BLAKE AND THE BIBLE

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by

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ABSTRACT

Through an examination of William Blake's literary works, this thesis attempts a systematic presentation of Blake's interpretation of the Bible. Following a brief introduction, which discusses the strength of Blake's interest in the Bible as well as the character of potential influences on his interpretation of the Scriptures, the study examines Blake's earlier works for at least preliminary statements relating to his reading of the Bible. It is found that up to The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, which inverts common interpretations of the Bible, there is little by way of actual reinterpretation of the Bible but that a number of notions and personae which are important in Blake's later efforts to reinterpret the Scriptures already exist though usually in embryonic form.

The study then presents an overview of Blake's reading of the Bible and suggests that the poet views the Biblical account of Hebrew history as representing the history of Man as a whole and as depicting Man's progress through a series of cycles from a Creation-Fall toward an Apocalypse and Redemption. The thesis next discusses in some detail Blake's version of the Creation-Fall, showing how he radically reinterprets the Biblical account of the Creation-Fall. There then follows an examination of Blake's reinterpretation of the Apocalypse and Redemption, which

reveals how in his account of Apocalypse and Redemption Blake inverts or modifies widely held interpretations of the Biblical version of the Apocalypse and Redemption. Finally, there is a summary of the findings of this study regarding Blake's interpretation of the Scriptures, followed by a concluding discussion of the significance of Blake's reading of the Bible.

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TEXTUAL NOTE

All citations of Blake's poetry and prose are from Blake: Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford University Press, 1974). This volume is a reprint with corrections of the 1966 edition by the same editor and publisher. The source of each citation which is separated from the text by indentation is given parenthetically immediately below the quotation. The source of each citation which is integrated into the text is given in a numbered footnote at the bottom of the page on which it appears. All citations of the Bible are from the Authorized (King James) Version.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> ...I rest not from my great task!
> To open the Eternal Worlds, to open
> the immortal Eyes
> Of Man inwards into the Worlds of
> Thought, into Eternity
> Ever expanding in the Bosom of God,
> the Human Imagination.
>
> (Jerusalem 5, ll. 17-20, p. 623)

The major theme in Blake's work is the challenge of attaining and sustaining imaginative vision. Blake's "mission, like the mission of the prophets, is to expose the errors that cloud or obliterate this vision, to attack those who by law, war, religion or 'false art' deny the incommensurable in man".[1] Man's vision had in Blake's view become blurred and constricted. An imaginative reading of the Bible would show Man the way to regain true Vision; it would raise men, in Blake's words, "into a perception of the Infinite".[2] It is this imaginative interpretation of the Bible that Blake attempts to provide in his writings and in this sense his work is that "of a

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[1]William Blake, The Book of Job Illustrated by William Blake, ed. Michael Marqusee (London: Paddington Press Ltd., 1976), p. 6.

[2]The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Keynes, Plates 12-13, p. 154.

man whose Bible was his textbook".[3]

Blake's interest in the Bible seems to have begun fairly early in his life. For example, the visions he is said to have experienced as a boy reflect some familiarity with the content of the Bible. At the age of four, he allegedly saw God's face at his window and, later, angels walking among some haymakers on a summer morning. At the age of eight he saw a tree full of angels on Peckham Rye and around the same time he had a vision of Ezekiel. Blake's observation to a traveller who was recounting the magnificence of a foreign city also suggests an early interest in or familiarity with the Bible. Blake, now ten years old, interrupted the traveller with the following words:

> Do you call that splendid? I should call a city splendid in which the houses were of gold and the pavement of silver, the street ornamented with precious stones.[4]

The Book of Revelation had apparently impressed itself upon Blake's mind; Blake's comment seems to echo Revelation 21: 18-21, which reads as follows:

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[3]Northrop Frye, "Blake after Two Centuries". William Blake: Songs of Innocence and Experience, ed. Margaret Bottrall (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1970), p. 170.

[4]Alexander Gilchrist, Life of William Blake (New York: Phaeton Press, 1969), I, p. 7.

> And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.
>
> And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald.
>
> The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolyte; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.
>
> And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

Blake's early experiences were sometimes likely to increase his contact with Biblical material. As a child, Blake was reportedly "strange and stormy"[5] and his father, recognizing this, decided against subjecting him to the discipline of a formal education. He was therefore kept away from school and educated by his parents until the age of ten when his father, noting the boy's talent for drawing, sent him to Pars's drawing school. His penchant for drawing was further encouraged by his father, who supplied him with extra money which he spent on prints of works by painters such as Michelangelo, Raphael and Durer. A survey of the work of these painters shows that many of their

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[5]Mona Wilson, The Life of William Blake (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 3.

subjects had their origin in the Scriptures. The paintings in the Sistine Chapel, for example, are proof of this. The similarity between the paintings of Michelangelo and Blake can hardly be overlooked; their figures have the same massiveness, the same muscular firmness, the same solidity, and the same determinate lines. What is important, however, is the fact that if Blake is attracted to the style of these artists he is no less attracted to the source of their subjects, the result subsequently being his magnificent paintings based on such subjects as Job, Moses, Christ and Mary.

In 1772, Blake, now fifteen, was apprenticed to an engraver named Basire but at the end of two years there was discord between Blake and certain new apprentices, and he was sent to Westminister Abbey to make drawings for engravings ordered by the Society of Antiquaries. This experience had an important effect upon his life. He himself mentions to Malkin that he "found there a treasure which he knew how to value".[6] The importance of this experience for him was the discovery of "the simple and plain road to the style of art at which he aimed".[7] His careful study of the Gothic style within the Abbey left a

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[6]G.E. Bentley, Jr., Blake Records (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 422.

[7]Ibid., p. 422.

lasting effect on his style but the atmosphere of awe, splendour and most importantly religiosity had an even greater impact upon his youthful, fertile mind. Thus it is not surprising to find that his visions in the Abbey were not of Kings and Queens but of Christ and the Apostles, and of monks, priests, choristers and censer-bearers.[8]

In the following years Blake's undertakings show evidence of a persistent interest in Biblical subject-matter. In 1773, Blake executed an engraving entitled "Joseph of Arimathea among the Rocks of Albion". It is clear that this engraving is based on the legend of Joseph of Arimathea at Glastonbury. According to this legend, Joseph collected the blood of Jesus in the Holy Grail and having received the body of Christ left Judah, journeyed to Britain and brought true religion to Glastonbury. While the historicity of this legend might be debated there can be little doubt that it had its roots in the Bible, where parallel accounts are given in Matthew 27: 57-60, Mark 15: 43-46, Luke 23: 50-53, and John 19: 38-42. Blake's commentary on the engraving also reveals a familiarity with the Bible, a familiarity clearly born of a deep interest in the Scriptures. The words "wandering around in sheep skins and goat skins" were in

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[8]Wilson, op. cit., p. 5.

all probability inspired by Hebrews 11: 37, which speaks of those who "wandered about in sheep skins and goat skins".

Blake's continuing interest in Biblical subjects reveals itself in other works. In 1774, Blake executed a drawing of "Moses and the Tablets of Stone" and in 1776 he painted a figure from Michelangelo's "The Last Judgment". Both his prose description and the painting itself constitute convincing evidence of his interest in the Bible.

The strength of Blake's attraction to the Bible in his more mature years can scarcely be a matter for debate. According to Mona Wilson, Blake was a "constant student of the Bible and a firm believer in the symbolism of the Old Testament".[9]

Blake, himself states that:

> ...the Bible is more Entertaining and Instructive than any other book... because [it is] addressed to the Imagination which is Spiritual Sensation and but mediately to the Understanding or reason....[10]

In the only extant letter to his brother, James, he also observes:

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[9] Ibid., p. 63.

[10] "Letter to Dr. Trusler", Keynes, p. 794.

> ...I read Greek as fluently as an Oxford Scholar and the Testament is my chief master: astonishing indeed is the English translation, it is almost word for word and if the Hebrew Bible is as well translated, which I do not doubt of its having been translated as well as written by the Holy Ghost....[11]

Even a cursory study of Blake's correspondence reveals also the poet's familiarity with the scriptures. In 1803, for example, Blake wrote to Thomas Butts:

> Now I may say to you what perhaps I should not say to anyone else: that I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoy'd, and that I may converse with my friends in Eternity, See Visions, Dream Dreams and Prophecy and Speake Parables unobserv'd and at liberty ... Christ is very decided on this Point. 'He who is Not With Me is Against Me'. There is no Medium or Middle state; ...[12]

No one acquainted with the Bible can possibly miss the allusion to Joel 2: 28 where God, promising restoration and goodness to the children of Israel, also states:

> ...I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions ....

Blake's quotation, "He who is Not With Me is Against Me", was gleaned from Matthew 12: 30, Mark 9: 40 and Luke 9: 50 and 11: 23.

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[11] "Letter to James Blake", Keynes, p. 821-22.

[12] "Letter to Thomas Butts", Keynes, p. 822.

That Blake, during his struggles as an artist, drew strength from the great men of the Bible is evident from his letter of 1803 to Butts. Informing the latter of Hayley's aversion to his poetry, Blake reveals that he does not intend to succumb in the face of such discouragement. His words show the Bible to be a source of inspiration for him:

> But if all the World should set their faces against This, I have orders to set my face like Flint (Ezekiel 3: 8-9) against their faces and my forehead against their foreheads.[13]

Accounts by Blake's contemporaries also provide evidence of his interest in the Bible. Crabb Robinson, for instance, reports Blake as making the following observation:

> I should be sorry if I had any earthly fame, for whatever natural glory a man has is so much taken from his spiritual glory....[14]

There is no denying the allusion to Matthew 17: 26:

> For what is man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

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[13]"Letter to Thomas Butts", Keynes, p. 825.

[14]Henry Crabb Robinson, Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson, ed. Thomas Sadler (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), II, p. 304.

On the occasion of a subsequent meeting, Robinson notes, Blake claimed that all he knew was in the Bible but added that he understood the Scriptures in their spiritual sense. When Blake died in 1827, William Carey drew attention to the straitened and intolerable circumstances of Blake's life but also noted that one of the books that lay on the "rickety" table nearby was the Bible.

It appears, however, that while Blake had a strong interest in the Bible he was also subject to influences which he found he could accommodate, to a degree, in his interpretation of the Scriptures. This point has not always been grasped by commentators dealing with Blake's work. No less a critic than T.S. Eliot, for example, perceives Blake as a writer whose "philosophy, like his visions, like his insight, like his technique, was his own".[15] Though conceding that in his early work Blake was "decidedly traditional",[16] Eliot claims that Blake subsequently ignores the traditional, that he discards the "framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own".[17] He accuses Blake of "a certain meanness of culture" and of a "lack of that

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[15] T.S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1920), p. 155.

[16] Ibid., p. 153.

[17] Ibid., p. 158.

Mediterranean gift of form which knows how to borrow".[18] It seems, though, that Eliot is mistaken in judging Blake to be indifferent to the traditional. Scholars have attempted to demonstrate that Blake has assimilated ideas and techniques from a variety of sources. Indeed, Yeats is convinced that great writers, among whom he would include Blake, "look backward to a long tradition without fear, they have held to whatever pleased them",[19] that they ignore what they dislike and take the liberty of altering tradition when they deem this necessary. Some, like Blake, have modified tradition so often and so significantly that critics in some instances apparently fail to recognize the transformation that has occurred and consequently conclude, as Eliot does regarding Blake's work,[20] that the end-product is "eccentric". Blake does not passively accept traditions. As his Annotations relating to the works of such writers as Milton, Swedenborg and Lavater reveal, he critically examines other men's ideas, agreeing with some notions, accepting some conditionally and rejecting others. He is critically

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[18] Ibid., pp. 156-57.

[19] W.B. Yeats, "Poetry and Tradition", in Essays (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1924), p. 310.

[20] Eliot, op. cit., p. 157.

selective, adopting ideas that enable him to fulfil his "mission" as a prophet.

A number of traditions with respect to reading of the Bible was apparently accessible to Blake and his contemporaries.[21] The tradition of allegorical or spiritual interpretation of the Bible, stressing the inner meaning of the Word, survived beyond the eighteenth century. Biblical material associated with the cabbala, the church Fathers and medieval mystics found its way into the works of Boehme, who influenced Swedenborg, Law and others. Earlier Biblical scholarship was also reflected in Voltaire's Biblical criticism. Various older exegetical traditions, such as that of the Gnostics, were accessible through reprints and citations of publications which reported or echoed their content. Available, too, were Milton's writings, which "contained the seventeenth-century heritage of radical dissent, but which also publicized the ideas of such exegetes as Augustine, Beza and Pareus".[22] Also, occult traditions were revived by a variety of religious groups which

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[21]For a concise overview of the nature of these traditions see Leslie Tannenbaum, Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies: The Great Code of Art (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 8-24.

[22]Ibid., pp. 16-17.

often displayed political radicalism. The tradition of a literal acceptance of the Bible as the living Word of God and the centre of Christian life was sustained with vigour by religious "enthusiasts" such as the Wesleyans and Evangelicals.

Blake was apparently attracted to the writings of Milton, Boehme and Swedenborg, and some of the ideas embodied in such works seem to be reflected in his writings. Milton believes, for example, that Good and Evil, Reason and Desire, are vital elements in human existence.[23] He accepts, also, that all things are of God, that the physical body is holy since it is composed of matter which has been created by God. By implication, the desires arising in the physical body are good and Man effects God's purposes when, within appropriate bounds, he satisfies such desires.[24] Boehme claims that in order to become manifest the Will of God divides into two aspects, one negative and the other positive, and that all subsequent development and creation is the product of this creative conflict between contraries in the centre of God.[25]

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[23]Denis Saurat, Blake and Milton (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), pp. 62-63.

[24]Ibid., pp. 63-65.

[25]Warren Stevenson, Divine Analogy: A Study of the Creation Motif in Blake and Coleridge (Salzburg: Institut Für Englische Sprache and Literatur, 1972), p. 43.

Good and Evil are only separate aspects of the same force, and this force is God. Imagination is an integral dimension of the soul of Man; it "originally proceeded from the Imagination of God, and remains in it eternally."[26] There is thus Divinity in Man. The world is simply a fallen form of Heaven and Man a fallen form of God. The Biblical pattern of Fall, Creation and Redemption involves a falling away from and eventual return to God, regeneration through faith being an act of Imagination.[27] Swedenborg, too, advances ideas which Blake is likely to have found acceptable. For instance, he amplifies the notion of "correspondences" which is founded on the idea of the unity of all being and involves "the inseparatability of existence and meaning".[28] He claims that all creatures live to the extent that they receive out of the fullness of God, that men as well as angels are of God.[29] He believes also that Heaven and Hell arose together and are contraries essential for each other's survival.[30] It is highly likely that such

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[26] Ibid., p. 45.

[27] Ibid., pp. 42-50.

[28] Kathleen Raine, The Human Face of God (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), pp. 16-17.

[29] Stanley Gardner, Blake (London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1968), p. 58.

[30] Ibid., pp. 58-59.

ideas made a lasting impression on Blake. It is thought, indeed, that Swedenborg and Boehme were "his two principal teachers".[31] This is not to suggest that Blake found all the ideas presented by Milton, Boehme and Swedenborg acceptable. For example, he rejected the idea that the damned were destined for eternal hell-fire, regarding such "predestinarianism" as inconsistent with true Christianity.[32]

Scholars have drawn attention to other likely influences on Blake. It is noted, for instance, that the works of Plato as well as of Plotinus and other Neoplatonists were translated into English by Taylor, a Platonist with whom Blake was acquainted.[33] According to the Neoplatonists, sin led to the soul's descent into the lowest level of existence, the material world. This fall, however, is a necessary stage in the soul's fulfilment, for the soul will eventually return to the One.[34] It is claimed, also, that the ideas of the Gnostics, including

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[31]Raine, op. cit., p. 29.

[32]Martin K. Nurmi, William Blake (London: Hutchinson Library, 1975), p. 21.

[33]Raine, op. cit., p. 12.

[34]Stevenson, op. cit., p. 17.

the notion that "the fall of Man involved a fall in part of the divine nature",[35] had an impact on Blake. It is suggested, as well, that the cabbala,[36] the Hermetica,[37] the work of Berkeley,[38] and other writings were possible influences on Blake. In this connection, Klonsky observes that while Blake was indirectly in touch with cabbalist ideas through Boehme, Paracelsus and others he might also have known at first hand the sixteenth-century version of the cabbala.[39] Blake himself names Paracelsus as a writer with whom he felt some affinity. Paracelsus advanced the idea of correspondences between Man (the microcosm) and Nature (the macrocosm), perceiving the life of Man to be an integral part of the life of the universe. According to Paracelsus, also, God made Man to provide his Spirit with a dwelling-place in flesh. Thus, the Spirit of God lives in Man but is of God and ultimately returns to God. Paracelsus is obviously trying to demolish the barrier

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[35]Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake, Princeton Paperback Edition (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 41.

[36]Milton Klonsky, William Blake: The Seer and His Visions (New York: Harmony Books, 1977), p. 11.

[37]Raine, op. cit., p. 15.

[38]Ibid., pp. 14-15.

[39]Klonsky, op. cit., p. 11.

between Creator and creature; he is proclaiming the essential unity of all existence.[40] From such influences as the foregoing Blake absorbed elements of Truth which he thought consistent with a "correct" reading of the Bible, modifying them where necessary to make them more compatible with his interpretation of the Scriptures.

In Blake's view, the Bible is "the Great Code of Art".[41] As Frye observes,

> For Blake ... the Bible provides the key to the relation between the two worlds. The ordinary world is 'fallen', the manifestation of man's own sin and ignorance; the true world is the apocalypse presented at the end of the Bible and the paradise presented at the beginning of it: the true city and garden that is man's home, and which all existing cities and gardens struggle to make manifest in the lower world.[42]

Blake thus seeks from the Bible the true message embedded within it, a message which he finds accessible only through a highly unusual reading of the Scriptures. This is a reading of the Bible in "its infernal or diabolical sense",[43]

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[40]Stevenson, op. cit., pp. 24-27.

[41]"Laocoön", Keynes, p. 777.

[42]Northrop Frye, "Blake after Two Centuries". William Blake: Songs of Innocence and Experience, ed. Margaret Bottrall (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1970), p. 166.

