preconceived prejudices, the world in all its perfection and order will produce abundant evidence that God exists. The God of infinite perfection and holiness has written this truth in the book of nature. "For the chain of causation, constantly indicating something still more primal than the cause immediately discerned, points with satisfying clearness to a First Purposive Cause, when observed by an unprejudiced mind." In the realm of efficient causality we find potent proof for the existence of God. Perceiving an effect we seek its cause, to which the effect is subordinated and upon which the effect so depends that if the cause did not exist, the effect would not exist. If this cause is not in itself uncaused we must in turn seek higher, until we arrive at the First Cause, uncaused, which is God. For in such a series of causes, so subordinated one to the other that the lower cause will not exercise its causality unless moved by a higher concurring cause, we cannot continue into infinity (else there would be neither the final effect nor the intermediary causes), but we must finally arrive at that Cause Who depends upon no other for His Causality. We perceive the motion of the leaves,—an effect caused by the wind. The wind in turn we find is being caused by the warming action of the sun. We proceed to the sun and, finding that it too is but a created part of this universe, we seek that which caused the action of the sun, and so we continue to the conclusion that there exists a First Cause, Who is uncaused—God.

"In the beginning, God created heaven and earth." God created—He brought things into existence by the omnipotent "*fiat*" of His Divine Will. We find no reference to the eternal unproduced matter of the materialist, who would thus deny to God universal causality and curtail the infinite scope of His omnipotent power. That God did create the world, we know not only from Revelation but also from reason. The act of producing beings from nothing—creation—requires infinite power, which belongs to God alone. Infinity yawns as a chasm between nothing and something, and this gap can be only negotiated by infinite power. Such power can be possessed by God alone, since the power of operation is in proportion to the nature of each being. Thus each created being, finite in nature, would have been powerless to perform the act of creation.

The more we consider and contemplate the Perfection of the Infinite Being, the stronger becomes the impulse to seek the reason for creation. The finiteness and imperfection of creatures prods one on to discover why God willed to bring this world into existence.

We know that God is an intellectual Being possessing an infinitely efficacious will through which He acts. The reason for creation must be in God Himself, for He is absolutely independent of any final cause outside Himself. The motive for creation is the goodness which God wished to communicate to His creatures,—not out of indigence, but out of the abundance of His goodness.

From the lowest form in the realm of created being even to the highest there is a likeness or similitude of God's Perfection. Irrational creatures really reflect it although very imperfectly, for to inanimate bodies, the lowest in the scale, existence is given by Him Who is Existence. Plant life is on a higher plane and receives life with its accompanying immanent operation. To animals a greater gift is given, for, although rooted in matter, the faculty of perception through the senses is an additional perfection. Thus in seeking their respective perfections, each higher grade approaches closer to the Font of all good even though infinity intervenes.

But to man has been shown the greatest love, for rational creatures participate intimately in the Divine Love. The spiritual soul with its faculties of intellect and will constitutes the subject of this gift. For in his soul, man mirrors though indistinctly God Who is a Pure Spirit; he is "made to the image and likeness of God." Through his intellect man can perceive the great munificence of God to man, portrayed in all the creatures of the universe. By his will man can offer acts of love and thanksgiving for these great gifts. This ability or capacity for such acts begets in man a duty and responsibility, for he alone of all the creatures of this world is capable of offering fitting thanks to the Creator.

True it is that all the acts of acknowledgement and love offered by man to God add nothing to His essential glory, for He is infinitely happy and complacent in Himself. His essential glory consists in His own perfections and in perfectly knowing and loving Himself. To know and to love Himself are the only acts necessary to God. However, creatures, manifestations of God's own perfections, and those acts by which His intelligent creatures know and love Him pertain to God's external glory.

Since the attainment of the external glory of God is the ultimate reason for the creation of the universe, an unbiased survey of the

world about us should reveal the working out of the plan of the Creator. Man has been constituted from the first the lord of creation—"constituisti eum super opera manuum tuarum,"—hence it is strictly his office to act as the spokesman of creatures in offering thanks to the Creator.

In the physical order, we find all things subjugated to man and ordained to his use and to the attainment of his ultimate perfection. Thus inanimate creation is ordained to vegetable life, which is ordained to animal life and all are in turn appointed for the maintenance of human life, in which glows the spark of spirituality—the medium by which man can fulfill his duty to the Creator.

However, in the intellectual order, this plan of the Creator is more perfectly realized. An observer who peers below the outer shell of material being sees in the world about him something more than just bodies,—he perceives each creature as the handiwork of the Omnipotent. Thus, taken singly each creature is an aid to him in the fulfillment of his mission, a reminder of his dignity as the master of the universe.

But could we only view the universe as a whole, could we but for a moment break down the walls of our own small worlds, if we could but grasp even imperfectly the closely interwoven web of cosmic activity, then would we begin to realize the tremendousness of the fact of creation. Then would we begin to marvel at the Goodness of the Creator. Then would we begin to realize the necessity of fulfilling our obligation to God. We would discern the hand of God ordering all things; we would begin to appreciate our position as master of all material creation in thanking the Creator for His benevolence.

Truly God's love for man knows no bounds, for He did not leave man in a purely natural state to render the debt of gratitude for creation. He raised him to a participation of His own life, to the supernatural state, showering upon man His special graces and blessings, so that man, the more perfectly fulfilling this higher mission of knowing and loving God not only as the Author of nature but as the Source of supernatural life, might attain the higher reward of the Beatific Vision.