**VOLUME 5; CHAPTER 24 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**"IN THE BEGINNING" by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*In the beginning God …*

*Genesis 1:1*

I AM QUITE CONSCIOUS THAT THE TEXT IS NOT A COMPLETE statement. It does not give us the full affirmation of the writer, but it reveals his assumption; and the affirmation is valueless apart from this assumption. To the affirmation itself, I do not propose to give anything more than passing reference by way of illustration of the larger subject suggested by and included in the assumption, "In the beginning God."

That phrase takes us beyond the seen to the unseen, behind the sensual to the spiritual, beneath the passing to the permanent, before the temporal to the eternal.

If then, I am charged with mutilating a text, I shall reply that the murder of the letter is in this case deliberate in order to the liberation of the spirit.

Let us consider the general spirit or atmosphere into which we are brought by these words. They constitute, first, the recognition of a starting-point. The phrase may have reference to matters of time or of place, to the subject of order or of rank. If you think of time, "In the beginning." If you think of place, "In the beginning." If you think of order, consecutive and regular movement, and progress, "In the beginning." If you think of rank, dignity, position, precedence, 312 "IN THE BEGINNING GOD" "In the beginning." This recognition of a starting-point is in perfect and absolute harmony with science.

The phrase is also the recognition of a cause; and the cause is written for us here in that old Teutonic form which defies the attempt of philologists to place it or explain it, "God." On the page of the Hebrew Bible the word is Elohim, the plural form of El. The word stands essentially and simply for might. There are three numbers in the Hebrew - singular, dual, and plural; and the plural is constantly made use of to indicate intensity. When some thought possessing the mind of a writer could not be expressed for very greatness by the singular number, he would employ the plural.

That in this connection is the suggestiveness of the word Elohim. It is used here not to define nature, or to unveil character; not even to solve the mystery of personality; it is used rather to indicate the recognition of a cause at the beginning of time, place, order, or rank. The phrase thus recognizes a Being separate from everything hereafter to be described, and yet sufficient for everything hereafter to be described.

If the recognition of a starting-point indicated by the words "In the beginning" is in perfect harmony with science, the recognition of a separate, sufficient cause transcends the demonstration of science. Science has never yet found its way to the honest possibility of making the declaration with which this Book of Genesis opens. Science has at times been compelled to say there must be a first cause: but there is a very distinct difference between that affirmation and this "In the beginning God created." The one is the admission of an apparent though not demonstrated necessity on the part of men of sincere investigation; but the other is the quiet, dignified affirmation of a Person and a fact. Thus the Divine Library in its present arrangement opens with a phrase which is a voice from without, speaking to the deeps within, and its message when perfectly and earnestly considered is found to be in harmony with everything around.

Here is no apology for God, no argument for God, no defence of God, but the opening affirmation, which for the moment may be received as an affirmation and not necessarily believed; then, as we take our way through page after page, and book after book, of the library, it will be for us to say, when that work is completed, whether the revelation of the library, the revelation of the facts and forces within and around us, harmonizes with the great opening assumption of the Book, "In the beginning God."

It is not my purpose this evening to defend the accuracy of this assumption. I accept it as true, and, proceeding from that standpoint, submit that it is axiomatic, that courses and consummations must be related to causes. If I can find a beginning, then that which begins must inevitably in all its course and in its consummation bear some relation to that which was its cause. The deduction in the present case is self-evident. If this opening affirmation of the Word of God be true concerning creation, concerning the Library itself, concerning man, that the first originating cause is God, then there surely can be no escape from the fact that all the course of creation, all the course of the Divine Library, all the course of man, that crowning fact and wonder of Creation, must inevitably be in some form or fashion, in some way or other related to the original cause; and that the consummation of creation, of the Divine Library, and of man must also be related to that originating cause, God.

Thus we are confronted in this first verse in the first book in the Divine Library with a fundamental truth that has its bearing on all life, "In the beginning God." At the back of all the forces in the midst of which we live, forces blossoming in beauty, moving in rhythmic order, even startling us by their differentiations and changes and new manifestations and developments; at the back of everything is God. Therefore, all these forces, in their movements and in their working, and in what they produce, are related to God, and are moving toward a consummation which must in some way be related to Him.

Let us then attempt to give ourselves first to some considerations, and finally to some applications.