[43]The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Keynes, Plates 22-24, p. 158.

a sense communicated in the following lines:

> Both read the Bible day and night,
> But thou read'st black where I read white.
> ("The Everlasting Gospel", p. 748)

While scholars have explored the extent to which Blake's work is permeated by tradition, they have generally not examined in a systematic and comprehensive manner Blake's interpretation of the Bible. A notable exception is Frye, who in his Fearful Symmetry discusses the Bible as one of the major influences on Blake and while doing so sheds valuable light on Blake's interpretation of the Bible. However, Frye's contributions in this direction are circumscribed by the nature of his task, which is to "offer an explanation of Blake's thought and a commentary on his poetry"[44] rather than specifically to analyze Blake's interpretation of the Bible. More recently, Tannenbaum has discussed the importance of Biblical tradition in Blake's work and the poet's use of this tradition in "re-creating the Bible for his own time".[45] However, this is only one of Tannenbaum's interests, and he confines his study to the Lambeth books. In general,

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[44]Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake, Princeton Paperback Edition (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 3.

[45]Tannenbaum, op. cit., pp. ix-x.

scholars have been content to intersperse observations and discussions of Blake's interpretation of the Scriptures among comments relating to a variety of other dimensions of the poet's work.

The present study focuses on Blake's interpretation of the Bible. In Chapter II, Blake's early works up to and including The Marriage of Heaven and Hell are examined for ideas relevant to the poet's reading of the Bible. Chapter III presents an overview of Blake's interpretation of the Bible. Chapter IV deals with Blake's version of the Creation-Fall, and Chapter V with his view of Apocalypse and Redemption. Finally, Chapter VI presents a summary and some concluding observations.

CHAPTER II

TOWARD REINTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE: BLAKE'S EARLY WORKS

> Both read the Bible day and night,
> But thou read'st black where I read white.
> ("The Everlasting Gospel", ll. 13-14, p. 748)

An examination of Blake's earlier works for apparent links with his interpretation of the Bible proves quite rewarding, for a variety of elements in his reading of the Scriptures now make their appearance, albeit often in tentative or highly embryonic form. Indeed, Frye suggests that "the main outlines of Blake's archetypal myth were in his mind from a very early age".[1] The preliminary statements tend to achieve their fullest and most explicit form in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell but are in many cases anticipated in prior works. The present chapter explores Blake's early works, including The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, for ideas pertinent to his interpretation of the Bible.

Blake's Poetical Sketches was first published in 1783 and the "Advertisement", which is usually attributed

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[1]Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake, Princeton Paperback Edition (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 182.

to the Reverend Henry Matthew, stated that:

> ... the sketches were the production of untutored youth, commenced in his twelfth year and occasionally resumed by the author in his twentieth year ... .[2]

While the Poetical Sketches in large measure consists of Blake's juvenilia, it often foreshadows notions that are of importance in the poet's subsequent attempts to develop his own interpretation of the Bible. One such notion is that of an apocalypse, a revelation or a recognition of a Divine truth. Blake claims in more mature works that it is through an Apocalypse that Man will regain his Latent Vision or Imagination, long stifled by institutionalized religion or by moral or legal codes. Already, however, the idea of an Apocalypse appears in Blake's work.

King Edward the Third, for example, contains Biblical echoes which are linked to the notion of an Apocalypse. Dagworth's words seem to suggest more than the mere physical preparation for battle; they also evoke images of an Apocalypse, of a recognition that salvation comes to those who are prepared:

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[2]William Blake, Blake: Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 883.

> Thousands of souls must leave this
> prison-house
> To be exalted to those heavenly
> fields,
> Where songs of triumph, palms of
> victory,
> Where peace, and joy, and love, and
> calm content,
> Sit singing in the azure clouds, and
> strew
> Flowers of heaven's growth over the
> banquet-table;
> Bind ardent hope upon your feet like
> shoes,
> Put on the robe of preparation,
> The table is prepar'd in shining
> heaven,
> The flowers of immortality are blown;
> Let those that fight, fight in good
> stedfastness,
> And those that fall shall rise in
> victory.
>
> (King Edward the Third, Sc. 5, ll. 27-38, pp. 30-31)

The idea of an apocalypse is suggested by Biblical echoes and allusions which appear to infuse a deeper level of meaning into the speech: for example, the first two lines refer to the "souls" leaving the physical body, "this prison-house", for the heavenly abode. The words "songs of triumph, palms of victory" are an allusion to Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem shortly before his Crucifixion. In general, the images relate to Christ, God and Heaven. At the literal level, Dagworth speaks of preparation for battle but at a figurative level his words convey a recognition that those who are prepared will transcend the physical and achieve eternal life. The idea of an Apocalypse is more clearly apprehended by a reader

who recalls the parallel in Ephesians 6: 14-18, where preparation for salvation is also conveyed in terms of battle array:

> Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness;
> And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;
> Above all, taking the shield of faith, where with ye shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked.
> And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Frye has pointed out, indeed, that King Edward the Third reveals an "early sketch of the parallel between English and Hebrew history which is the ground plan of Jerusalem".[3] He notes further that the minstrel's song which in telling

> ...the legend of the Trojan origin of Britain, obviously recalls the Biblical story of an exodus from enemies, a wandering to a land of destiny, a rapid conquest of giants and a prophecy of everlasting peace and prosperity.[4]

The idea of an Apocalypse seems to be present in "The Couch of Death" as well and is communicated at least partly through parallelism with the Book of Job in the Scriptures. Like Job, the youth in this work has sinned, and the youth's confession of sin resembles that of Job's

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[3]Frye, op. cit., p. 182.

[4]Ibid., p. 182.

quite strongly. For example, the youth says, "... My ways are sinful, how shall I raise mine eyes?"[5] while Job 7: 20 states: "I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee O thou preserver of men?" Again, the youth says, "My breath is loathsome ... the grave opens its mouth for me",[6] while Job 17: 1 states: "My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are open for me." According to Blake's interpretation of the Book of Job in the Scriptures, as presented in the text and illustrations for his own work entitled The Book of Job, the prophet has a Divine revelation when he realizes that the Satanic state of experience is not inevitable but is a condition that must be resisted with the vision brought by the Fall into Experience. It appears that the youth of "The Couch of Death" has a parallel experience. He has an insight into the truth, that he is not a mere object or thing, that there is Divinity within Man, an insight brought about by the mother's words which suggest that God dwells within Man:

> O Voice, that dwellest in my breast,
> can I not cry, and lift my eyes to
> Heaven?
>
> ("The Couch of Death", p. 36)

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[5] "The Couch of Death", Keynes, p. 36.

[6] Ibid., p. 36.

Symbolically, as the following passage suggests, this Apocalypse leads the youth from the state of Nature to Eternity or Vision:

> Such smiles were seen upon the face of the youth; a visionary hand wiped away his tears, and a ray of light beamed around his head! All was still....; the bosom of the lofty hill drank in the silent dew, while on his majestic brow the voice of Angels is heard, and stringed sounds ride upon the wings of night. The sorrowful pair lift up their heads, hovering Angels are around them, voices of comfort are heard over the Couch of Death, and the youth breathes out his Soul with joy into eternity.
>
> ("The Couch of Death", p. 36)

It does not appear far-fetched to suggest here that the idea of Christ as Imagination, a vital notion in later works by Blake, is already beginning to take shape in the poet's mind. There seems to be an allusion to Christ in the words "Stretch forth thy hands", which emphasize the contrast between those who are able to reach out to God and the youth of "The Couch of Death" who cannot but which also clearly echo the words of Matthew 12: 13, Mark 3: 5 and Luke 6: 10. In these verses in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus is described inviting the man with the withered hand to be healed. The apparent allusion to Christ, when seen in conjunction with the words "... a visionary hand wiped away his tears, and a ray of light beamed around his head!"[7]

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[7] Ibid., p. 36.

as well as with the description of a Divine uplifting of the youth to Eternity, seems to foreshadow the idea of Christ the Imagination.

The suggestion of a spiritual deliverer is present in Blake's "Samson" as well and is again communicated through Biblical echoes and allusions. Blake's "And he shall be called Israel's deliverer"[8] reflects Luke 1: 31. It also parallels Luke 1: 38, which concerns the annunciation to Mary, and Isaiah 7: 14, which also relates to Christ. Such Biblical echoes or allusions seem to hint at the coming of a Divine deliverer who will bring redemption to Man.

"Samson" appears as well to contain in rudimentary form Blake's conception of the Circle of Destiny. Based on Judges 13: 1-8, but also showing the influence of Milton's Samson Agonistes, Blake's version of the Biblical episode deals specifically with Dalila's role immediately prior to Samson's fall. To emphasize her power over Samson and her importance in his fall, Blake juxtaposes the events immediately preceding the fall with an account which recalls the events leading up to Samson's birth, the circumstances faced by Samson's parents and his country, and the angel's visits and prophecies. Recollection of these events ought to strengthen Samson and enable him to resist Dalila's

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[8]"Samson", Keynes, p. 39.

wiles, tears and supplications. Blake deliberately focuses on Samson's wavering. The alternatives open to Samson might easily be described in terms of Blake's conception of the Circle of Destiny. Samson might choose to remain in a state of innocence (in "Beulah") and eventually find himself in a condition of spiritual and imaginative decline (the state of "Ulro"), or he might move through a state of Experience or Generation, associated with Energy and Imagination, in which a rebirth can occur leading to the Edenic state ("Eternity"). Blake apparently sees Samson's "degeneration" as a preliminary to spiritual regeneration. Like Job, Samson must move from the state of Beulah into and through the state of Experience or Generation before he can gain Eternity.

The Poetical Sketches also seems to contain the seeds of some of the personae found in Blake's later works in which he presents his interpretation of the Bible. As Frye suggests, for example, the words "ruddy limbs and flourishing hair" in "To Summer", foreshadow the figure of Orc, the persona who symbolizes the revolutionary spirit continually striving to free itself from its fetters.[9] Again, there appear to be repeated portrayals of the distant, avenging Mosaic God associated with Justice, the

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[9]Frye, op. cit., p. 182.

Elohim of the Old Testament. This God is the parallel of Blake's Urizen. In "To Winter" the poet writes:

> Lo! now the direful monster, whose skin clings
> To his strong bones, strides o'er the groaning rocks:
> He withers all in silence, and in his hand
> Unclothes the earth, and freezes up frail life. '
>
> He takes his seat upon the cliffs; the mariner
> Cries in vain. Poor little wretch! that deals't
> With storms, till heaven smiles, and the monster
> Is driv'n yelling to his caves beneath Mount Hecla.
>
> ("To Winter", ll. 9-16, p. 3)

These stanzas, with their description of a cruel and punitive "monster" who feels no pity, convey the picture of a Mosaic God. The words "groaning rocks" and "cliffs" reinforce this image of the abstract Creator, the Elohim. Stanzas One and Two are to some extent an inversion of Biblical supplications to God, more specifically of Psalm 121 which stresses the safety of the Godly who trust in God and "lift up" their "eyes unto the hills from whence cometh" their help. Psalm 121 speaks of a God who is the maker of heaven and earth, a God who does not "slumber nor sleep", a God who is the "keeper" of Israel and the "shade upon its right hand", a God who protects from all evil and preserves the soul "from this time forth and even for evermore". This is a vision of a loving, caring Divinity but Blake's poem inverts the

Psalm to give us the exact opposite of this Divinity, so that what the poem presents is a picture of an Abstract, inaccessible God whose main concern is asserting His own power and authority, a God who "hears not"[10] the pleas of His followers and therefore does nothing to help them. The speaker is afraid to lift up his eyes because the direful God is not humane and does not incline His eye to those who call upon Him. As pointed out, He parallels the Mosaic God. He is the genesis of Blake's later creation, Urizen, the false god who is more concerned with punishing and tyrannizing than helping and forgiving.

The image of an angry, displeased God appears again in "King Edward the Third". The first few lines of the play contain an invocation to a God whose fury and wrath are emphasized. A similar image of God occurs in the "Prologue: Kind Edward the Fourth":

> When the souls of the oppressed
> Fight in the troubled air that rages,
> who can stand?
> When the whirlwind of fury comes from
> the
> Throne of God, when the frowns of his
> countenance
> Drive nations together, who can stand?
> ("Prologue: King Edward the Fourth",
> ll. 3-7, p. 33)

It might also be suggested that as early as in "The Couch of Death" the idea of a God as the First Cause and of

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[10]"To Winter", Keynes, l. 4, p. 3.

Justice as contrasted with a God of Mercy is beginning to take shape in the young Blake's mind. The early part of the youth's speech and the mother's words "But lo there is a God who made the world..."[11] clearly indicate the Jewish Jehovah-Elohim of the Old Testament, the Creator and the Mosaic God of repressive laws and justice. The second part of the youth's speech alludes specifically through direct words, as well as Biblical echoes, to Jesus of the New Testament.

In his Annotations to Lavater, also, Blake introduces a number of ideas that are relevant to his interpretation of the Bible. He regards as "true Christian philosophy far above all abstraction"[12] Lavater's notions concerning the essential similarity of all men. He expresses his approval of Lavater's statement that "mankind agree in essence, as they do in their limbs and senses"[13] and thus reveals his belief in the brotherhood of men. Blake also advances the idea of the Divinity in Man. For example, he refers to Man as "the Ark of God"[14] and agrees with Lavater when he writes:

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[11] "The Couch of Death", p. 36.

[12] Annotations to Lavater", Keynes, p. 65.

[13] Ibid., p. 65.

[14] Ibid., p. 82.

> He, who hates the wisest and best of men, hates the Father of men; for, where is the Father of men to be seen but in the most perfect of his children?
>
> (Annotations to Lavater, p. 82)

Blake also observes that "Human nature is the image of God",[15] additional evidence of his belief in the Divinity in Man. Closely linked with this idea is that of God in close relationship with Man. In response to Lavater's statement that "He, who adores an impersonal God, has none; and, without guide or rudder, launches on an immense abyss that first absorbs his powers, and next himself",[16] Blake comments: "Most superlatively beautiful and most affectionately Holy and pure; would to God that all men would consider it".[17] There also occurs in embryonic form in Annotations to Lavater the notion that "energy", which Blake associates here with "Active Evil" and in later works with creative imagination, is a positive force in human life. He claims that "Active Evil is better than Passive Good".[18] The thought that what is conventionally regarded as evil could be a positive force and therefore "capable of good" is again expressed as follows:

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[15] Ibid., p. 83.

[16] Ibid., p. 82.

[17] Ibid., p. 82.

[18] Ibid., p. 77

> Man is a twofold being, one part capable of evil and the other capable of good; that which is capable of good is not also capable of evil, but that which is capable of evil is also capable of good.
>
> (Annotations to Lavater, p. 80)

Blake presents as well a preliminary statement of the notion that Man can achieve a "Vision of the Eternal"[19] while in the temporal world and identifies Christ as one who achieved such a vision. Already, therefore, he is associating Christ with Vision or Imagination. Lavater observes:

> The greatest of characters, no doubt, was he, who, free of all trifling accidental helps, could see objects through one grand immutable medium, always at hand, and proof against illusion and time, reflected by every object, and invariably traced through all the fluctuation of things.
>
> (Annotations to Lavater, p. 66)

Blake adds that "This was Christ".[20]

In his Annotations to Swedenborg Blake again links Christ with the "Poetic Genius" or Vision: he makes reference to "the Poetic Genius, which is the Lord",[21] and he equates Swedenborg's "Negation of God" and "Negation of the Lord's Divinity" with "the Negation of the Poetic Genius".[22] In addition, he repeats the idea of the Divinity

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[19] Ibid., p. 77.

[20] Ibid., p. 66.

[21] Ibid., p. 90.

[22] Ibid., p. 90.

in Man. For example, in response to Swedenborg's comment that "In all the Heavens there is no other Idea of God than that of a Man"[23] Blake observes:

> Man can have no idea of anything greater than Man, as a cup cannot contain more than its capaciousness. But God is a man, not because he is so perciev'd by man, but because he is the creator of man.
>
> (Annotations to Swedenborg, p. 90)

Blake also expresses agreement with Swedenborg's thought that "the Divine fills all things",[24] which provides an early indication of the poet's belief in the unity of all things in God. In this work, he also introduces the notion of the dynamic coexistence of contraries. Commenting on Swedenborg's conception of the relationship between Good ("the Action of God") and Evil ("the Reaction of Man"), he notes that "Good and Evil are here both Good and the two contraries Married".[25] The idea that Good and Evil are both positive forces is reiterated in the words "Heaven and Hell are born together".[26] Blake also advances the notion that the true New Religion "is in the Active Life

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[23] Ibid., p. 90.

[24] Ibid., p. 92.

[25] Ibid., p. 91

[26] Ibid., p. 96.

and not in Ceremonies at all".[27] Since he associates the "active" with energy and creative imagination, this statement foreshadows his later idea that it is through the "Poetic Genius" that Error, which in his view arises at least partly from adherence to repressive rituals and moral codes, might be recognized and eliminated.

In "There Is No Natural Religion", Blake again claims that Man is capable of Vision, that Man's "perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception",[28] and that without "the Poetic or Prophetic character the Philosophic and Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, and stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again".[29] Through the "Poetic Genius", Man can apprehend "the Infinite" and thus see the unity of all things in God. Blake's observation, "Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is",[30] is a reference to the Incarnation and therefore to Christ as the means through which men may grasp the Infinite. Again,

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[27] Ibid., p. 92.

[28] "There Is No Natural Religion", Keynes, p. 97.

[29] Ibid., p. 97.

[30] Ibid., p. 98.

then, Blake is associating Christ with the "Poetic Genius" or Vision. In "All Religions Are One", he proclaims the universality of the "Poetic Genius", noting that the "Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nation's different reception of the Poetic Genius, which is every where call'd the Spirit of Prophecy".[31]

Implicit in Tiriel is an embryonic form of the Orc cycle, another concept which is important in Blake's reading of the Bible. Tiriel, who in his youth is equivalent to the revolutionary Orc, becomes in his later years the equivalent of the tyrannical Urizen. In the poem the cycle begins when Tiriel revolts against his father and establishes himself as a ruler. With time Tiriel becomes a tyrant but is eventually overthrown by his own sons who once more symbolize the revolutionary spirit of Orc. The cycle has begun again. The idea of the Orc cycle appears in somewhat clearer form in such early works as The French Revolution, America and Europe but even here is not as fully developed as in later works like "The Mental Traveller" and "The Grey Monk". In the minor prophecies Blake still has faith in the redemptive effectiveness of social revolution, and the Orc cycle at this point of his career consists of the overthrow of a decayed and repressive social order by a new regenerative

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[31] Ibid., p. 98.

force. In later works, however, he depicts such developments as typically leading to the entrenchment of a new tyranny which will in turn be challenged by a new revolutionary force as the cycle repeats itself.

