

—it is a sceptre of straightening. Am I saying God is not merciful? What could be more merciful than he who spares sinners so, he who does not care what their past contains once they have been converted to him? But you must love his mercy in such a way that you value his truthfulness. His mercy cannot do away with his justice, nor his justice with his mercy. Meanwhile as long as he bides his time, do not you bide yours; for a sceptre of straightening is the sceptre of his kingdom.



GAMALIEL

(Questions should be addressed to Gamaliel, c/o the Editor, 'THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT', Hawkesyard Priory, Rugeley, Staffs.)

Q. I am prompted by the question on the creation in the July LIFE OF THE SPIRIT to ask another which has been worrying me for a long time. We are told in Genesis that God made the green herb on the third day, but the sun was not made until the fourth day. If, as we are told, each day of creation lasted for some millions of years, how did the green herb grow at all, let alone become green or ripen its fruit, without the sun?

Does this knock the bottom out of evolution? If the days of creation were really days one could understand it, otherwise it would indeed be a miracle.

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A. May I refer you again to what I said in reply to the question in the July issue, 'that the account of creation in Genesis is not a scientific description, but an imaginative dramatic picture'.

And so, to answer your second question first, no interpretation of Genesis can either knock the bottom out of evolution, or put the bottom into it, because evolution is a scientific theory, advanced to explain a huge collection of data, supported by much evidence, in which however there are gaps. Genesis advances no

evidence one way or the other, for or against, because the man who wrote the account of creation in the first chapter was not concerned with accurately describing facts, as he knew them either by experience or by being told about them by God.

Your first question I cannot answer at all, because it is based on the assumption, which is not a sound one, that Genesis is an accurate description of what took place at the beginning of the world, but written in a sort of cypher, in which, for example, one day equals a million years. I will try and show what I mean by saying that Genesis is an imaginative, dramatic picture, and why in consequence your question does not arise.

The author is talking about God as if he were a human being on a large scale; God speaks, and sees, and makes things, and rests, and works. But the author knew as well as you and I do that God is not a human being on a large scale, that he is not a material being with eyes and ears and hands. God is so completely other, that no human words which human experience has ever devised can be strictly appropriate for talking about him, about what he is and what he does. Even this little word 'he' is not strictly applicable to God because it implies that he is male and not female, whereas he is beyond the distinction between male and female. But there is nothing wrong with talking about God as if he were a human being, just as sailors talk about a ship as if it were a woman and call it 'she', provided we realize that he is not a human being, and that we are talking imaginative, story-book language. There is also a lot to be said for talking about God, as the Bible often does, as if he were a rock, or a thunderstorm, or a volcano, or a shining light, or a gentle breeze, or a lamb or a lion. All these things are like him in some respects, all tell us something about him, and the more things we compare him to, the less likely we are to identify him with any one of them.

But the thing that is most like God is man, and so the author of Genesis talks about God as if he were a man. To be more precise he is talking about him as if he were a builder, and he is building the world as a sort of house. Being a good builder, he does it in a working week. The writer of the first chapter of Genesis probably wrote it in Babylon when the Jews were in captivity there; and he probably wrote it as a sort of counter-blast to the heathen idolatry of his Babylonian masters. They pictured their gods as living in temples, those seven-tiered towers, called

ziggurats, which gave rise to the story of the tower of Babel.

Well, the true God, our writer is saying to them, does not need men to build him a temple to live in; he built his own temple, which is this world. And furthermore, this world was not born out of a chaotic conflict between primordial gods of heaven and monsters of the deep, as Babylonian myths would have it; it was the result of calm and ordered architectural construction by the one and only Almighty God. So the sequence of acts in the days of creation follows an imaginative pattern, and presents an aesthetic harmony. God makes light on the first day, because the distinction between light and darkness, night and day, is perhaps the most elemental and obvious distinction in our experience. God begins by distinguishing the various elements and parts of the world he is making. So after making light and separating it from darkness, he makes the sky, which was imagined as a solid dome, to separate the waters above and the waters below; in other words he clears a space for the world he is making. Then he separates the world proper, the dry land, from the waters below, and the basic structure of his house temple is complete. Now he starts decorating; he decorates the dry land first, with vegetation, and the sky second, with sun, moon and stars. Perhaps the author put them in that order because he was keeping the more noble decoration, the celestial, to the last; or perhaps he thought of the green herb and vegetation as being almost a part of the dry land—or at least a necessary part of its distinction from the sea. He would have regarded the barren desert as rather like the sea, a symbol of terrifying, untameable chaos. In any case he is not thinking of the scientific relationships of cause and effect, etc., between sun and vegetation.

After decorating his temple, God proceeds to furnish it. The sea and air, these 'alien' elements, are furnished first (not even the chaotic elements escape this builder's control), and then on the sixth day the earth is furnished. The last thing to be made is the crown of creation, man, who is put in God's world temple as a true God-made image or likeness, as against the false man-made images or idols which were put in the little man-made temples of the Babylonians. Then God, having made an excellent job of his creative work, and seen that it was very good, sits back to rest on the seventh day.

If Genesis were in any sense a scientific description, telling us in

a mysterious and cryptic way the same sort of thing as astronomers and cosmologists try to discover, then it would be untrue; no attempt to make it seem otherwise, on this premiss, is ever convincing. But you and I know that it cannot be untrue, because it is the word of God as well as of the human author who wrote it. Very well, then, in that case it cannot be a scientific description. It is true if we understand it in the sense in which it was written, long before science was ever heard of. I have suggested the sort of sense in which it might have been written. I am sure better interpretations can be found. But at least they will not be bothered with making Genesis fit science, or *vice versa*.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

(See THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, June, 1959, p. 569)

THE ROSARY DURING MASS

DEAR EDITOR,

In defence of the public recitation of the rosary being allowed sometimes during low mass, perhaps the best rejoinder to Gamaliel will be to quote *An Instruction of Pius XII*. On page 27 of Fr Clifford Howell's edition (Herder), we read about the first stage of the participation of the faithful in low mass. In this connection, we are told that, while the use of the missal is commended, an easier way of participation is possible 'by devoutly meditating on the mysteries of Jesus Christ, or by performing *other religious exercises* and saying *other prayers* which, though different in form from the liturgical prayers, *are by their nature in keeping with them*' (Encyclical *Mediator Dei*).

The italics in the foregoing quotation are mine, emphasizing the fact that even if Gamaliel is correct in insisting that holy mass and such religious exercises as the public recitation of the rosary are distinct acts of worship, the Holy Father said that they may be, and may profitably be, blended.

Yours in vinea Domini,

FR RAYMUND, O.P.