Let us consider our phrase in its relation to the actual affirmation of the writer, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Let me quietly, earnestly, and solemnly warn my young friends especially that in the study of the Bible we need to disabuse our minds of all human interpretations, ever remembering that not what the Fathers thought, or the schoolmen taught, or the theologians held, is necessarily true; but what the Word itself declares. The first fact declared concerning the creation is that the potential stuff - call it matter, if you will - is God-created. For the moment we are not considering the process by which the work was done, nor the processes which followed that initial act of God, through which the thing first made has come to be the things we now know and touch. The fundamental declaration, that with which I am now dealing, is that "In the beginning God created."

What is your particular theory of the origin of the things in the midst of which you live? Do you believe still that this universe came into being suddenly; that God, by some sudden, immediate act, made everything as you find it? I dismiss that as being utterly out of harmony with the first chapter of Genesis. Or, do you say, I have been compelled to the acceptation of what is known as the evolutionary theory? Then remember that the evolutionary theory postulates perpetual beginnings. What is its last product? Its last product is something self-evident. Whence came it? It is the product of something lower. Whence came that? From something lower still. Whence came that? From something still lower. In each case there was a new beginning; call it differentiation if you will. It was a new start, a fresh development, a coming of the new out of the old. Trace this process back and back, and where will you end? Thirty years ago the scientist would have told you, in the primordial protoplasmic germ. The scientist now says nothing of the kind; he whispers electrons, and then speaks of a psychological fact beyond. The scientist, with honest integrity and splendid heroism tracking his way back, finds ever a beginning proceeding out of something which also has a beginning, until at last he arrives where there is no place on which to step off; his last word has been said, and, beyond, the scientist of today tells us he hears whispers, thunders of mind, and is conscious of psychological mysteries. In that strange, magnificent gap my text stands, and out of it comes the word "In the beginning God." Let that be granted, and that which I have already declared to be axiomatic follows. All the developments, all the processes are related to that first cause from which everything sprang. All that which science has discovered is the method of God. Between the first and second verses of this chapter there is a great gap, so great that we cannot bridge it, a mystery so dark that we cannot explain it. "The earth was waste and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." That is not how God made it. That is not the suggestion of the first verse. The suggestion of the first verse is that of perfection, harmony, a cosmic order. What happened between the first and second verses? I do not know. There is no solution anywhere in the Word of God; but God did not create a waste.

La Place's theory of nebulae is exploded. He declared that everything might be explained as proceeding out of nebulae; but when Rosse turned his reflector upon those cloudy masses, which even Herschel had described as nebulae, and had scientifically declared as impossible of resolution into order, they were seen to be perfected systems of stars. The first verse of the Bible declares that God did originally create, and from the third verse to the end of the chapter we have the account, not of original creation, but of the restoration of a lost order, the bringing of cosmos out of chaos. How the chaos happened none can tell, for the Bible has no whisper of the secret, and science has as yet not attempted an explanation, perhaps because it has not recognized the fact. Yet the marvel of scientific investigation is that it is going behind that chaos of the second verse, and is discovering the footprints of God in that earliest method of creation, in fossil remains which must have been lying hidden for millenniums. The testimony which it bears is that all the way, through all evolutions or devolutions, through all developments or progress, God Who started has accompanied. Paul, speaking of the Son of God in that marvelous Colossian passage, says not only is it true that by Him were all things created, but also that in Him all things consist, are cohesive, hold together and march forward in rank and order and rhythm toward the ultimate consummation.

If this great assumption be accepted as to the cause of creation, then the consummation is assured as being a consummation related to the God of creation and according to the purpose of the God of creation. I am not now speaking of man, but of creation itself. This Bible is not the Bible of creation; it is the Bible of redemption, and the story that we often speak of as the story of creation is in reality the story of the starting of redemption - that is, of reconstruction. The gospel flames upon the first page of the Bible, not perhaps in the terms in which we know it, the terms of our human salvation, but in terms that reveal the heart of God. That is the thought of the second verse, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" for reconstruction, not for first creation; for renewal, not for origination. This is the gospel fact revealed to those who have eyes to see. That which he created, being ruined in some dark mystery unrevealed, He will make again a second time. Even though in this process of second making there shall come a catastrophe somehow growing out of the first, yet He will move forward toward the establishment of a new order, "Behold, I make all things new … I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." So that from the first page to the last the consummation is set in relation to the first cause; and if that first cause be God, the courses are under His command, and the consummation must harmonize with His will.