The Songs of Innocence and of Experience, also, contains ideas relevant to Blake's interpretation of the Bible. The work deals with "Two Contrary States of the Human Soul".[32] One of these is the state of Innocence, which represents Man in his unfallen condition, and the other the state of Experience, which reflects Man in a fallen state. "The Lamb", for example, deals with the first of these two states and "The Tyger" with the second. The "tyger", however, symbolizes wrath, energy and creative imagination which Blake perceives as potentially good and no less necessary to human life than the love and meekness which the lamb represents. The idea that "contraries" are necessary for human "progression" is presented more fully in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell and remains an important one in Blake's subsequent writings.

In his Songs of Innocence and of Experience Blake again observes that there is an inherent Divinity in Man. He writes:

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[32] Songs of Innocence and of Experience, Keynes, p. 210.

> And all must love the human form,
> In heathen, turk, or jew;
> Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell
> There God is dwelling too.
>
> ("The Divine Image" in Songs of Innocence, p. 117)

However, Man has lost sight of the Divinity within him. This has occurred because his energy and creative imagination have been suppressed:

> In every cry of every Man,
> In every Infant's cry of fear,
> In every voice, in every ban,
> The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.
>
> ("London" in Songs of Experience, p. 216)

The suppression of energy and creative imagination has been brought about by institutionalized religion:

> I went to the Garden of Love
> And saw what I never had seen:
> A chapel was built in the midst,
> Where I used to play on the green.
>
> And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
> And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;
> So I turn'd to the Garden of Love
> That so many sweet flowers bore;
>
> And I saw it was filled with graves,
> And tomb-stones where flowers should be;
> And Priests in black gowns were walking
> their rounds,
> And binding with briars my joys and
> desires.
>
> ("The Garden of Love" in Songs of Experience, p. 215)

Through the "Poetic Genius", the "bard" is aware of the Divinity in fallen Man and calls upon him to discard Error:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, and Future, sees;
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walk'd among the ancient trees,

Calling the lapsed Soul,
And weeping in the evening dew;
That might controll
The starry pole,
And fallen, fallen light renew!

("Introduction" in Songs of Experience, p. 210)

Through Christ, Man can escape from his fallen state and achieve reintegration with God:

Whate'er is Born of Mortal Birth
Must be consumed with the Earth
To rise from Generation free:
Then what have I to do with three?

The Sexes sprung from Shame and Pride,
Blow'd in the morn; in evening died;
But Mercy chang'd Death into Sleep;
The Sexes rose to work and weep.

Thou, Mother of my Mortal part,
With cruelty didst mould my Heart,
And with false self-decieving tears
Didst bind my Nostrils, Eyes, and Ears:

Didst close my Tongue in senseless clay,
And me to Mortal Life betray.
The Death of Jesus set me free:
Then what have I to do with three?

("To Tirzah" in Songs of Experience, p. 220)

The lyric "To Tirzah" in fact encapsulates the myth which Blake develops in later works. It contains the idea of the Creation as an act of mercy which gives Man the opportunity to regain immortal life through Jesus.

In addition, the Songs of Innocence and of Experience reveal parallels of personae appearing in later works related to Blake's interpretation of the Bible. In "Earth's Answer", for instance, there is mention of "the Father of the Ancient Man"[33] who is the "Selfish father of men",[34] in all likelihood a reference to Urizen, the God associated with established laws and moral codes. Again, the following lines from "The Tyger" foreshadow the work of Los-Urthona who forges the body of the fallen God-Man, Urizen, and who is linked by Blake to the Creative imagination that contributes to the establishment of both Golgonooza and the new Jerusalem:

> What the hammer? what the chain?
> In what furnace was thy brain?
> What the anvil? what dread grasp
> Dare its deadly terrors clasp?
>
> ("The Tyger" in Songs of Experience, p. 214)

The lyric "To Tirzah" also introduces a persona, Tirzah, who is an important figure in Blake's later writings where he symbolizes "passive dependence on sense experience".[35]

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[33]"Earth's Answer", Keynes, p. 211.

[34]Ibid., p. 211.

[35]Frye, op. cit., p. 127.

In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Blake consolidates many of the ideas relevant to his interpretation of the Bible which are introduced or foreshadowed in earlier works. Indeed, according to Keynes The Marriage of Heaven and Hell "was Blake's first full-scale attempt to present his philosophic message."[36] Central among his ideas is the notion of contraries:

> Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 3, p. 149)

Human life and thought, in Blake's view, cannot progress without the stimulus provided by such active, opposing forces. The contraries are basic and necessary experiences or elements in human life and human nature and form part of the fully unified man. A failure to recognize this - that is, a loss of Vision/Imagination - has led institutionalised religion into Error:

> All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors:
>
> 1. That Man has two real existing principles: Viz: a Body and a Soul.
> 2. That Energy, call'd Evil, is along from the Body, and that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the Soul.
> 3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 4, p. 149)

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[36] William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. ix.

As a result of such Errors, institutionalised religion has made distinctions between Good and Evil which are purely arbitrary:

> From these contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.
>
> Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 3, p. 149)

Furthermore, failure to perceive the importance of contraries has led institutionalised religion to emphasize and value fragmentation in men. For example, Reason is exalted whereas Energy is condemned. Blake sees as incomplete and inferior those in whom Reason suppresses Energy:

> Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or Reason usurps its place and governs the unwilling.
>
> And being restrain'd, it by degrees becomes passive, till it is only the shadow of desire.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 5-6, pp. 149-50)

The theme of the incompleteness and inferiority of those in whom Reason rules recurs in the following:

> The Giants who formed this world into its sensual existence and now seem to live in it in chains, are in truth the causes of its life and the sources of all activity; but the chains are the cunning of weak and tame minds which have power to resist energy, according to the proverb, the weak in courage is strong in cunning.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 15-16, p. 155)

Blake's interest lies in a reintegration of humanity, in reunification within and among men. He seeks recognition of the importance of contraries within men, believing that once this is achieved disunity among men arising from divisions into categories such as Good and Evil will be eliminated. After disclosing the Errors of institutionalized religion, Blake adds:

> But the following Contraries to these are True:
>
> 1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a postion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
>
> 2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
>
> 3. Energy is Eternal Delight.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 4, p. 149)

Energy, which Blake sees as linked with expanded perception or the Poetic Genius, is crucial in Man's attempt to gain the Vision/Imagination which will enable him to see the Divinity within himself and the unity of all things in God. Indeed, active "Evil" is superior to passive "Good": the Energy associated with Hell will infuse life into a passive but sterile Heaven. Creative energy will lead to Vision/Imagination; it will in Blake's view foster an awareness of the "Infinite". Blake's narrator in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell states:

> This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment.
>
> But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul is to be expunged; this I shall do by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.
>
> If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite.
>
> For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 14, p. 154)

Through a widening of the senses and enhancement of perception, then, all of creation will be perceived in its infiniteness and holiness. The "cherub with his flaming sword", who is guardian of restriction and restraint, is ordered to leave the "tree of life":

> For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at tree of life; and when he does, the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite and corrupt.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 14, p. 154)

The theme that contraries are essential for true life, that is for a life of creative growth and Vision/ Imagination, is emphasized in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell through a repeated focus on the desirability of Energy. The "Proverbs of Hell" in Plates 7-10, for instance, tend to exalt the active over the passive and

"excess" over moderation or restraint:

> The road of excess leads to the palace
> of wisdom.
> Prudence is a rich, ugly old maid
> courted by Incapacity.
> He who desires but acts not, breeds
> pestilence.
> ...
> A dead body revenges not injuries.
> The most sublime act is to set
> another before you.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,
> Pl. 7, pp. 150-51)

From the viewpoint of "infernal" wisdom, passion, lust, wrath and other excesses are acceptable since they all come from God:

> Prisons are built with stones of Law,
> Brothels with bricks of Religion.
> The pride of the peacock is the glory
> of God.
> The lust of the goat is the bounty of
> God.
> The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of
> God.
> The nakedness of woman is the work of
> God.
> Excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy
> weeps.
> The roaring of lions, the howling of
> wolves, the raging of the stormy
> sea, and the destructive sword,
> are portions of eternity too great
> for the eye of man.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 8
> p. 151)

Blake insists, however, that he does not seek a synthesis of contraries. Rather, "progression" occurs through a free interplay of the contraries. Indeed, his

statement "One Law for the Lion and Ox is Oppression"[37] is in actuality a plea for the freedom which will permit such an unrestricted interplay of contraries in Man. The necessity for the independent existence of contraries is emphasized in Blake's distinction between two aspects of human existence, the Prolific (the active) and the Devouring (the passive):

> Thus one portion of being is the Prolific, the other the Devouring; to the devourer it seems as if the producer was in his chains; but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole.
>
> But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer, as a sea, received the excess of his delights.
>
> Some will say: 'Is not God alone the Prolific?' I answer: 'God only Acts and Is, in existing beings or Men.'
>
> These two classes of men are always upon earth, and they should be enemies: whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence.
>
> Religion is an endeavour to reconcile the two.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 15-16, p. 155)

Each of these two aspects of existence must retain its identity. The two aspects of existence should be "enemies". Attempts to reconcile them, such as those made by institutionalized religion, negate the principle of free interplay of contraries which is vital for human "progression".

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[37] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Keynes, p. 158.

The ideas Blake develops in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell are fundamental in later works in which he presents his interpretation of the Scriptures. The doctrine that the free interplay of contraries is crucial for the creative growth of Man reasserts itself in those works. In Blake's conception of the human personality, for instance, Imagination - which the poet links to Energy - in seen as a critical constituent of Man; it is one of the four "zoas", the free interaction of which is characteristic of fully unified and integrated men. Also, the idea that institutionalized religion, in labelling vital dimensions of Man as "evil", has produced fragmentation within and among men recurs repeatedly in Blake's work. A related idea, that Man has lost his apprehension of the "Infinite", that Man no longer possesses Vision/Imagination, is presented in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell and also assumes importance in Blake's later interpretation of the Scriptures. In the earlier work, indeed, Blake traces the course of the loss of Vision, attributing the loss to the growth of institutionalized religion. In the anthropormorphic religions, according to Blake, the Ancient Poets assigned the names and characteristics of Gods or Geniuses to natural objects and places and the "systems" created in this way led to the growth of a Priesthood, the priests subsequently claiming that such "systems" had been ordained

by God. In the process, the Divinity of Man was eventually forgotten:

> ... a system was formed, which some took advantage of, and enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood;
>
> Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.
>
> And at length they pronounced'd that the Gods had order'd such things.
>
> Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 11, p. 153)

Yet another idea from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, the possibility of the restoration of Vision to Man, recurs in Blake's later works where he reinterprets the Scriptures to show how "the doors of perception" might be "cleansed". Christ, viewed in a special way by Blake, will show the way to the regaining of Imagination. Again, there is substantial continuity between The Marriage of Heaven and Hell and Blake's more mature works with regard to the implications of the recapturing of Imagination. Man will be able to perceive the "infinite"; he will be able to see the unity of all things in God. He will therefore apprehend the inherent goodness of all of Creation and of all dimensions of Man.

It is clear, however, that in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Blake has already begun to reinterpret the Bible. Through inversion, he generates a reading of the

Scriptures quite different from the conventional. In asserting Energy and the Active to be good and linking them with Hell, he reverses the usual meanings of Heaven and Hell. Also, institutionalized religion, including all its "Bibles and sacred codes", is shown to be oppressive and destructive and induces fragmentation within and among men. Institutionalized religion, along with its "Bibles and sacred codes", is therefore evil. The Devil, as well as prophets, possess insights into sacred truths. Hell, rather than Heaven, is associated with creativity and Truth. In this connection, Blake's narrator observes:

> As I was walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity, I collected some of their Proverbs; thinking that as the sayings used in a nation mark its character, so the Proverbs of Hell shew the nature of Infernal wisdom better than any description of buildings or garments.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 6-7, p. 150)

Christ, too, is portrayed in terms highly unfamiliar to the conventional reader of the Bible:

> "... if Jesus Christ is the greatest man, you ought to love him in the greatest degree; now hear how he has given his sanction to the law of ten commandments: did he not mock at the sabbath, and so mock the sabbath's God? murder those who were murder'd because of him? turn away the law from the woman taken in adultery? steal the labor of others to support him? bear false witness when he omitted making a defence before Pilate? covet when

> he pray'd for his disciples, and when
> he bid them shake off the dust of their
> feet against such as refused to lodge
> them? I tell you, no virtue can exist
> without breaking these ten commandments.
> Jesus was all virtue, and acted from
> impulse, not from rules."
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Pl. 22-24, p. 158)

Of course, Blake is stressing the virtue of Energy and the evil character of conformity to repressive laws and codes, and Christ is employed here to symbolise these ideas. The qualities attributed to Christ here by the Devil will in Blake's later writing be incorporated along with rather different ones into a portrait of Christ as a fully integrated Being.

The foregoing discussion has revealed that many ideas which later become important in Blake's interpretation of the Bible are already present in his earlier works, though often in rudimentary form. Prominent among these are Blake's notions regarding the unity of all things in God, the Divinity in Man, the positive nature of contraries, and the fragmentation caused within and among men by institutionalized religion and its repressive moral codes. Also important are such ideas as the Creation-Fall as an act of Mercy, the association of Imagination with Christ, the "Poetic Genius" as the doorway to Vision, the significance of the Apocalypse, and the occurrence of cycles and phases in human experience. Present in the works, also,

are foreshadowings of personae important in Blake's later writings. The ideas mentioned above are not usually presented in a fully integrated and systematic manner, and in general there is little conscious attempt on Blake's part at reinterpretation of the Bible. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell constitutes a notable exception to these trends. It is in the poet's later works that he integrates and develops such ideas, incorporating them into his myth.

CHAPTER III

BLAKE'S INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

> The Nature of My Work is Visionary or Imaginative; it is an Endeavour to Restore what the Ancients call'd the Golden Age.
> (A Vision of the Last Judgment, p. 605)

An examination of Blake's work discloses the uniqueness of his reading of the Bible. Blake perceives the Scriptures as an account of Man's journey from a Creation-Fall toward Apocalypse and Redemption; thus he invests the course of human history with a special meaning: he associates it with the loss and the eventual restoration of Vision/Imagination among men. Before a discussion of his interpretation of the Creation-Fall, which he links to Man's loss of Vision, and of the Apocalypse and Redemption, which he associates with the regaining of Vision, it is useful to provide an overview of his reading of the Scriptures.

Blake, clearly, does not accept the Bible in its literal sense; he does not believe that a literal reading of the Scriptures reveals the true Divine message or the true will of God. He thus rejects an approach to the Scriptures not uncommon in his age. Literal reading of the Bible had been given an impetus by the growth of Protestantism. The Reformation, in emphasizing the freedom

of the individual to read and interpret the Scriptures, vested authority for religious truth in the Bible as the Word of God rather than in the Church. The Scriptures came to be regarded as the infallible Word of God, and there emerged in orthodox Protestantism a tendency toward literal interpretation of the Bible.[1] In this connection, Wood comments as follows:

> The Protestant Scholastics believed the Bible should be interpreted literally, but not in a bare literal sense. They held that the Bible was clear so far as things necessary to salvation are concerned. The more difficult parts are to be read in the light of the less difficult and in relation to the analogy of faith. But the bare literal interpretation is not sufficient for the Christian reader. True interpretation is possible only to the regenerate, and is impossible without the light of the Holy Spirit.[2]

In Blake's time, literal interpretations of the Bible were not unusual. For example, Millenarians such as Richard Brothers and Joanna Southcott read the Bible in a highly literal sense. Brothers perceived himself as a modern-day prophet and pronounced himself the Nephew of the Almighty who would lead the Hebrews, "visible" and "invisible", to glory.[3] Southcott accepted the Virgin Birth literally and

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[1]Fred G. Bratton, The History of the Bible (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 303-304.

[2]James Wood, The Interpretation of the Bible (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 1958), p. 106.

[3]Morton Paley and Michael Phillips, eds., William Blake: Essays in Honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 273.

designated herself the Virgin who was about to give birth to the new Messiah, Shiloh.[4]

Literal interpretation of the Bible was challenged by others, particularly by the Rationalists. The Enlightenment had led many people to try to base their thinking on human reason rather than on revelation. As a result, a "critical detachment to the holy scripture"[5] was fostered: the Bible was no longer regarded as God's direct word, and authority had to be subjected to rational examination.[6] In this new intellectual climate, the "traditional ideas of infallibility, revelation, and inspiration" were shunted aside in favour of "the objective approach" to the Scriptures.[7] Men like Paine and Voltaire opposed a literal reading of the Bible partly because in their view such an interpretation was biased toward one people, the Hebrews, as is evident for instance in the Old Testament accounts of the massacres of the heathens. The tenor of such thinking was captured clearly in Paine's The Age of Reason in which the author, viewing the Bible as a compendium of blasphemous fables and of revolting accounts

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[4] Ibid., p. 285.

[5] Fritz Stolz, Interpreting the Old Testament (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1974), p. 6.

[6] Ibid., p. 6.

[7] Bratton, op. cit., p. 310.

of human cruelty, contended that God was portrayed as a petty, malevolent tyrant rather than as a Supreme Being worthy of Man's worship.

In general, Blake found the Deist world-view highly repugnant. He objected, for instance, to the Deist conception of a universe functioning through mechanical cause and effect. More importantly, he found quite unacceptable the Deist notion of the First Cause, of a God who created the world and then became remote, inaccessible and impassive. He also objected to the Deist psychology, which assumed Reason to be Man's supreme faculty. His views regarding Deism/Rationalism are forcefully expressed in such works of his as "There Is No Natural Religion", Jerusalem and Europe. While Blake felt little affinity with the Deists, he nevertheless shared their skepticism regarding a literal interpretation of the Bible. His skepticism, however, tended to be based on considerations somewhat different from the Diest concern that all matters be subjected to the test of reason.

In Blake's view, a literal interpretation of the Bible leads to adoption of religious and moral beliefs which result in the making of distinctions among men and ultimately in hostility and disunity among men. At the same time, the true Vision implicit in the Scriptures is ignored. The poet explains:

> The whole Bible is fill'd with Imagination and Visions from End to End and not with Moral Virtues; that is the baseness of Plato and the Greeks and all Warriors. The Moral Virtues are continual Accusers of Sin and promote Eternal Wars and Dominency over others.
>
> ("Annotations to Berkeley's 'Siris'", p. 774)

Blake is interested in the "Eternal Vision" which the Bible might reveal and not simply in allegorical interpretations, since in his opinion allegory might be "seldom without some Vision" but is nevertheless an "inferior kind of Poetry". Blake seeks the permanent truth, the real and lasting message, which is in his view embedded in the Scriptures:

> Fable and Allegory are a totally distinct and inferior kind of Poetry. Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists Really and Unchangeably. Fable or Allegory is Form'd by the daughters of Memory.... Fable is Allegory, but what Critics call The Fable is Vision itself. The Hebrew Bible and the Gospel of Jesus are not Allegory but Eternal Vision of all that Exists. Note here that Fable or Allegory is seldom without some Vision. Pilgrim's Progress is full of it, the Greek Poets the same; but Allegory and Vision ought to be known as two distinct things....
>
> (A Vision of the Last Judgment, p. 604)

Blake's approach to interpreting the Bible is inextricably bound up with his conception of the role of a prophet. He defines a prophet not as one who foretells the future but as any "honest man" who reveals truth. This notion of a prophet is expressed in the following words:

> Prophets in the modern sense of the word, have never existed ... Every honest man is a Prophet; he utters his opinion both of private and public matters. Thus, if you go on So, the result is So. He never says such a thing will happen let you do what you will. A Prophet is a Seer, not an Arbitrary Dictator ...
>
> (Annotations to Watson, p. 392)

Like Aristotle, Blake equates the poet ("vates") with the prophet. For example, when Bacon disparages the "chief doctors and fathers" of "heathen" religion for being poets, Blake underlined "Poets" and added a marginal notation "Prophets",[8] suggesting that he viewed poets and prophets as the same. Again, Isaiah's comments to Blake's narrator in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell reveals Blake's idea of a prophet's inspiration:

> I saw no God, nor hears any, in a finite organical perception; but ... as I was then perswaded and remain confirm'd that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, p. 153)

The preceding quotation indicates that Blake, the poet, also sees himself as a prophet and perceives his role as similar to that of the Hebrew prophets. He terms his America and Europe prophecies even though they were written after the events which they describe have occurred because he sees them as prophecies in the poetic sense, recording the

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[8] Annotations to Bacon, Keynes, p. 399.

eternal pattern of all revolutions. Like Milton, Blake believes that he is inspired in the same way as the prophets. This is stated explicitly in the opening section of Jerusalem:

> Reader! lover of books! lover of heaven
> And of that God from whom all books are given,
> Who in mysterious Sinai's awful cave
> To Man the wondrous art of writing gave:
> Again he speaks in Thunder and in fire!
> Thunder of thought and flames of fierce desire:
> Even from the depths of Hell his voice I hear
> Within the unfathom'd caverns of my Ear.
> Therefore I print; nor vain my types shall be:
> Heaven, Earth and Hell henceforth shall live in harmony.
>
> (Jerusalem, Pl. 3, p. 621)

He feels, however, that under the new dispensation of Christ his work is even more far-reaching than that of the Hebrew prophets, whose work was carried on under the Old Dispensation, and so acknowledges Jesus as the source of his inspiration in the following passages:

> This theme calls me in sleep night after night, and every morn
> Awakes me at sunrise; then I see the Saviour over me
> Spreading his beams of love and dictating the words of this mild song.
>
> (Jerusalem, Pl. 4, ll. 3-5, p. 622)

> O Saviour pour upon me thy Spirit of
> meekness and love!
> Annihilate the Selfhood in me: be thou
> all my life!
> Guide thou my hand which trembles
> exceedingly upon the rock of ages,
> While I write of the building of
> Golgonooza, ...
>
> (Jerusalem, Pl. 5, ll. 21-44, p. 623)

Given this view of himself and the role of the prophet, it is not surprising that Blake rejects blind acceptance of the Bible. He differentiates the Divine character of its purpose, which is in his view the reintegration of men in God, from the human and fallible means - seen most clearly in the imposition of repressive laws and codes - utilized by Man to achieve that purpose. Blake believes that the adoption on his part of a literal interpretation of the Bible would obligate him to accept an evil, punitive and vindictive tradition that worked against the brotherhood of men as characteristic of true Christianity:

> To me who believe the Bible and
> profess myself a Christian, a defence
> of the wickedness of the Israelites in
> murdering so many under the pretence
> of a command from God is altogether
> Abominable and Blasphemeous. Wherefore
> did Christ come? Was it not to abolish
> the Jewish imposture? Was not Christ
> murder'd because he taught that God
> loved all Men and was their father and
> forbad all contention for Worldly
> prosperity in opposition to the Jewish
> Scriptures, which are only an Example
> of the wickedness and deceit of the Jews
> and were written as an Example of the
> possibility of Human Beastliness in all
> its branches?
>
> (Annotations to Watson, p. 387)

In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell he indicts all "Bibles and sacred codes"[9] as being the causes of several errors which mankind mistakenly accepts as truths. In surveying the history of the Hebrews he sees the Jews themselves as an example of the inhumanity and blindness resulting from Laws and Codes. He states in Annotations to Watson:

> .... The Earthquakes at Lisbon etc. were the Natural result of Sin, but the destruction of the Caanites by Joshua was the Unnatural design of wicked men. To Extirpate a nation by means of another nation is as wicked as to destroy an individual, which God considers (in the Bible) as Murder and commands that it shall not be done....
>
> (Annotations to Watson, p. 388)

Blake notes also that:

> The Bible or Peculiar Word of God Exclusive of Conscience or the Word God, is that Abomination which, like the Jewish ceremonies, is forever removed and henceforth every man may converse with God and be king and Priest in his own house.
>
> (Annotations to Watson, p. 389)

Blake claims also that:

> The Laws of Jews were (both ceremonial and real) the basest and most oppressive of human codes and being like all other codes given under the pretence of Divine command were what Christ pronounced them, The Abomination that maketh desolate, i.e. State Religion which is the source of Cruelty.
>
> (Annotations to Watson, p. 393)

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[9] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Keynes, Pl. 4, p. 149.

Finally, he condemns both Jews and Christians for assuming exclusive rights to the benefits of God:

> That the Jews assumed a right
> Exclusively to the benefits of God will
> be a lasting witness against them and
> the same will it be against Christians.
>
> (Annotations to Watson, p. 389)

As the following quotations show, Blake perceives the Bible as a visionary document:

> The Jewish and Christian Testaments
> are An Original derivation of the Poetic
> Genius.
>
> ("All Religions Are One", p. 98);

> The Hebrew Bible and the Greek
> Gospel are Genuine [Vision].
>
> (A Vision of the Last Judgment, p. 605)

It is this complete "Vision", without encrusted errors, that he attempts to present in a distilled form in the Lambeth books[10] and in his aborted epic, The Four Zoas. He regards the Bible as a product of Inspiration which shows Man working out his destiny as he proceeds from the Creation-Fall toward Apocalypse and Redemption. The Bible is therefore the entire history of Man in this world, the "woof of Six Thousand Years":

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[10]The Lambeth books consist of America, Europe, The Song of Los, The Book of Urizen, The Book of Ahania and The Book of Los. They are so designated because they were written while Blake lived in Lambeth and bear the "Lambeth" imprint.

> Then as a Moony Ark Ololon descended
> to Felpham's Vale
> In clouds of blood, in streams of gore,
> with dreadful thunderings
> Into the Fires of Intellect that rejoic'd
> in Felpham's Vale
> Around the Starry Eight; with one accord
> the Starry Eight became
> One Man, Jesus the Saviour, wonderful!
> round his limbs
> The Clouds of Ololon folded as a Garment
> dipped in blood,
> Written within and without in woven letters,
> and the Writing
> Is the Divine Revelation in the Litteral
> expression,
> A Garment of War. I heard it nam'd the
> Woof of Six Thousand Years.[11]
>
> (Milton, 42, ll. 7-15, p. 534)

While the preceding quotation refers to the achievement of Vision/Imagination by an individual, Milton, at another level it simultaneously relates to the entire history of Man's quest for Vision. It is at the latter level that Blake reads the Bible as a whole. For Blake, a "correct" reading of the Bible shows how Man secures the means of achieving Vision/Imagination and thus of seeing conventional beliefs regarding Creation, Judgment and Redemption as Errors. It reveals how Man might obtain the means to "Foresee and Avoid/The terrors of Creation and Redemption

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[11]The "Starry Eight" refers to the Eight Eyes of God. The Seven Eyes represent the entire course of human thought in the search for an ideal to guide life. The Eighth Eye is added by Blake to represent the Individual, who is necessary to complete the integration of God and Man. The incident described in the quotation above describes Milton's union with his Emanation. Love and wisdom are combined; the Starry Eight become Jesus, and Jesus becomes one with mankind. See S. Foster Damon, A Blake Dictionary (Boulder: Shambhala, 1979), pp. 134; 307-308.

and Judgment ... ."[12] In Blake's view, the Bible discloses that "Man Can only Reject Error ... by Immediate Inspiration of God...",[13] so that the vehicles of such Inspiration are the prophets and Christ. This line of thought apparently leads Blake to the conclusion that the Bible is in part a record not only of the failure of the Jews but of Man to recognize and accept Truth/Vision/Imagination, even though glimpses of these were given to him by the prophets and Christ clearly showed him the way to achieve them.

Blake appears to reinterpret Biblical material in two main ways to emphasize the theme of Man's resistance to Vision/Imagination. First, he uses shorter periods or cycles of Jewish history to symbolize the loss and recovery of Vision. Second, he seems to suggest that simultaneously the Bible as a whole represents a movement, through such cycles or periods of Jewish history, from the impairment of Vision at the Creation-Fall to its restoration in the Apocalypse and Redemption which occur through Christ.

The history of the Jews shows a cyclical pattern which repeats itself until the fall of Jerusalem. This

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[12] Jerusalem, Keynes, Pl. 92, ll. 19-20, p. 739.

[13] A Vision of the Last Judgment, Keynes, p. 614.

pattern is summarized in the words of Joshua 23: 15-16 who says to the Israelites:

> Therefore it shall come to pass that as all good things are come upon you, which the Lord your God promised you; so shall the Lord bring upon you all evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord God hath given you.
>
> When ye have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them; then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the land which he hath given unto you.

The history of the Hebrews is a repetition of periods of prosperity and peace followed by transgressions, apostasy and regressions and by periods of decadence which evoke the hot anger of Jehovah who, as punishment, delivers the Hebrews into the hands of their enemies. When oppression becomes unbearable, the Hebrews repent and plead with the Lord to help them. He sends a deliverer who defeats or subdues the oppressor and brings peace and prosperity once more to the Israelites, following which the cycle begins again. Blake sees in this cyclical pattern not simply a rise and fall of nations but the rise and fall of Imagination. The cyclical pattern of the history of the Jews reflects the Orc cycle which is made quite explicit in such works as <u>The Mental Traveller</u> and "The Grey Monk". In the Orc cycle, the spirit of revolution or change brings about a rekindling of Imagination which is reflected in the pursuit of new

social ideals; but in the course of events Vision is lost and the movement for change becomes consolidated in a new repressive social order. Then the cycle recurs, true Vision being possible only through Christ the Saviour. In "The Grey Monk", for example, Blake makes the point that the challenge to tyranny in the absence of true Vision results simply in a vicious circle in which overthrow of the old tyranny leads to establishment of a new:

> The hand of Vengeance found the Bed
> To which the Purple Tyrant fled;
> The iron hand crush'd the Tyrant's head
> And became a Tyrant in his stead.
> ("The Grey Monk", ll. 33-36, p. 431)

The occurrence of the Orc cycle implies failure and tragedy because "all imaginative efforts are bound to a wheel of time, which in turn is imprisoned in a wheel of space".[14] In the fallen world, in other words, Man is imprisoned by Time and Space and therefore has only glimpses of Vision, whereas in the unfallen world Vision is eternal. Blake does not believe that the repetitions of cycles are useless, however. He sees them as a path of Experience established by the Divine Mercy for the individual to achieve Vision. Though the individual, like Orc, declines, his "imaginative achievements" reach their zenith in a single form (symbolized by the "Female Babe" in "The Mental Traveller") and this

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[14]Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake, Princeton Paperback Edition (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 229.

form is used by other "imaginations" in another cycle to help them move progressively closer to reintegration with the Divine one.[15] Besides this, every cycle affords the individual of each new generation the opportunity of achieving that glimpse of Eternity which can help Man to free himself from the bondage of the cycle of time and regain his highest state. The nature of this ideal state, in which all things are married, is captured by Blake in the following lines:

> The trees bring forth sweet Extacy
> To all who in the desert roam;
> Till many a city there is built,
> And many a pleasant Shepherd's home.
>
> ("The Mental Traveller", ll. 89-92, p. 427)

To Blake, the prophets are the instruments through whom these glimpses of Vision/Imagination are repeatedly brought to Man in the cycles of history. The prophets' mission was that of uncovering the errors that blurred or suppressed true Vision. In this connection, Marqusee observes:

> The Hebrew prophets were never the upholders of law and order that the established church made them out to be. Theirs was "the voice of honest indignation," which Blake insisted was "the voice of God." Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel had defended human industry against the exploitation of war-makers. Time

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[15] Ibid., p. 229

> and again they had spoken out against the usurpation by kings of privileges that belonged to God alone. Blake understood them as Republicans of the spirit, attacking that religion in which "God is only an allegory of Kings." By their symbolic actions they sought to "raise men to a perception of the Infinite" which was hidden from them by the mysteries of "State Religion."[16]

Such "symbolic actions" would include, for example, Hosea's repeated forgiving of his unfaithful wife, which signifies the transcending of established restrictive laws and codes by the more inclusive principle of love and forgiveness, as well as Jeremiah's purchase of the field at Anathoth in the face of impending subjugation, which signifies the preservation of Vision for a later rebirth.

That Blake sees the prophets as agents through whom Man is brought glimpses of Vision in each cycle is evident from the roles in which he casts the prophets in his works. In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, for example, the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel are in reality spokesmen for Blake who presents his notion that the Poetic Genius or Vision is the "first principle"[17] which enables Man to perceive the Infinite. These prophets are also utilized by Blake to justify apparently eccentric acts and ordeals

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[16]William Blake, The Book of Job Illustrated by William Blake. Ed. Michael Marqusee (London: Paddington Press Ltd., 1976), p. 6.

[17]The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Keynes, Pl. 12-13, p. 153.

employed as means of drawing attention to visionary truths. This role of the prophets, their role as spokesmen for Blake, is evident in the exchange between Isaiah and Blake's narrator:

> I also asked Isaiah what made him go naked and barefoot three years? he answer'd: 'the same that made our friend Diogenes, the Grecian'.
>
> I then asked Ezekiel why he eat dung, and lay so long on his right and left side? he answer'd, 'the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite: this the North American tribes practise, and is he honest who resists his genius or conscience only for the sake of present ease or gratification.
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, p. 154)

Blake also refers to prophets as men who have influenced him, implying that they are in possession of Vision. In a letter to John Flaxman, for instance, he names Ezra and Isaiah as important sources of inspiration in his life. Again, Blake presents prophets as individuals who preserve the glimmerings of Vision that they achieve. For example, there are references in Blake's writing to Abraham's departure from "Chaldea". In Jerusalem, the poet writes: "As Abraham flees from Chaldea shaking his goary locks";[18] while in "The Song of Los" he states: "Abram fled in fires

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[18] Jerusalem, Keynes, Pl. 15, l. 28, p. 636.

from Chaldea".[19] These are allusions to Abraham's abandonment of the Druidic religion involving human sacrifice and to his attempt to preserve the Vision he had achieved. Abraham establishes a new religion which constitutes one step toward the achievement of true Vision by Man. Indeed, Blake credits Abraham and David with an awareness of the Divinity in Man; he observes that Plato and Aristotle "consider'd God as abstracted or distinct from the Imaginative World, but Jesus, also Abraham and David, consider'd God as a Man in the Spiritual or Imaginative Vision."[20] In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, also, Blake sees the prophet-king David as possessing and preserving the Poetic Genius or Vision. In this work, as a result, Ezekiel, who is actually speaking for Blake, states:

> ... we of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius (as you now call it) was the first principle and all the others merely derivative, which was the cause of our despising the Priests and Philosophers of other countries, and prophecying that all Gods would at last be proved to originate in ours and to be the tributaries of the Poetic Genius; it was this that our great poet King David desired so fervently and invokes so pathetic'ly, saying by this he conquers enemies and governs kingdoms; ... .
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, p. 153)

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[19]"The Song of Los", Keynes, Pl. 3, l. 16, p. 245.

[20]"Annotations to Berkeley's 'Siris'", Keynes, p. 774.

Furthermore, the writings of Joshua, Samuel, David and other prophets are linked by Blake to the tabernacle built by Los to protect the latent Vision in the fallen Albion from complete disintegration:

> ... and the merciful Saviour in his arms
> Reciev'd him, in the arms of tender mercy, and repos'd
> The pale limbs of his Eternal Individuality
> Upon the Rock of Ages. Then, surrounded with a Cloud,
> In silence the Divine Lord builded with immortal labour,
> Of gold and jewels, a sublime Ornament, a couch of Repose
> With Sixteen pillars, canopied with emblems and written verse,
> Spiritual Verse, order'd and measur'd: from whence time shall reveal
> The Five books of the Decalogue: the books of Joshua and Judges,
> Samuel, a double book, and Kings, a double book, the Psalms and Prophets,
> The Four-fold Gospel, and the Revelations everlasting.
>
> (Jerusalem, Plate 48, ll. 2-11, p. 677)

In light of the foregoing discussion, it seems reasonable to suggest that Blake perceives in the prophets' messages indications of the possible regaining of true Vision by Man. The Old Testament concludes with the defeat of Israel under Zedekiah; the old Jerusalem is sacked by Nebuchadrezzar and the Temple is burnt. From his prison and in the midst of his degradation, however, Jeremiah still speaks of a "branch" of David who will come and re-establish a new Jerusalem (the Lost Imagination). It is important to note that all the later prophets, such as

Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel and Habbakuk, focus on the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of a new Jerusalem. The Biblical history of the Jews is ultimately completed in the New Testament. The Jews' struggle (Fallen Man's struggle) is completed by the Incarnation of Jesus, and Man's achievement of his goal and his reintegration with the Divine One - his regaining of Imagination - is in Blake's view symbolized by the destruction of the Whore of Babylon and the establishment of a new Jerusalem. The parallel of these events occurs in Jerusalem when the Whore of Babylon, Blake's "Hidden Harlot",[21] is absorbed into the Covering Cherub which is symbolic of Error in institutionalized religion. Jerusalem lies "hidden within the Covering Cherub"[22] and is revealed when the Covering Cherub along with Rahab is destroyed. A New Jerusalem emerges characterized by the unity of all things in God:

> All Human Forms identified, even Tree,
> Metal, Earth and Stone: all
> Human Forms identified, living, going
> forth and returning wearied
> Into the Planetary lives of Years, Months,
> Days and Hours; reposing,
> And then Awaking into his Bosom in the
> Life of Immortality.
> And I heard the Name of their Emanations:
> they are named Jerusalem.
>
> (Jerusalem, Plate 99, ll. 1-5, p. 747)

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[21] Jerusalem, Keynes, Pl. 89, l. 53, p. 735.