For second illustration, which of course must be dealt with in the briefest way, let us take the divine Library.

What is the story of the Bible? The cause is again the same: "In the beginning God"; holy men of old spoke, as they were moved by God.

The course of the Bible is that of the chronicling of actual events and spiritual interpretation of their meanings. As to the story of their writing I use three words - selection, advancement, incompleteness. That is true from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible is perfectly complete in its revelation of all that man needs to know; but there are things about which the Bible never says the final word; it never finally explains the mystery of the Divine Being, it never attempts the solution of the problem of evil in the universe, it never explains the part that pain is playing in the economy of God. Then it is the result of a method of selection. There has been a great dispute about the first chapter of Genesis, as to who wrote it, and how he knew what he wrote. Hugh Miller suggested, as you remember, that visions were granted to Moses or some other, in the same way as the visions in the Book of Revelation were granted to John. I should describe that as a pious hypothesis having no foundation in fact. It has been said that it is now established beyond a doubt that the man who wrote this, whether Moses or not, owed very much to Chaldean inscriptions, and we are perfectly certain that there is an element of truth in that declaration. Today we are in possession of Chaldean inscriptions in the reading of which things stated in the Book of Genesis are to be found, but it is interesting to note in passing that in no inscription yet found has the first assumption of this Book been discovered, "In the beginning God." What shall I say, then, when I am told that some of these things are found in Chaldean inscriptions, believing as I do that Moses wrote this book? I remember Moses' relation to Abraham, and I remember that Abraham came from Chaldea, and I have no doubt that he brought with him legends, traditions from Chaldea, which legends and traditions contained elements of truth, and Moses' account is the result of selection from the mass of material. The process was that of God revealing to this man the element of truth in the midst of the darkness in which he found himself. The true missionary ever comes, not to destroy but to fulfill, to find the gleam of light without which God has never yet left a people, to destroy the accretions, the things of evil that contradict the essential light. The Bible is the result of that Divine presidency over human thought through which there has been the separation of the true from the false. In poetic statement we have the account of that process by which the chaos became the cosmos. There was reconstruction, and as I read that first page, and watch the process described, I see also the process by which man wrote the story; it was accomplished by the presidency of the Divine mind over his mind, leading him to the selection of the thing that is true from the mass of false; and the result was that he wrote in such a fashion that while millenniums have passed he who considers the story in the light of advanced science finds how absolutely accurate it is. This element of growth and development runs through the processes.

The consummation of the Bible is found in the One to Whom the Bible leads, in the central Person Who is not merely the One Who speaks the Word, but the Word of God, the expression of God, pronouncing in human history the final, inclusive truth. The Bible leads at last to the Spirit Who interprets that Word. Jesus Himself declared that the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

Our final illustration of the things suggested by this phrase is that of man; and now we may leave behind us those dim distances full of light and glory, and think within the sphere of our own personality. What is the truth about man. "In the beginning God." Every man is the creation of God. In that fact the race is unified, in spite of all its apparent division. There is nothing in all Scripture more remarkable than what may be termed an incidental word in the letter to the Hebrews, in which the writer says: "We had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" It is incidental, but it is a word flaming with light showing that every individual man is related to God in his first creation, that the spirit-life of a man, which is his essential life, is not the creation of his father after the flesh, but the creation of God, the Father of the Spirit. In that spiritual fact, I repeat, lies the unity of the race, not the uniformity of the body, for we are differently formed and fashioned, not in the unanimity of the mind, for our mental outlook and temperament varies infinitely and gloriously; but in the unity of the spirit the race is united. Black and white, high and low, these are the incidental differences of the physical, and sometimes of the mental, but beneath the whole of them, unifying into the magnificent solidarity of the human race, is the spiritual nature which every man receives individually as the creation and gift of God. So that the essential truth concerning every man is, "In the beginning God." In a great and wonderful mystery, with which I cannot attempt to deal in this presence or time, God has linked Himself to the human race, so that in the creation of individuals He is forevermore in fellowship with man, even though man may have fallen and have sinned. The essential, central fact in the life of every individual is this, "In the beginning God."