[22] Ibid., l. 44, p. 735.

The history of Man, which Blake sees in the history of the Jews, is also reflected in his aborted epic, The Four Zoas.

It might also be suggested that through his paintings, drawings and etchings Blake attempts to emphasize the fluctuations of Vision/Imagination in the course of human history. He appears to select subjects which might be seen as symbolizing the loss, the recovery or the preservation of Vision. The wise and foolish virgins of his painting, for example, are probably intended to represent, respectively, the preservation and loss of Vision. The depiction of Joseph in Egypt might well symbolize the preservation of Imagination in the midst of a society that had lost it. The scene in which the Pharoah's daughter finds the baby Moses perhaps represents the recovery of Vision. In this regard, Beer observes that Blake creates "designs which illustrate biblical events in a way which could be regarded as illustrating the decline and ultimate recovery of 'human vision'".[23] He cites Blake's painting of Noah creating the Ark as symbolic of the preservation of human vision, that of Joshua conquering a city accompanied by the Ark of the Covenant as representing the preservation of Vision, and that of the supper at Emmaus as symbolizing the attainment of Vision.

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[23]John Beer, Blake's Visionary Universe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), p. 31.

In keeping with his interpretation of the Bible, it is quite likely that Blake sees the teachings of the later prophets as indicative of progress toward the regaining of Imagination. Earlier books of the Bible had depicted God as a jealous deity and an angry potentate, commanding the murder of women and children. This deity was at first worshipped through human sacrifice, which under Abraham was replaced by the sacrifice of animals as an atonement for sin. The God of Moses was a tribal deity, the protector of the Hebrews. Entering the Promised Land, the Hebrews conquered the Caanites but soon the worship of Jehovah became confused with that of Baal, the agricultural deity of the Caanites. The Hebrew religion therefore became syncretistic. Later, Elijah established the supremacy of Jehovah over Baal and recalled the Hebrews to the worship of Jehovah. The teachings of the later prophets are perhaps viewed by Blake as evidence of an evolving conception of God, of a God increasingly concerned with the individual instead of the nation only, a God of forgiveness and compassion, an emergent universal God. This evolving conception is evident in Jeremiah where the prophet perceived God as a Being with whom the individual could commune, in Hosea where that prophet taught that Jehovah was a God of mercy and forgiveness, and in Habbakuk where the prophet's emotions were stirred by the sufferings of <u>both</u> Israelites and the other victims of

the Chaldean rapacity. It is also apparent in Jonah where the prophet saw God, not as bestowing favour exclusively upon Israel, but as using it to further his purpose for all mankind and where he viewed God as the universal Lord whose compassion is extended to heathen nations like Niveveh. It is also seen in Isaiah 56: 1-8, where Jerusalem was pictured by the prophet as the centre of the universe to which all nations would come and where foreigners who kept the sabbath were seen being admitted to the Temple, a house of prayer for all people. Isaiah 45: 22, too, reports that "Trito-Isaiah" also heard Jehovah proclaiming "Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends / of the earth:..." In the same vein, Zechariah 2: 10-13; 8: 1-3; 14: 9 records that Zechariah looked forward to a time when nations would be joined in Jehovah, while in Zephaniah 3: 9-10 Zephaniah spoke of people from beyond Ethiopia bringing offerings to Jehovah and worshipping him. This newer conception of God is clearly manifested in Hosea, who preaches of a God of love, pity, compassion and forgiveness. This marks a significant change from the older Jewish vision of Jehovah, which emphasized a God pre-occupied with the maintenance of law and the dispensation of justice.

From Blake's perspective, an emergent conception of unified Man in close relationship with God is evident in such events. God is being perceived less as a tyrannical

father and more as a compassionate, loving brother, a conception of God which is closer to Blake's as it is presented in the following lines:

> Where has thou hidden thy Emanation,
> lovely Jerusalem,
> From the vision and frution of the Holy
> One?
> I am not a God afar off, I am a brother
> and friend,
> Within your bosoms I reside and you in
> me:
> Lo! We are one forgiving all Evil, Not
> seeking recompense.
> Ye are my members, ...
>
> (Jerusalem, Pl. 4, ll. 16-21, p. 622)

The idea of Man integrated with God is important to Blake. In Jerusalem, for example, he indicates the importance of recognizing the unity of Man in God:

> He who would see the Divinity must see
> him in his Children
> One must first in friendship and love,
> and then a Divine Family, and in
> the midst
> Jesus will appear.
>
> (Jerusalem, Pl. 91, ll. 19-21, p. 738)

As is evident in such works as Milton, "The Everlasting Gospel" and The Four Zoas, however, Blake believes that emphasis on the worth of the individual is a crucial element in the outlook possessed by unified Man. He sees each individual as unique. For example, he writes in Milton that "Everyman's Wisdom is peculiar to his own Individuality".[24]

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[24] Milton, Keynes, 4, l. 8, p. 483.

He accepts also that individuals must be valued for whatever talents they possess since these are manifestations of the Divinity in Man. He notes in Jerusalem:

> Go tell them that the Worship of God
> is honouring his gifts
> In other men: loving the greatest
> men best, each according
> To his Genius: which is the Holy
> Ghost in Man, ...
>
> (Jerusalem, Pl. 91, ll. 8-10, p. 738)

Given his emphasis on the worth of the individual and the brotherhood of Man in God, Blake no doubt attaches substantial weight to the prophets' awareness of Jehovah's concern for the individual, perhaps regarding it as an additional step toward their recognition of the Divinity of Man.

In his attempt to reinterpret the Bible Blake rejects not the Bible but what he deems errors encrusted on or mixed with the true Word of God. The Bible he regards as the medium through which God's dealings with recalcitrant man are recorded. He would no doubt agree with Bratton that the writers of the Bible were attuned to the spirit of God and "had an unusual spiritual genius in their grasp of reality."[25] They were able to express eternal truths that can inspire mankind anytime and anywhere. Since these writers were human, however, they were capable of

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[25]Bratton, op. cit., p. 6.

error.[26] Also in keeping with his unusual interpretation of the Bible, Blake regards the prophets not simply as men but as States, or phases, in Man's progress toward the achievement of complete Vision:

> It ought to be understood that the Persons, Moses and Abraham, are not here meant, but the States signified by these Names, the Individuals being representatives or Visions of those States as they were reveal'd to Mortal Man in the series of Divine Revelations as they are written in the Bible; these various States I have seen in my Imagination; when distant they appear as One Man, but as you approach they appear Multitudes of Nations.
>
> (A Vision of the Last Judgment, p. 607)

He further regards States as being eternal in the sense that they transcend the existence of individual men:

> Man passes on but States remain for Ever; he passes thro' them like a Traveller who may as well suppose that the places he has passed thro' exist no more, as Man may suppose that the States he pass'd thro' Exist no more. Everything is Eternal.
>
> (A Vision of the Last Judgment, p. 606)

Furthermore, Blake's reading of the Bible enables him to see beyond the narrow confines of interpretations adopted and espoused by the Jews and established Christianity. Thus he recognizes the Bible as "... Eternal Vision or Imagination of all that Exists"[27] and the Hebrews as the nation that preserved Vision or Imagination by believing

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[26] Ibid., p. 6.

[27] A Vision of the Last Judgment, Keynes, p. 604.

"the Poetic Genius to be the first Principle and all others merely derivative".[28] As he states in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell:

> Then Ezekiel said: The Philosophy of the east taught the first principles of human perception: some nations held one principle for the origin and some another: We of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius (as you now call it) was the first principle and all others merely derivative, which was the cause of our despising the Priests and Philosophers of other countries, and prophesying that all Gods would at last be proved to originate in ours and to be tributaries of the Poetic Genius....
>
> (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, p. 153)

Blake acknowledges, however, that other nations also have at times been receptive to the "Poetic Genius". In "All Religions Are One" he states that:

> The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nation's different reception of the Poetic Genius, which is everywhere called the Spirit of Prophecy.
>
> The Jewish and Christian Testaments are an original derivation from the Poetic Genius; this is necessary from the confined nature of bodily sensation.
>
> As all men are alike (tho' infinitely various), So all Religions, and all similars, have one source.
>
> The true Man is the Source, he being the Poetic Genius.
>
> ("All Religions Are One", p. 98)

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[28] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Keynes, Pl. 12-13, p. 153.

Blake recognizes the sacred writings of all nations to be equally inspired because they are the product of the Poetic Genius and not of the reason or moral sense. He is careful to differentiate between Inspiration and memory as is seen when he denounces the Greek and Roman writings which he views as imitation of Eastern originals. He feels that, during their transmission, a corruption or adulteration of the original vision through the imposition of morality and reason occurred. In A Vision of the Last Judgment Blake refers to

> ... The Greek Muses, which are not Inspiration as the Bible is. Reality was Forgot, and the Vanities of Time and Space only Remember'd and call'd Reality. Such is the Mighty difference between Allegoric Fable and Spiritual Mystery. Let it here be Noted that the Greek Fables originated in Spiritual Mystery and Real Visions, which are lost and clouded in Fable and Allegory, while the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Gospel are Genuine, Preserv'd by the Saviour's Mercy.
>
> (A Vision of the Last Judgment, p. 605)

Blake views the prophets as leading the way to the attainment of Vision by Man, and it is this Vision toward which the prophets point the way that he seeks to communicate in most of his works but particularly in his major and minor prophecies. His works are an attempt to provide a history of Man without the distortions imposed by priests and institutionalized religion. His works are also an attempt to show that the Imagination, the moving force in the Bible

as Blake understands it, is the most important faculty of Man and God; it is the link between God and Man:

> The Eternal Body of Man is Imagination, that is God Himself ..., Jesus: we are his Members. The Divine Body.
> ("The Laocoon", p. 776)

It will be seen when his interpretation of the Creation-Fall, Apocalypse and Redemption is examined in the following chapters that Blake also simultaneously contrasts the Imagination with one of its "enemies", institutionalized religion, showing that when the latter is substituted for the Imagination it becomes dangerous to humanity - it is "opposed to visions of Imagination".[29] It will also be found that Blake's reading of the Bible accommodates the visionary truths of many nations in addition to those of the Hebrews and orthodox Christians. The result is an unconventional Christian religion but at the same time a universal religion which is perhaps the true vision or spirit of the Bible. Blake's The Everlasting Gospel especially will reveal the truth which in his view lies embedded in the Bible: the replacement of the fragmentation arising from an obsessive concern with law, justice and moral codes in the Old Testament by reintegration through the love and forgiveness exemplified in Christ. It is the recognition of the Divinity in each man, which

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[29] Jerusalem, Keynes, Pl. 74, l. 26, p. 715.

comes through love and forgiveness, that will lead to the reunification of creation and the reintegration of Creator and creature. A survey of Blake's treatment of the Creation-Fall, Apocalypse and Redemption is necessary for a comprehension of Blake's unique vision. First, his interpretation of the Creation-Fall will be examined.

CHAPTER IV

THE CREATION AND FALL MYTHS

> Falling, falling! Los fell and fell
> Sunk precipitant heavy down down
> Times on times, night on night, day on day
> Truth has bounds. Error none: falling,
> falling.
>
> (The Book of Los, 4, ll. 27-30, p. 258)

A comparison of Blake's Creation-Fall myth with the Genesis account of the Creation and the Fall reveals that Blake is once more reading the Bible in "its infernal or diabolical sense".[1] Unlike conventional Christianity, which sees the Creation as the work of one God, Blake depicts Creation as the act of two distinct agents. Each of these agents is a fallen and fragmented God, and the efforts of each in the Creation produce further fragmentation. In presenting his version of the Creation, Blake is suggesting that the Creation described in the Bible should not be read as producing a perfect world. Indeed, in view of the fragmentation and disharmony it involved, it was simply a stage in the Fall. The present chapter discusses Blake's interpretation of the Creation-Fall.

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[1] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Keynes, Pl. 22-24, p. 158.

Blake, in his interpretation of the Creation and Fall described in the Book of Genesis, departs from the conception of the Creator commonly adopted in Christianity. As writers like Simon, Astruc and Eichorn have shown, the Bible contains two separate and varying accounts of the Creation, each with its distinctive style, vocabulary and point of view as well as its own name for the Creator.[2] The first account of the Creation, referred to as the Priestly account, is found in Genesis 1-2:4a ("In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.... These are the generations of the heaven and of the earth when they were created, ..."). The second account, referred to as the Jahwist account, is found in Genesis 2: 4b-25 ("...in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, ... And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."). The two distinct narrative accounts embody two antithetical conceptions of the Creator. The Priestly account names its Creator "Elohim", which is a generic name ("Judges"), while the Jahwist account names the Creator "Jahweh", which is a proper name. Furthermore, "Elohim" is a concept while "Jahweh" is a person. The style of the P-account is:

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[2]See Fred G. Bratton, A History of the Bible (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), pp. 106-108.

> ... precise, repetitive, and largely abstract and its austere description of the Creation seems prosaic beside J's [the Jahwist's] striking anthropomorphisms.[3]

Also, P's point of view is that of the Creator "looking down from some remote position in space";[4] whereas the Jahwist's account, which is "vivid and pictorial",[5] reveals a Creator who is more human than divine. Furthermore, J's point of view is that of the Creature not the Creator. P views the Creator as the author of the universe who creates by expression of His Will whereas the Jahwist's Creator fashions man from earth with his own hands, "breathes life into his nostrils, plants the garden of Eden, walks in it,"[6] converses with Adam and Eve after they have sinned and banishes them from the garden. Unlike P's creator, J's God is not omniscient; he appears to be jealous and fearful (He denies Adam and Eve knowledge and he seems to be fearful of their eating of the tree of life and becoming like Him.). Indeed, J's Creator is the complete antithesis of P's monotheistic and transcendental God who is portrayed as creating the world and mankind not through direct contact

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[3] J.M. Evans, Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 11.

[4] Ibid., p. 11.

[5] Ibid., p. 11.

[6] Ibid., p. 14.

with it but through His Divine fiat: "Let there be....". P's Creator creates the world first and finally man and woman who are both created together. J's Creator "forms" man first, and afterwards, because man is lonely, makes the woman out of the man's rib. P's Creator is associated with Justice and the Law; it is He who issues edicts to Adam and Eve and punishes them when they disobey. He comes later to be associated with the Laws and Codes of Moses. J's Creator, on the other hand, is linked to Mercy. For example, He pities Adam because of his loneliness and creates Eve to be his companion. The styles of J and P differ also: P's is formal, precise, orderly and repetitive whereas J's is poetical, imaginative, spontaneous and vivid. It might also be noted that in J's account the writer focuses on the nature of man which is shown to have two sides, a higher and a lower; on the one hand he is related to God who breather the breath of life into him and on the other he is connected with the material world for he is made of the dust of the earth.

Christian writers have continually tried to reconcile these two accounts and their differing portrayals of God.[7] This attempt is evident, for example, in those medieval mystery plays which incorporated "the traditional debate

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[7] Ibid., pp. 232-34.

of Justice and Mercy over Adam before the throne of God",[8] as well as in the medieval hymn "O felix culpa", which shows God to be both just and merciful.[9] A similar attempt is made in Milton's Paradise Lost in which the poet seeks to reconcile a Just with a Merciful God:

> O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
> That all this good of evil shall produce,
> And evil turn to good; more wonderful
> Than that which by creation first brought forth
> Light out of darkness![10]

These lines refer to God's dispensing of Justice for Adam's disobedience while also extending Mercy by promising Man redemption through the sacrifice of His Son.

Blake seeks no such reconciliation. He conceives of the Creation-Fall as the work of two separate male agents, Urizen and Los, who seem to be parallels of the Elohim and the Jahweh, respectively, of the Book of Genesis. The attributes of the Elohim are reflected in Urizen. For example, Urizen is portrayed as the God of Reason, as the Lawgiver, and is therefore akin to P's Elohim. On the other hand, Los, who adds the human form to the Creation by fashioning Urizen's human body, is the

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[8] John Milton, Complete Poems and Major Prose, Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1957), p. 175.

[9] Ibid., p. 175.

[10] Ibid., Paradise Lost, Book XII, ll. 469-73, p. 465.

parallel of the anthropomorphic Yahweh who has the shortcomings of a human being. Neither Urizen nor Los is a complete or unified God, and in depicting the Creation as the work of flawed Beings Blake is able to invert the conventional Christian interpretation of the Genesis Creation.

The orthodox Christian interpretation of the Creation is that it was a good act, since it resulted in a perfect world. This view of the Creation is captured in Satan's soliloquy in Milton's Paradise Lost as Satan sees the newly created world for the first time. He says, for instance:

> O Earth, how like to Heav'n, if not preferred
> More justly, Seat worthier of Gods, as built
> With second thoughts, reforming what was old!
> For what God after better worse would build?[11]

According to the conventional view of the Creation, Man was initially perfect and had no knolwedge of Evil. Complete harmony existed between God and Man, and Man was free to enjoy this Eden so long as he obeyed the edicts of his Creator.

From the point of view of the Jahwist as well as the orthodox Christian, the Fall occurred after the Creation,

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[11] Ibid., Paradise Lost, Book IX, ll. 99-102, p. 381.

taking place when Man disobeyed his Creator's command to refrain from eating of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil".[12] Unlike conventional Christians, however, Blake does not see the Creation as separate from and preceding the Fall. For him the Creation was one of several phases in the fall of the God-Man from perfection. An important part of the God-Man's history had occurred before the Creation:

> Many suppose that before the Creation
> All was Solitude and Chaos. This is
> the most pernicious Idea that can
> enter the Mind, as it takes away all
> sublimity from the Bible and Limits
> All Existence to Creation and to Chaos
> To the Time and Space fixed by the
> Corporeal Vegetative Eye.
>
> (A Vision of the Last Judgment, p. 614)

Blake further states that Man's "History Preceded that of the Hebrews and in whose Sleep, or Chaos, Creation began."[13] Indeed, in The Four Zoas, Night IV, Creation is shown as the last stage in the Fall when humanity is given a recognizable form and the cycle of fallen life (Adam) and death (Satan) is established as an "act of Mercy"[14] so as to prevent the complete annihilation of the fallen God-Man. An examination of the structure of The Four Zoas reveals the various steps and the course of the Fall. The aborted epic begins in

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[12] Genesis 2: 17.

[13] A Vision of the Last Judgment, Keynes, p. 609.

[14] Ibid., p. 614.

medias res: Albion (God-Man) has already fallen and his "Zoas" or faculties have become disrupted. Night I begins with the fall of Tharmas, the Zoa who represents the physical senses. Night II deals with the fall of Luvah, the Zoa of Love; Night III with the fall of Urizen; Night IV with the establishment of the "Circle of Destiny",[15] the cycle of fallen life (Adam) and death (Satan); Night V with the Orc cycle; Night VI with Urizen's exploration of his dens, and Night VII with the crucifixion of Orc. An examination of the accounts of the Creation in the Book of Genesis reveals that the process of creation is also one of division: there is a division of light from darkness; then a division of the sky and earth, followed by a division of earth and water; the separation of man from God; the division of the sexes; the distinction between good and evil after the eating of the fruit, and the emergence of joy and sorrow after expulsion from the Garden of Eden. This theme of fragmentation is further emphasized in the whole of the Book of Genesis. There are accounts of the separation of brothers; for example, Cain is divided from Abel, Jacob from Esau, Isaac from Ishmael, Abraham from Lot, and Joseph from his brothers. In addition, there occurs the Creator's division of the people of Babel who

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[15]The term "Circle of Destiny" is introduced by Blake in The Four Zoas, Night I, Keynes, l. 74, l. 101, pp. 266-67.

attempted in vain to gain divinity. Whereas a conventional interpretation of the Bible is that these events are the doings of God and are therefore acceptable, Blake sees in them continued fragmentation and thus evidence of the further fall of the God-Man.

Blake presents his Creation as the act of fragmented and fallen Gods. In The Book of Urizen, he shows that Urizen's fall actually commenced before the Creation and that the God-Man had already lost his divine Vision at the time of the Creation. At first the Eternals or the Divine Family, consisting of all who had achieved Vision or Imagination, lived in complete harmony. The Zoas of each were in a state of perfect balance, and the Eternals acted and perceived as One Man. They possessed Vision or Imagination, recognizing the unity of all things in God.[16] In Jerusalem, these qualities are described as follows:

> Mutual in one another's love and wrath
> all renewing
> We live as One Man; for contracting
> our infinite senses
> We behold multitude, or expanding,
> we behold as one,
> As One Man all the Universal Family,
> and that One Man
> We call Jesus the Christ; and he in
> us, and we in him
> Live in perfect harmony in Eden, the
> land of life,
> Giving, recieving, and forgiving each
> other's trespasses.
>
> (Jerusalem, Plate 38, ll. 16-22, pp. 664-65)

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[16]See S. Foster Damon, A Blake Dictionary (Boulder: Shambhala Publications Inc., 1979), p. 105.

The first stage of the Fall occurred when the harmony among the Eternals was disrupted by Urizen, who was motivated by "foul ambition".[17] As the opening lines of the preludium to The Book of Urizen show, the other Eternals joined forces to expel Urizen from the Divine Family:

> Of the primeval Priest's assum'd power,
> When Eternals spurn'd back his religion
> And gave him a place in the north,
> Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary.
>
> (The Book of Urizen, Plate 2, ll. 1-4, p. 222)

Los, still an Eternal, opposed Urizen's tyrannical plans so as to prevent further disintegration of the original unity. On his part, Urizen became a fragmented or divided God controlled only by Reason, since he was separated from Los (Imagination):

> Los, wept, howling around the dark Demon,
> And cursing his lot; for in anguish
> Urizen was rent from his sides,
> And a fathomless void for his feet,
> And intense fires for his dwelling.
>
> (The Book of Urizen, Plate 6, ll. 2-6, p. 226)

To contain Urizen so that he did no further damage to the Divine Family Los imprisoned Urizen in a physical body which was the human form, the result being that his eternal life "like a dream was obliterated".[18] Since Urizen had

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[17] The Four Zoas, Night IV, Keynes, l. 141, p. 301.

[18] The Book of Urizen, Keynes, Pl. 13, l. 34, p. 230.

been an Eternal, however, he retained a part of his Divinity. As Frye observes, the God-Man preserved "part of his divine nature"[19] and consequently the potential for regaining the lost Vision or Imagination. Unlike the Genesis tradition, which depicts Man as being perfect at his Creation, Blake portrays the God-Man (the fallen Urizen in his human form) as imperfect but with the capacity to regain his original unity with the Eternals.

The Fall continued as Los came under the influence of the fallen Urizen. Los, seeing the fallen God imprisoned, felt pity for him, and his sympathy for Urizen (Reason) led to further fragmentation:

> The globe of life blood trembled
> Branching out into roots,
> Fibrous, writhing upon the winds,
> Fibres of blood, milk and tears.
> In pangs, eternity upon eternity.
> At length in tears and cries imbodied,
> A female form, trembling and pale,
> Waves before his deathly face.
>
> (The Book of Urizen, Pl. 18, ll. 1-7, p. 231)

This fragmentation resulted in the emergence of Enitharmon in the female form. The formation of Enitharmon is paralleled in the Bible by the creation of Eve out of Adam's body. Indeed, in The Four Zoas Blake casts her in the role of Eve

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[19] Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 41.

partaking of the apple and tempting Los to do the same.[20] Whereas in the Bible God's act in creating Eve as a companion for Adam is seen as praiseworthy, the emergence of Enitharmon is viewed by Blake in a highly negative light:

> All Eternity shudder'd at sight
> Of the first female now separate,
> Pale as a cloud of snow
> Waving before the face of Los
>
> Wonder, awe, fear, astonishment
> Petrify the eternal myriads
> At the first female form now separate.
>
> (The Book of Urizen, Plate 18, ll. 9-15, p. 231)

Blake sees in the birth of Enitharmon only further disunity and a continuation of the Fall. Reunification with the Eternals became more remote as they separated themselves further from the fallen Gods:

> Spread a Tent with strong curtains
> around them.
> Let cords and stakes bind in the
> Void,
> That Eternals may no more behold
> them.
>
> (The Book of Urizen, Plate 19, ll. 2-4, p. 231)

When Los fell under the sway of Urizen, the latter once more came to the forefront in Blake's version of Genesis 2-3 found in Chapter VII of The Book of Urizen. Los created this world with the Garden of Eden:

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[20] The Four Zoas, Night VII, Keynes, ll. 384-400, pp. 329-30.

He form'd a line and a plummet
To divide the Abyss beneath;
He form'd a dividing rule;

He formed scales to weigh,
He formed massy weights;
He formed a brazen quadrant;
He formed golden compasses,
And began to explore the Abyss;
And he planted a garden of fruits.

(The Book of Urizen, Plate 20,
ll. 33-41, pp. 233-34)

He also explored his "dens", formulated his "iron laws", cursed his children, and created the "Net of Religion":

And Urizen, craving with hunger,
Stung with the odours of Nature,
Explor'd his dens around.
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

He in darkness clos'd view'd all his race,
And his soul sicken'd! he curs'd
Both sons and daughters; for he saw
That no flesh nor spirit could keep
His iron laws one moment.
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

A cold shadow follow'd behind him
Like a spider's web, moist cold and dim,
Drawing out from his sorrowing soul,
The dungeon-like heaven dividing,
Whereever the footsteps of Urizen
Walked over the cities in sorrow;

Till a Web, dark and cold throughout all
The tormented element stretch'd
From the sorrows of Urizen's soul.
And the Web is a Female in embrio.
None could break the Web, nowings of fire,

So twisted the cords, and so knotted
The meshes, twisted like to the human brain.

And all call'd it The Net of Religion.

(The Book of Urizen, Pl. 20, ll. 29-31;
Pl. 23, ll. 22-26; Pl. 25, ll. 9-22,
pp. 233-35)

From the conventional Christian viewpoint, God gave the Laws and Codes to Man to promote his spiritual well-being and His action is therefore perceived in a positive light. In Blake's version of the Creation-Fall, however, the Laws and Codes were devised by the fallen God-Man, Urizen, and were a source of further disintegration. Because of the Laws and Codes the notion of "Sin" was introduced and as a result distinctions among men - namely, the "good" as opposed to the "evil" - became possible. Furthermore, notions such as "pity" and "compassion" then came into existence, whereas in the unfallen world such concepts would have no relevance because of the perfect unity characterizing it. Urizen's promulgation of his Laws and Codes, and the consequent birth of Sin and related notions, is described in the following lines:

> Here alone I, in books form'd of metals,
> Have written the secrets of wisdom,
> The secrets of dark contemplation,
> By fighting and conflicts dire
> With terrible monsters Sin-bred
> Which the bosoms of all inhabit,
> Seven deadly Sins of the soul.
>
> Lo! I unfold my darkness and on
> This rock place with strong hand the Book
> Or eternal brass, written in my solitude:
>
> Laws of peace, of love, of unity,
> Of pity, compassion, forgiveness,
> Let each chuse one habitation,
> His ancient infinite mansion,
> One command, one joy, one desire,
> One curse, one weight, one measure,
> One king, One God, One Law.
>
> (The Book of Urizen, Pl. 4, ll. 24-40, p. 224)

In addition, the Laws and Codes were repressive and stultifying; they did not take into consideration the complete Man. As a result they induced disharmony within Man. Even Urizen recognized this:

> He in darkness clos'd view'd all his race,
> And his soul sicken'd! he curs'd
> Both sons and daughters; for he saw
> That no flesh nor spirit could keep
> His iron laws one moment.
>
> For he saw that life liv'd upon death.
>
> (The Book of Urizen, Plate 23, ll. 22-27, p. 235)

In other words, even Urizen perceived that the life and survival of his "children" under his Laws and Codes were possible only through fragmentation or "death". The idea that Laws and Codes are repressive and fail to take into account all the faculties of the complete, harmoniously integrated Man is reiterated in Jerusalem:

> No individual can keep these Laws,
> for they are death
> To every energy of man and forbid
> the springs of life.
>
> (Jerusalem, Plate 35, ll. 11-12, p. 662)

Blake thus sees the promulgation of Laws and Codes by the fallen God-Man as leading to fragmentation both within and among men and making it even more difficult for them to regain Vision or Imagination.

An important aspect of the Creation and Fall which Blake interprets in a manner different from the conventional is the tension between a God of Justice and a God of Mercy.

As has been pointed out earlier in this chapter, there is a definite tension in the Old Testament between the God espoused by the Priestly tradition - the Elohim, the God of Justice - and the God championed by the Prophetic tradition - the Jehovah, the God of Forgiveness and Mercy. In The Book of Urizen Blake inverts the Christian and the rabbinic tradition which sought to reconcile a God of Justice with a God of Mercy, a God who could forsee the ensuing wickedness of Man and his fall and yet create him. The rabbinic and Christian traditions, which both drew from the Genesis tradition, sought to reconcile this conflict of Justice and Mercy by asserting the triumph of God's Mercy over Justice: God's love of righteousness is shown to be greater than his hatred of sin. Blake's source for this tradition may have been the debate between the Father and Son in Book III of Milton's Paradise Lost. As Evans states:

> The real key to the episode in book III is to be found ... in the long-standing tradition of the debate of the four daughters of God. This ... had its origins in the rabbinic tractates, where God's foreknowledge of the Fall and its consequences was reconciled with his omnipotence by the invention of a dispute between His four daughters, Love, Truth, Righteousness and Peace. During the course of their argument, which took place during Adam's creation, Love and Righteousness urged that Man should be created, Truth and Peace that he should not. Later versions of the legend reduced the disputants to two, giving the objections of Truth and Peace to the Torah and the counterarguments of Love and

> Righteousness to God. In both versions of the legend the dispute was finally settled by God's decision that His love of goodness outweighed His hatred, that His Mercy was greater than His vengefulness. The medieval Christian treatments of the subject transferred the debate to some occasion after the Fall and realigned the four contestants so that Peace and Love (Mercy) defended Man while Truth and Righteousness (Justice) accused him. The controversy now concerned the advisability not of creating Man but of saving him, and its purpose was to reconcile not God's omnipotence with His omniscience but his Justice with his benevolence. Further it was resolved by the Son's offer to satisfy the claims of Justice by dying on Man's behalf rather than by an arbitrary decision on the part of the Father.[21]

In his debate, Milton had tried to reconcile a God of Justice and a God of Mercy - he had tried to reconcile God's omnipotence with His foreknowledge of the Fall. It is evident from Blake's The Book of Urizen and Milton that Blake felt Milton to be in error in trying to reconcile what to his own mind was a divided God. In The Book of Urizen, the Urizen-Elohim is made to triumph over Los-Jehovah, for Blake sees the Creator of this world as a fallen Creator fashioning a fallen world and establishing his "One Law".[22] Unlike Milton, therefore, Blake does not try to reconcile a God of Justice and of Mercy. To him, as shown in Urizen's promulgation of Laws and Codes which his "children" could not obey, this fallen world is the product of a fragmented

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[21] Evans, op. cit., pp. 232-33.

[22] The Book of Urizen, Keynes, Pl. 4, l. 40, p. 224.

God who created Man mainly to accuse him of sin.

In discussing Blake's frontispiece to Europe (1974), Sutherland suggests that as early as 1794 Blake may have envisaged the need for a rational creator in his system:

> The well-known frontispiece to Europe 1794 (also printed separately, and often called "The Ancient of Days"), provides a significant image of Urizen at a relatively early stage in his career. One is immediately surprised by the degree to which the figure seems to be dignified - even glorified. However, negative aspects of the image suggest it may have been intended (at least in part) as a covert comment on Proverbs 8:27 "When he prepared the heavens, I was there:/when he set a compass upon the face of the / depth: and on Milton's account in Paradise Lost, VII, 225-27, of God's using the "golden compasses.../...to circumscribe / This Universe and all created things..." (One is reminded of Blake's more forthright address to the Divine Circumscriber: "If you have formed a Circle to go into / Go into it yourself and see how you would do.") Nonetheless, the degree to which the form of the picture as a whole involves the Urizenic figure suggests that as early as 1794, Blake accepted (at least theoretically) the need to comprehend a rational figure within his system.[23]

The implication of such a recognition on Blake's part is that although in The Book of Urizen and The Four Zoas the poet emphasizes what he sees as negative aspects of Urizen he perceives these negatively because they are aspects of a fallen or divided God whose Justice is a good thing when

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[23]John Sutherland, "Blake and Urizen". Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic, ed. David Erdman and John Grant (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 248.

joined with Mercy but harmful when separated from it.

When Los falls under the control of the Urizen, Justice becomes the ruling force and, judging from Blake's comments in The Ghost of Abel and The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, the poet sees all the incidents and accounts in Genesis as being inversions of the truth. Unlike the Christian and rabbinic traditions which show Mercy as more dominant than Justice Blake views Justice as being triumphant in the Creation-Fall, for Urizen and the fallen Los are in the ascendancy. Through the technique of inversion Blake seeks to communicate the "real" truth which in his view the Genesis accounts attempted to convey. For example, in "The Argument" of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (Blake's account of the Esau and Jacob story) Jacob is defined as "the villian" who "drives the just man into barren climes".[24] Esau or Edom is shown as a man of energy whose birthright is stolen from him but whose restoration is shown in the words "Now is the dominion of Edom, and the return of Adam into Paradise."[25] In The Ghost of Abel Blake sees the divided brothers as once more reflecting a divided God and by inverting the Genesis account the poet once more makes Jahweh and His attribute, Mercy, triumph

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[24] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Keynes, Pl. 2, l. 16, p. 148.

[25] Ibid., Pl. 3, p. 149.

over the Justice of the Elohim by having Yahweh offer himself as a sacrifice for both Man and Elohim. In "The Ghost of Abel", Abel's ghost, the voice of the Elohim and that of Satan are all viewed as one figure, the Accuser, demanding Justice:

> I will have Human Blood and not the
> blood of Bulls and Goats
> And no Atonement O Jehovah the Elohim
> live on sacrifice
> Of Men: hence I am God of Men: Thou
> Human O Jehovah.
>
> ("The Ghost of Abel", Pl. 2, p. 780)

Unlike what occurs in the Genesis account, therefore, Mercy and Jahweh triumph over Justice and the Elohim, and the mark placed on the forehead of Cain is interpreted by Blake as a mark of forgiveness instead of as one of condemnation.

Blake's interpretation of the creation of the primal waters, described in Genesis 1: 1-10, and of Noah's flood, recorded in Genesis 6-7, illustrates once more his notion that further disunity was brought about by the creative acts of a fallen God. In The Book of Urizen, Urizen's creation of water - "Eddies of wrath creaseless round and round / And the sulphureous foam, surgeing thick, / Settled a lake bright and shining and clear, ..."[26] - parallels the creation of the primal world, while Urizen's shedding of tears of pity - "And he wept and called it Pity, / And his tears flowed down on the winds"[27]

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[26] The Book of Urizen, Keynes, Pl. 10, ll. 19-22, p. 227.

[27] Ibid., Pl. 25, ll. 3-4, p. 235.

- parallels Noah's flood, which is the second major disaster to affect the whole world (the Fall being the first). It appears that Blake sees both floods as being precipitated by a divided God, the Elohim-Jehovah (Urizen-Los); since water in Blake's works usually sumbolizes Matter, this overwhelming of mankind with Matter further separates the fallen God-Man from Eternity. Blake's equating of the floods with the dominance of the physical senses rather than Imagination is evident in the following lines:

> ... when the five senses whelm'd
> In deluge 'oer the earth-born man; ...
> . . . . . .
> . . . . . .
> ... that like an ocean rush'd
> And overwhelmed all except this finite
> wall of flesh.
>
> (Europe, Pl. 10, ll. 10-20, p. 241)

The result of Urizen's act, then, is a shrinking of the human race from its original giant stature; so that in Blake's description of this shrinking race and his use of the number seven he appears once more to be inverting the orthodox idea of the Creation in seven days as being a good act. His words convey the idea that the act of Creation diminished man; it reduced him from his gigantic, titantic stature to that of the "worms of sixty winters".[28] In The Book of Urizen he states:

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[28] Europe, Keynes, Pl. 5, l. 6, p. 240.