If that be the true cause of every individual life, I pray you remember the course of every individual life is held in relationship to that cause. All the course is under His government. How often shall that be stated? How often shall I declare that which has become a great conviction to my soul? No man ever escapes for any five minutes of his earthly career from the government of God. A man may be in rebellion against that government, but he lives in the grip of it. By the laws of God each man is made or marred; which, depends upon his attitude toward those laws. It is impossible for humanity to separate itself from God. Take the lowest method of illustration; I breathe His air; I trample upon His earth; I derive the sustenance of the physical from the forces which have emanated from Deity; I employ mental powers which are the reflex of His own infinite knowledge; all my aspirations spring out of my spiritual being. I may degrade them, prostitute them, but they are all things which I am, and have, from God, and I cannot ultimately escape the touch of the government and law of God, the rule of God in my life. All the course of every human life is related to the originating cause of every human life.

The consummation of every human life must therefore inevitably be related to the originating cause. No man can escape God here or hereafter. I am not now dealing with the experience of the man. Let me only say the experience of relationship may be blessing or blasting, according to whether our yielding to Him is the yielding of sane, spiritual loyalty, or our rebellion against Him is that of insane, carnal disloyalty. But escape Him we cannot; not for this evening, not for the hour in which we sin, not for the time in which we have tried to forget Him that we may indulge the passions of the flesh; never! The touch of God is on our spirits, and the hand of God is holding us even at such times. Never can I escape the originating cause, present in the course, and there in the consummation.

Already I have merged from consideration to application. Let me close by the enforcement of one or two matters. What is our relation to God as Cause? That is a fact, and there is no escape. I am His stuff. I take the old Hebrew figure of the clay in the hand of the potter; I am the potter's clay. The Hebrew figure breaks down, for no potter manipulating clay originated the clay; but this great Potter originated this clay, this stuff of my substance. The figure is a very beautiful one. Remember, the potter can never make a vessel either for use or ornament out of steel filings; he must have clay. Man is the very stuff God wants in order to accomplish His work. God is the originating Cause; man is His stuff, His design, His workmanship. These are the things from which I cannot escape. I live and move and have my being in Him, whether I will or not; the beating of my heart, the throbbing of my nerves, all these things are of Him.

If the fact of the originating Cause is settled, what shall I say concerning the course? That is forevermore the opportunity for my choice, the point of my responsibility. Write it as a motto everywhere "In the beginning God." In veiled language let me utter it in this assembly. With regard to the birthright of the bairns, fathers and mothers, "In the beginning God"! Then when the children are coming to adolescence, boys and girls, write over that sweep period, "In the beginning God." Help them to make their choices in relation to Him. Instead of asking your boy whether he has made up his mind what he wants to be, ask him if he has found out what God made him to be. A little further on, the great moment of human life, that of love's dawning, comes. Alas and alas! that we have trifled so long with the sacred subject of the love of youth and maiden. There also let us say, "In the beginning God." If the writing over that dawning wonder of love reveals something that is unlike Him, contrary to Him, banish it, though it be as dear as the right hand or right eyes. In the beginning of vocation, when looking to the future, choosing a calling in life, deciding what you will be, "In the beginning God." Then when in marriage a new world opens, you are to live no longer in your heroic and pure loneliness, but now and for tomorrow in association; then inscribe over the portal of your new home "In the beginning God," erect a family altar, and observe the same, upright recognition of God as interested in and presiding over all the affairs of home life. In other words, set the course in right relation to the Cause.

If you will, what then? Then in the consummation the relation will be one that results in crowning, in the ultimate fulfilment of life, in all spaciousness of being and of doing.

My brother, "In the beginning God," you are God- created. Submit yourself to Him so that your whole life may be God-governed, and that at last you may come to the full infolding of your own life, and be God-crowned.

I dare not finish there. Someone is listening, and saying, "Yes, I think you are right, but it is all too late. 'In the beginning God,' but I broke His law and set Him at defiance, spoiled my chance; I am waste, void, a ruin and a wreck." Is that so? Thank God the chapter is not ended, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light." O'er the waste and ruin and wreckage is seen the brooding Spirit of God, bringing back order. So that if you say you have no chance in the first verse, you have in all the rest of the Bible that follows! He can come to you in healing restoration as surely as He came to the scarred earth in the dim and distant past, and make you fair and beautiful as His own heaven. Let him. May God help you.