Then the inhabitants of those Cities
Felt their Nerves change into Marrow
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

The senses inward rush'd, shrinking
Beneath the dark net of infection;
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

Till the shrunken eyes, clouded over,
Discern'd not the woven hipocrisy;
But the streaky slime in their heavens,
Brought together by narrowing perceptions,
Appear'd transparent air, for their eyes
Grew small like the eyes of man,
And in reptile forms shrinking together,
Of seven feet in stature they remain'd.

Six days they shrunk up from existence,
And on the seventh day they rested,
And they bless'd the seventh day, in sick hope,
And forgot their eternal life.
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

No more could they rise at will
In the infinite void, but bound down
To earth by their narrowing perceptions

They lived a period of years,
Then left a noisom body
To the jaws of devouring darkness.

And their children wept, and built
Tombs in the desolate places,
And form'd laws of prudence, and call'd them
The eternal laws of God.

(The Book of Urizen, Pl. 27, ll. 23-47,
Pl. 28, ll. 1-7, pp. 235-36)

This account of the disappearance of the giants from the earth parallels that of the disappearance of the "Sons of God" after Noah's flood, but whereas in the Bible the Fall-Creation and the Flood are separate events, the flood coming after the Creation and the Fall, in The Book of

Urizen, Blake combines both events and makes the Flood a part of the Creation-Fall and thus an act of the fallen God-Man. It might also be noted that, unlike the Genesis account, Blake gives equal significance to the primal flood in the Creation act and Noah's flood. He sees both as insidious acts of a fragmented God-Man. The words "laws of prudence" in the quotation above seem to refer to the Mosaic laws and reveal that, unlike orthodox Christians and Jews, the poet sees those laws as distortions of the true and eternal laws of the unfallen God. The devised laws are seen as trammeling the spirit of Man and are therefore to be abhorred. Egypt is used by Blake to symbolize Ulro, and the sojourn of the Israelites in that country is seen by Blake as the state of the fallen God-Man, a state which shows him as being almost cut off from his former abode in Eternity.

In The Book of Urizen Blake further emphasizes the theme of division by inverting the orthodox acceptance of the concept of naming as a Divine activity. As Skinner points out, this practice of naming had its origin in primitive religion but was perpetuated in both Christian and Hebraic religions.[29] As Evans notes, furthermore, according to the rabbinical commentaries of Augustine and

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[29]John Skinner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis (New York: Scribner, 1910), p. 20.

Chrysostom an important part of Adam's original perfection was his ability to name the creatures.[30] According to orthodox tradition, therefore, the act of naming in Genesis conveys God's close affinity with man as well as his goodness to man. Blake reverses this tradition in The Book of Urizen for the namings which occur here indicate not close affinity with God but instead a further estrangement between God and man. Each naming calls into being a new error. For example, Los gives birth to Enitharmon and the Eternals call her "Pity".[31] Again, the Eternals shudder at the sight of Urizen and they identify him by name:

> . . . what demon
> Hath form'd this abominable void
> This soul - shudd'ring vacuum? - Some said
> "It is Urizen", But unknown, abstracted
> Brooding secret, the dark power hid.
> (The Book of Urizen, Pl. 3, ll. 3-7, p. 222)

Furthermore, the Eternals weave a woof to separate Eternity from the fallen world and they call it "Science".[32] Urizen weeps when he sees that his children cannot abide by his laws and he calls his tears "Pity".[33] The net which these

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[30] Evans, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

[31] The Book of Urizen, Keynes, Pl. 19, l. 1, p. 231.

[32] Ibid., Pl. 19, l. 9, p. 231.

[33] Ibid., Pl. 25, l. 3, p. 235.

tears form is named "The Net of Religion"[34] and when the children of Urizen shrink under the "Net", they in turn establish "laws of prudence and call'd them / the eternal laws of God".[35] When Fuzon and his brethren flee from the fallen world, "They called it Egypt...".[36] In The Book of Urizen Blake shows that the act of naming is the act of a fallen Divinity, for his act of naming causes further separation from Eternity.

In attributing Creation to two fallen Gods, Urizen and Los, who are parallels of Elohim and Jahweh, Blake is able to argue that orthodox interpretations of the Creation actually imply a disunited, fallen God whose fragmented nature is reflected in his actions throughout the Book of Genesis. It is He who, by devising repressive moral codes, creates Sin as well as Man's apparent propensity for disobedience; it is He who creates rivalry between Cain and Abel, as well as between other brothers, by favouring one over the other, and therefore it is He who causes the first murder. His Creation brings about hatred, jealousy, and bloodshed and consequently further disintegration. The Creator's work is therefore fragmentation; He creates chaos, not order. This idea is emphasized in The Four

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[34] Ibid., 1. 22, p. 235.

[35] Ibid., Pl. 28, ll. 6-7, p. 236.

[36] Ibid., 1. 22, p. 237.

Zoas where the Creation of the fallen world is seen as just one step away from annihilation of the fallen God-Man. For Blake, true Creation means reintegration and this takes place in a true Last Judgment. In The Four Zoas Blake reverses the seven-day act of Creation; he emphasizes the reintegration of all the Zoas in the mind of Man, the departure of the "war of swords"[37] and "dark religions",[38] and the reign of "sweet science".[39] This "New Jerusalem" can be achieved only through the act of redemption, and Blake's ideas of redemption and the Christ who brings it are as unorthodox as his views of the Creation-Fall. These ideas will be explored in the next chapter.

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[37] The Four Zoas, Night 9, Keynes, ll. 844, p. 379.

[38] Ibid., l. 855, p. 379.

[39] Ibid., p. 379.

CHAPTER V

THE SON OF MAN: APOCALYPSE AND REDEMPTION

> I am not a God afar off, I am a brother
> and a friend;
> Within your bosoms I reside, and you
> reside in me:
> Lo! we are One, forgiving all Evil,
> Not seeking recompense.
>
> (Jerusalem, Pl. ll. 18-20, p. 622)

Blake presents a highly unusual view of the Apocalypse and Redemption. He rejects the Biblical account of a Last Judgment and the widely held belief, nurtured by that account, that in a great cataclysm the "good" will be saved and the "evil" condemned to eternal punishment. He claims, instead, that apocalypse and redemption are possible at any time and are accessible to all men. It is through Christ the Imagination, the unique Christ envisioned by Blake, that men will achieve apocalypse and redemption. It is through Christ the Imagination that men will recapture Imagination or Vision and regain the integration that was theirs before the Fall.

Blake rejects widely held notions about the Apocalypse and Redemption. It has generally been believed by Jews as well as Christians that God would vindicate Himself and His people by intervening in human history to acknowledge his chosen people and save them from their enemies. This intervention would occur on a Day of

Judgment when the world would be judged, the Anti-Christ annihilated, and the kingdom for the saints established. The Book of Revelation presents particularly lurid pictures of both the out-pouring of God's wrath upon the wicked and the separation of the good from the evil. The saved would be rewarded with eternal bliss while the damned would be punished with everlasting torture. Revelation 21: 7-8 states, for example:

> He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.
>
> But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

The notion of such a Day of Judgment is anathema to Blake. In his view the division of mankind into groups designated "good" or "evil", "saved" or "damned", contributes to further fragmentation among men and therefore militates against the reintegration of the fallen God-Man. This is a theme which occurs throughout his works. As has been shown in the preceding chapter, for example, it is prominent in Blake's interpretation of the Creation-Fall. Blake's unwillingness to accept the conventional Christian division of mankind into "good" and "evil" is also expressed in the following words:

> It seems as if Dante's supreme Good was something Superior to the Father or Jesus; for if he gives rain to the Evil and the Good, and his Sun to the Just and the Unjust, He could never have built Dante's Hell, nor the Hell of the Bible neither, in the way our Parsons explain it - It must have been originally Formed by the devil Himself; and So I understand it to have been.
>
> Whatever Book is for vengeance for Sin and whatever book is against the forgiveness of Sin is not of the Father, but of Satan the Accuser and Father of Hell.
>
> ("Notes on the Illustrations to Dante", p. 785)

In such works as The Book of Urizen, The Four Zoas and Jerusalem, Blake emphasizes that this categorization of Man into "good" and "evil" works against reintegration. Man's persistence in making such distinctions reveals that he has failed to see the value of a harmonious coexistence of all aspects of his personality and does not apprehend the unity of all things in God.

Blake is also opposed to the idea that the Apocalypse and Redemption occur at only one point in mankind's existence. In A Vision of the Last Judgment he notes that "Whenever any Individual Rejects Error and Embraces Truth, a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual."[1] In other words, Apocalypse and Redemption might be experienced by Man at any time: they might occur to individuals at any

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[1] A Vision of the Last Judgment, Keynes, p. 613.

point in mankind's history. As is shown in Job Plates 13-17, for example, Job experiences a Last Judgment when God appears to him in the whirlwind in human form and converses with him. Job now recognizes that God is the "Human Form Divine"[2] and perceives the unity of all things. He no longer sees God as remote, as detached from Man. Job has recognized and cast our Error.

According to Blake's earlier works, a Last Judgment might also occur on the occasion of great social upheavals. In America, for example, Blake writes:

> Stiff shudderings shook the heav'nly
> thrones! France, Spain, and Italy
> In terror view'd the bands of Albion,
> and the ancient Guardians,
> Fainting upon the elements, smitten
> with their own plagues.
> They slow advance to shut the five
> gates of their law-built heaven,
> Filled with blasting fancies and with
> mildews of despair,
> With fierce disease and lust, unable to
> stem the fires of Orc.
> But the five gates were consum'd, and
> their bolts and hinges melted;
> And the fierce flames burnt round the
> heavens, and round the abodes of
> men.
>
> (America, Pl. 16, ll. 16-23, p. 203)

Blake claims here that France, Spain and Italy resist change to their repressive established order but that the spirit of revolution, symbolised by Orc, cannot be halted. A Last Judgment occurs as Man frees himself from tyranny and oppression and recognizes the fraternity and unity of Man.

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[2] "The Everlasting Gospel", Keynes, l. 66, p. 755.

Blake emphasizes reintegration, as opposed to fragmentation, because he sees a need for unity to be restored to the fallen God-Man. Unity within the individual will contribute toward unity of the whole. In such works as The French Revolution, Europe and America, Blake claims that oppressive and tyrannical government and religion lead to fragmentation of the God-Man by suppressing individual freedom and creative imagination. In the epigraph to The Four Zoas, Blake again claims that external restrictions and prohibitions fetter Man's creative imagination and thus work against unity within and among men. That he sees such restrictions and prohibitions as undesirable is clear from the following words:

> For our contention is not with the
> blood and the flesh,
> but with dominion, with authority,
> with the blind world --
> rulers of this life, with the spirit
> of evil in things heavenly.
>
> Ephes., 6 Chap., 12
>
> (The Four Zoas, p. 263)

In addition to confronting external forces which induce fragmentation within men and consequently work against the unification of individual men into the larger Human and Divine Body constituting the God-Man, Man has to contend with the warring elements of his own personality. Blake terms these elements the "Zoas": Tharmas represents Man's body, Urizen his reason, Luvah his emotions, and Los-Urthona his imagination. These Zoas are reflections of

the divine aspects which were fragmented at the Creation-Fall. When one of these elements becomes dominant, disharmony or fragmentation occurs. In The Book of Urizen, for example, Blake shows the chaos which occurs when reason takes control. In The Four Zoas, also, Blake shows how disharmony among the four Zoas precipitates fragmentation and the Fall. Harmony among these elements must be restored if Man is to experience an Apocalypse and the reintegration of the fragmented God-Man is to be effected. This theme is expressed in the following lines:

> If Gods combine against Man, setting
> dominion above
> The Human form Divine, Thrown down
> from their high station
> In the Eternal heavens of the Human
> Imagination, buried beneath
> In dark Oblivion, with incessant pangs,
> ages on ages,
> In enmity and war first weaken'd, then
> in stern repentance
> They must renew their brightness, and
> their disorganiz'd functions.
> Again reorganize, till they resume the
> image of the human,
> Co-operating in the bliss of Man, obeying
> his Will,
> Servants to the infinite and Eternal of
> the Human form.
>
> (The Four Zoas, ll. 366-374, p. 366)

For Blake, the prophets of the Old Testament represented the "Poetic Genius" or the Imagination at work, unceasingly attempting to cleanse "the doors of perception"[3]

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[3] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Keynes, Pl. 14, p. 154.

and reclaim the lost Vision. In other words, they tried one after the other to bring about the reintegration of the fallen God-Man. They had not, however, been successful in doing so. In some of his works, including Tiriel, The French Revolution, America, and Europe, Blake seems confident that given liberty from repressive legal and moral codes Man will achieve his destiny of becoming Divine, that the regeneration of Man might be accomplished through social and political revolutions. In his later works, however, he places his faith in "Christ the Imagination" as the means through which reintegration of the fallen God-Man will be effected. The Incarnation, Blake believes, was a prerequisite for apocalypse, redemption and reintegration in and among men. This is shown in The Four Zoas, for example, where the poet writes:

> Refusing to behold the Divine Image which
> all behold
> And thereby, he [Fallen Man] is sunk down
> in a deadly sleep.
> But we immortal in our strength, survive
> by stern debate
> Till we have drawn the Lamb of God into
> a mortal form.
> And that he must be born is certain, for
> One must be All
> And comprehend within himself all things
> aspire to be and live,
> Will so receive the Divine Image that
> amongst the Reprobate
> He may be devoted to destruction from
> his mother's womb.

> I see, invisible descend into the Gardens
> of Vala,
> Luvah walking on the winds! I see the
> invisible knife,
> I see the shower of blood, I see the
> swords and spears of furturity.
>
> (The Four Zoas, Night I, ll. 290-301, p. 272)

Blake's depiction of this Christ through whom men's apocalypse, redemption and reintegration will be achieved is quite different from the conventional. It is in the person of Christ, Blake believes, that fallen Man ultimately attains Vision or Imagination. It was noted earlier that the historical movement of the Israelites was spiral rather than circular, each movement brings the nation closer to its eventual material or physical fall, symbolised in the destruction of the old Jerusalem. This old Jerusalem symbolises the consolidation of the Error of the priests and the upholders of the Laws who, by adhering to oppressive codes and rituals, had stifled Imagination or Vision. They had consequently suppressed the Divine in the fallen God-Man and had prevented the reintegration of the fallen God-Man. The fall of Jerusalem therefore indicated the victory of the prophets who had been able to retain the glimmers of Vision they had achieved because they had been motivated by "the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite."[4] The achievement of each prophet was not wasted or valueless; each had in his small way contributed toward

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[4] Ibid., Pl. 12-13, p. 154.

the consolidation of the Imagination or Vision. Imagination or Vision is finally revitalised in the person of Jesus Christ.

Blake's portrayal of Christ is unique, also, in the attention the poet gives to qualities of Christ not generally emphasized. Traditionally, Christianity has viewed Christ as exemplifying perfection in conduct, as being moved by love and self-sacrifice. This is the Christ who gave his life to save Man, the Christ who displayed humility, meekness and tenderness. Blake, too, conceives of a Christ of perfection, but while his Christ is characterised by love and forgiveness, He also displays other qualities. In "The Everlasting Gospel", for example, this Christ

> ....Scorn'd Earth's parents, scorn'd
> Earth's God,
> And mock'd the one and the other's
> rod'
> His seventy Disciples sent
> Against Religion and Government--
> They by the sword of Justice fell,
> And Him their cruel murderer tell.
> He left His father's trade to roam,
> A wand'ring vagrant without home;
> And thus He others' labour stole,
> That He might live above control.
> The publicans and harlots He
> Selected for His company,
> And from the adulteress turn'd away
> God's righteous law, that lost its prey.
>
> ("The Everlasting Gospel", ll. 35-47, p. 757)

Blake depicts a Christ "whose impact on society was that of a revolutionary and an iconoclast",[5] a Christ who acted "from impulse, not from rules".[6] Instead of adhering to and fulfilling the ceremonial law and code, he "tore this code to pieces and broke all ten commandments, in theory at least."[7] Blake's Christ, then, possesses energy and vitality. This Christ perceives the oppressiveness of institutionalised religion and entrenched authority and refuses to be fettered. His attitude toward institutionalized religion, for example, is clearly revealed in the following words:

> ....The Laws of the Jews were (both ceremonial and real) the basest and most oppressive of human codes, and being like all other codes given under pretence of divine command were what Christ pronounced them, the Abomination that maketh desolate, i.e. State Religion which is the source of all Cruelty.
>
> (Annotations to Watson, p. 393)

Blake identifies his Christ with the Imagination. In his "Annotations to Berkeley's 'Siris'", for example, he states:

> ... Christ addresses himself to the Man, not to his Reason. Plato did not bring Life and Immortality to Light. Jesus only did this.
>
> ("Annotations to Berkeley's 'Siris'", p. 774)

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[5]Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 79.

[6]The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Keynes, Pl. 22-24, p. 158.

[7]Frye, op. cit., p. 79.

In the same work, Blake further writes:

> What Jesus came to Remove was the Heathen or Platonic Philosophy which blinds the Eye of Imagination, The Real Man.
>
> ("Annotations to Berkeley's 'Siris'", p. 775)

This belief that Jesus is the Imagination, the creative power which is the core of man's being, is also expressed in A Vision of the Last Judgment:

> All things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, the Human Imagination.
>
> (A Vision of the Last Judgment, pp. 605-606)

Similar ideas are expressed in Milton where once again Blake associated the "Human Imagination" with the "Divine Body of the Lord Jesus",[8] and in "The Laocoön", where he indicates:

> The Eternal Body of Man is the Imagination, that is, God himself
> The Divine Body ..., Jesus: we are his Members.
>
> ("The Laocoön", p. 776)

In "Annotations to Berkeley's 'Siris'", Blake also states:

> They [Plato and Aristotle] also considered God as abstracted or distinct from the Imaginative World, but Jesus, as also Abraham and David, consider'd God as a Man in the Spiritual or Imaginative Vision.

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[8] Milton, Keynes, Book 1, 3, l. 4, p. 482.

> Jesus consider'd Imagination to be the
> Real Man and says I will not leave you
> Orphans and I will manifest myself to
> you; he says also, the Spiritual Body or
> Angel as little Children always behold
> the Face of the Heavenly Father.
>
> ("Annotations to Berkeley's 'Siris'",
> p. 774)

It appears, therefore, that in Blake's view Christ is the Imagination personified. In Him the Divine and the Human are now united. He has not "closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern".[9] He grasps the eternal realities beyond the world of reason and the senses, and he is cognizant of the unity of all things in God. In Blake's view, indeed, all existence - even the immortal - is united in Christ:

> Then those in Great Eternity met in the
> Council of God
> As one Man, for contracting their Exalted
> Senses
> They behold Multitude, or Expanding they
> behold as one,
> As One Man all the Universal family; and
> that One Man
> They call Jesus the Christ, and they in
> him and he in them
> Live in Perfect harmony, in Eden the
> land of life.
>
> (The Four Zoas, Night I, ll. 469-474,
> p. 277)

Christ the Imagination exemplifies the reintegrated God-Man. In addition, his teachings show Man the way to apocalypse, redemption and reintegration. Man's adoption

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[9] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Keynes, Pl. 14, p. 154.

of Christ's doctrine of forgiveness will, in Blake's view, lead to reunification within and among men as well as of Man with God. In "The Everlasting Gospel", Blake declares:

> There is not one Moral Virtue that Jesus Inculcated but Plato and Cicero did Inculcate before him; what then did Christ Inculcate? Forgiveness of Sins. That alone is the Gospel, and this is the Life and Immortality brought to light by Jesus, Even the Covenant of Jehovah, which is This: If you forgive one another your Trespasses, so shall Jehovah forgive you, That he himself may dwell among you; but if you Avenge, you Murder the Divine Image, and he cannot dwell among you; because you Murder him he arises again, and you deny that he is Arisen, and are blind to Spirit.
>
> (Preface to "The Everlasting Gospel", p. 757)

Through forgiveness, and the love which follows, Man will accept the notion of universal brotherhood and will become aware of the Divine in each individual. He will be cognizant of the unity among men and of Man with God. He will enter the world of eternity, recognizing that

> Man is All Imagination. God is Man and Exists in us and we in him.
>
> ("Annotations to Berkeley's 'Siris'", p. 775)

He will, through brotherhood and love, come to be aware of the unity of all things in God:

> It is the God in all that is our companion and friend, for our God himself says: "You are my brother, my sister and my mother," and St. John: "Whoso dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him," and such an one cannot judge of any but in love.... God is in the lowest effects as

> well as the highest causes; for he is become a worm that he may nourish the weak. For let it be remember'd that creation is God descending according to the weakness of man, for our Lord is the word of God and everything on earth is the word of God and in its essence is God.
>
> (Annotations to Lavater, p. 87)

In this way the individual experiences a Last Judgment and gains Vision or Imagination.

The "world of Imagination" is described by Blake as follows:

> This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body. The World of the Imagination is Infinite and Eternal.... There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. All things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination.....
>
> (A Vision of the Last Judgment, pp. 605-606)

Thus, Christ the Imagination will accomplish what institutionalized religion and legal or moral codes could not. He will enable Man to abandon Error which has prevented him from achieving

> ...the vision of everything and a direct interpenetration of the eternal and the temporal, of the universal and the particular, so that the universal was seen as the particular and not just inferred from it....[10]

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[10]Peter F. Fisher, "Blake's Attacks on the Classical Tradition", Philological Quarterly, XL, 1 (January 1961), p. 7.

Man is now aware that "everything that lives is Holy"; he is able

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
> And Eternity in a hour.
>
> ("Auguries of Innocence", ll. 1-4, p. 431)

By identifying Christ with the Imagination or Vision, Blake is implying that Imagination is a divine quality or capacity. He also believes, of course, that Man is capable of achieving Imagination:

> That the Poetic Genius is the true Man, and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius.
>
> ("All Religions Are One", p. 98)

and:

> The true Man is the source, he being the poetic Genius.
>
> ("All Religions Are One", p. 98)

Blake is claiming, therefore, that God is revealed in Man and that Man's essential purpose is to be the Divine Image. In other words, the reintegration of the fallen God-Man is possible through Imagination. These ideas are succinctly expressed as follows:

> He who sees the Infinite in all things, sees God. He who sees the Ratio only, sees himself only.
>
> Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is.
>
> ("There Is No Natural Religion", p. 98)

It appears, therefore, that whereas the Bible and conventional Christianity adopt the view that Man has fallen into sin and is consequently evil Blake takes a different position. He believes there is a latent Divinity in Man which needs to be unveiled and nurtured.

The redemptive mission of Christ typifies the eternal redemptive process in which all men are involved because they are part of a universal humanity. Blake firmly rejects the widespread belief that the purpose of the Incarnation is the redemption of only Jews and Christians. For instance, he castigates the Jews in the following terms for their belief in their exclusiveness:

> ....That the Jews assumed a right
> Exclusively to the benefits of God will
> be a lasting witness against them....
> (Annotations to Watson, p. 368)

Blake insists that Jesus was not the kind of Messiah the Jews had been expecting, that Jesus had not come to redeem only the Jews or to establish the Jewish kingdom and people above all others. In his Annotations to Watson, Blake states:

> To me, who believe the Bible and profess
> myself a Christian, a defence of the
> Wickedness of the Israelities in murdering
> so many under pretence of a command from
> God is altogether Abominable and Blasphemous
> Wherefore did Christ, come? Was it not to
> abolish the Jewish Imposture? Was not
> Christ murder'd because he taught that God
> loved all Men and was their father and
> forbad all contention for Worldly
> prosperity in opposition to the Jewish

> Scriptures, which are only an Example of the possibility of Human Beastliness in all its branches? Christ died as an Unbeliever....
>
> (Annotations to Watson, p. 387)

He further observes in the same work:

> ...God never makes one man murder another, nor one nation. There is a vast difference between an accident brought on by man's own carelessness and a destruction from the designs of another. The Earthquakes of Lisbon etc. were the Natural result of Sin, but the destruction of the Caanites by Joshua was the Unnatural design of Wicked men. To extirpate a nation by means of another nation is as wicked as to destroy an individual by means of another individual which God considers (in the Bible) as Murder and commands that it shall not be done....
>
> (Annotations to Watson, p. 388)

Blake emphasizes that Christ's coming paves the way for the redemption of all men:

> ....The Bible or Peculiar Word of God, Exclusive of Conscience or the Word of God Universal, is that Abomination, which like the Jewish ceremonies, is for ever removed and henceforth every man may converse with God and be a King and a Priest in his own house.
>
> (Annotations to Watson, p. 389)

The efforts of each individual to secure reintegration are not useless. Each individual Apocalypse, in Blake's view, contributes toward the final reintegration of the fragmented God-Man and the rebuilding of another spiritual Jerusalem which Blake terms "Golgonooza". It is clear that Blake's apocalypse is not a great cataclysm at

the end of time but is an event that recurs constantly in moments of human awakening and inspiration.

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that in formulating his ideas regarding Apocalypse and Redemption Blake draws upon the Bible. He reinterprets his borrowings, however, so that they serve his myth. In addition, he selects and emphasizes Biblical content so that meanings quite different from those in the Scriptures are generated. It is clear from the above discussion, for example, that while Blake obtains the notion of the Last Judgment from the Bible, his interpretation of that event inverts its Biblical meaning. The Day of Judgment is in Blake's view evil, and certainly not worthy of true Christianity, since it contributes to fragmentation among men. Again, Blake borrows selectively and emphasizes certain elements of the Bible to present an unusual portrait of Christ. This is a Christ with energy and wrath as well as love and forgiveness, a Christ exemplifying the fully integrated God-Man, a Christ whom Blake associates with Imagination or Vision.

Blake borrows other contents of the Bible and infuses his own meanings into them in order to reiterate ideas central to his view of Apocalypse and Redemption. For example, Blake apparently employs the image of Christ's rending of the veil of the temple to symbolize the imaginative awakening of fallen Man that allows him to envision the way to redemption. The image occurs in the

Scriptures. Matthew 27: 50-51 records the following event:

> Jesus when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.
>
> And behold the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake; and the rocks rent; ...

Blake repeatedly employs the image of the rending of the veil. For example, in Jerusalem he writes of "a Veil the Saviour born and dying rends".[11] In the same work Los pleads: "Arise O Lord, and rend the Veil!"[12] The following lines, also, appear in Jerusalem:

> Hence the Infernal Veil grows into the disobedient female,
> Which Jesus rends and the whole Druid Law removes away
> From the Inner Sanctuary, a False Holiness hid within the Center.
>
> (Jerusalem 69: ll. 38-40; p. 708)

The "veil", which is also the "Mundane Shell", is a reference to the Veil of the Temple which conceals the divinity and which Jesus rends at the Crucifixion.[13] Blake identifies the "veil" or "Mundane Shell" with major impediments to the fallen God-Man in the task of achieving reintegration. In Jerusalem he describes its establishment:

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[11] Jerusalem, Keynes, Pl. 55, l. 16, p. 686.

[12] Ibid., Pl. 30, l. 40, p. 656.

[13] S. Foster Damon, A Blake Dictionary (Boulder: Shambhala, 1979), p. 432.

> And as Albion built his frozen Altars,
> Los built the Mundane Shell
> In the Four Regions of Humanity, East
> and West and North and South,
> Till Norwood and Finchley and Blackheath
> and Hounslow cover'd the whole Earth.
> This is the Net and Veil of Vala among
> the Souls of the Dead.
>
> (Jerusalem, Pl. 42, ll. 78-81, p. 671)

The "Net and veil of Vala" represent Error.[14] A similar meaning is found in Milton, where Blake describes the "Mundane Shell" as follows:

> The Mundane Shell is a vast Concave Earth,
> an immense
> Harden'd shadow of all things upon our
> Vegetated Earth,
> Enlarg'd into dimension and deform'd into
> indefinite space,
> In Twenty-seven Heavens and all their
> Hells, with Chaos
> And Ancient Night and Purgatory. It is a
> cavernous Earth
> Of Labyrinthine intricacy, twenty-seven
> folds of opakeness,
> And finishes where the lark mounts; ....
>
> (Milton 17, ll. 21-27, p. 498)

The "Twenty-seven Heavens and all their Hells" and the "twenty-seven folds of opakeness" represent the specific forms of Error inherent in institutionalized Christianity and, by implication, institutionalized religion generally.[15]

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[14]The "veil of Vala" represents Error in the form of acceptance of oppressive moral law and the reasonings of those blind to Eternity. Damon, op. cit., p. 432.

[15]The "Shell" contains all the errors of Man: the gods of the heathen and the Twenty-seven false Churches of the Christians. See Damon, op. cit., p. 288.

While the "veil" or "Mundane Shell" is associated with Error, it is also the "Place of Redemption and of awaking", the place where "Eternity" might be reentered by men:

> For the Veil of Vala, which Albion cast
> into the Atlantic Deep
> To catch the Souls of the Dead, began
> to Vegetate and Petrify
> Around the Earth of Albion among the
> Roots of his Tree.
>
> Of Weeping and the Palm of Suffering
> beneath Albion's Tomb.
> Thus in the process of time it became
> the beautiful Mundane Shell,
> The Habitation of the Spectres of the
> Dead, and the Place
> Of Redemption and of awaking, again
> into Eternity.
>
> (Jerusalem, Pl. 59, ll. 2-9, p. 691)

"Eternity" is achieved when men believe in the unity or brotherhood or mankind rather than in Selfhood:

> Jesus replied: "Fear not Albion: unless
> I die thou canst not live;
> But if I die I shall arise again and
> thou with me.
> This is Friendship and Brotherhood:
> without it Man is Not.
>
> So Jesus spoke: the Covering Cherub
> coming on in darkness
> Overshadow'd them, and Jesus said:
> "Thus do Men in Eternity
> One for another to put off, by
> forgiveness, every sin."
>
> Albion reply'd: "Cannot Man exist
> without Mysterious
> Offering of Self for Another? Is
> this Friendship and Brotherhood?
> I see thee in the likeness and
> similitude of Los my Friend."

> Jesus said: "Wouldest thou love one who
> never died
> For thee, or ever die for one who had
> not died for thee?
> And if God dieth not for Man and giveth
> not himself
> Eternally for Man, Man could not exist;
> for Man is Love
> As God is Love; every kindness to another
> is a little Death
> In the Divine Image, nor can Man exist
> but by Brotherhood."
>
> (Jerusalem, Pl. 96, ll. 14-28, p. 743)

Blake appears again to be claiming that through Christ the Imagination Man is able to recognize Error/Selfhood, which enables him to break out of the "Mundane Shell" and grasp the eternal truth of the unity of mankind.

Blake's interpretation of the Crucifixion also emphasizes aspects of his unique view of Apocalypse and Redemption. The guardians of established religion, according to Blake, nailed Christ the Imagination to a "tree of mystery" in order to destroy Him. What they succeeded in demolishing, though, was not Imagination but "Nature's dross". Blake writes in "The Everlasting Gospel":

> And thus with wrath he did subdue
> The Serpent Bulk of Nature's dross.
> Till He had nail'd it to the Cross.
>
> He took on Sin in the Virgin's Womb,
> And put it off on the Cross and Tomb
> To be Worship'd by the Church of Rome.
>
> ("The Everlasting Gospel", ll. 53-60,
> p. 749)

The "tree of mystery", or the Cross, represents systems of morality, such as the Old Testament codes justifying vengeance and punishment for "Sin". Christ's physical body symbolises "sin" or Error. Blake is evidently saying that worship of the Cross and Christ's body constitutes obeisance to oppressive moral codes. This focus among men on the physical elements of the Crucifixion, and by implication on oppressive systems of morality, leads men to neglect a vital aspect of the Crucifixion: Christ's emphasis on unconditional forgiveness and sacrificial love.

The tendency of Man to worship the signifier instead of the thing signified is illustrated in The Four Zoas:

> And Los and Enitharmon builded
> Jerusalem, weeping
> Over the Sepulcher and over the
> Crucified body
> Which, to their Phantom Eyes,
> appear'd still in the Sepulcher;
> But Jesus stood beside them in the
> spirit, separating
> Their spirit from the body....
>
> (The Four Zoas, Night IX, ll. 1-4, p. 357)

Even Jerusalem, Blake's symbol of enlightened love, and Los, whom Blake associates with the creative process, are misguided in the importance which they place upon the physical body of the crucified Christ. In The Four Zoas, Blake provides the following account:

> Jerusalem saw the Body dead upon the
> Cross. She fled away,
> Saying: "Is this Eternal Death? Where
> shall I hide from Death?
> Pity me Los! Pity me Urizen! and let
> us build
> A Sepulcher, and worship Death in fear
> while yet we live.
>
> Death! God of All! from whom we rise,
> to whom we all return:
> And Let all Nations of the Earth worship
> at the Sepulcher
> With Gifts and Spices, with lamps rich
> emboss'd, jewels and gold."
>
> Los took the Body from the Cross, Jerusalem
> weeping over;
> They bore it to the Sepulcher which Los
> had hewn in the rock
> Of Eternity for himself: he hew'd it
> despairing of Life Eternal.
>
> (The Four Zoas, Night VIII, ll. 331-340,
> p. 349)

Conventional Christianity, Blake feels, has venerated Christ's physical body and the Cross and has therefore attended to the signifier rather than the thing signified. As a result, men have not practised unconditional forgiveness and love and have failed to recognize the Divine Image in all human beings.

The selectiveness of Blake's borrowing from the Bible is evident in his conception of forgiveness. In the Old Testament, forgiveness is frequently shown to be dependent upon the "sinner's" repentance. For example, the Israelites were repeatedly forgiven and accepted by their God when they repented and begged Him for forgiveness. Again, as II Samuel 11-12 reveals, David is

forgiven for committing adultery and murder but only after he has repented. With the coming of Christ, however, the Old Covenant was superseded by the New. Christ brought the perfect revelation, introducing a new law of love, mercy and forgiveness. The Beattitudes in Matthew 5, for instance, clearly reveal Christ's fulfilment, and transcendance, of the Old Covenant and disclose the main tenets of the New. Matthew 5: 43-45 states:

> Ye have heard that it had been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.
>
> But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you;
>
> That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and seudeth rain on the just and the unjust.

St. Paul, too, sees Christ as introducing a New Covenant. In Galatians 4, Paul emphasizes the notion of freedom from the Law through Christ and presents a picture of God quite different from that of the harsh, remote God commonly described in the Old Testament. In Galatians 4: 3-7, he states:

> Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.
>
> But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his son made of a woman, made under the law,

> To redeem that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.
>
> And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father.
>
> Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then heir of God through Christ.

The unconditional nature of forgiveness implicit in the New Covenant is reflected in the Lord's Prayer which, according to Matthew 6: 12, reads: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." It is also embodied in the words of the crucified Christ, who is reported in Luke 23: 34 to have said, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do." In "The Everlasting Gospel" Blake delineates the reaction of men in authority, men who represent the secular and the ecclesiastical law, to this newer conception of forgiveness:

> Then Jesus rose and said to Me,
> "Thy Sins are all forgiven thee."
> Loud Pilate Howl'd, loud Caiphas yell'd,
> When they the Gospel Light beheld.
>
> ("The Everlasting Gospel", ll. 17-20, p. 758)

Their reaction is immediately crystallized into a response which they believe will protect their established institutions:

> The Moral Virtues in Great fear
> Formed the Cross and Nails and Spear,
> And the Accuser standing by
> Cried out, "Crucify! Crucify!
> Our Moral Virtues ne'er can be,
> Nor Warlike pomp and Majesty;
> For Moral Virtues all begin
> In the Accusations of Sin, ..."
>
> ("The Everlasting Gospel", ll. 28-35, p. 759)

Blake is demonstrating that the crucifiers, like the priests and rulers in the Old Testament, have not accepted the notion of forgiveness implicit in the New Covenant and are instead intent on upholding the Law. He is therefore identifying the older conception of forgiveness, the forgiveness achieved only after repentance and acceptance of the Law, with Error, and is implying that unconditional forgiveness is the true path to redemption. Unconditional forgiveness, Blake believes, transcends the moral laws of the Elohim. The poet points out that Christ's teachings regarding forgiveness supersede "Moses' Law", that since men have fallen and are all "sinners" no man can justly "cast one stone" at another:

> He laid His hand on Moses' Law:
> The Ancient Heavens, in Silent Awe
> Writ with Curses from Pole to Pole,
> All away began to roll:
> The Earth trembling and Naked lay
> In secret bed of Mortal clay,
> On Sinai felt the hand divine
> Putting back the bloddy shrine,
> And she heard the breath of God
> As she heard by Eden's flood:
> Good and evil are no more!
> Sinai's trumpets, cease to roar!

> Cease, finger of God, to write!
> The Heavens are not clean in they Sight.
> Thou art Good, and thou Alone;
> Nor may the sinner cast one stone.
>
> ("The Everlasting Gospel", ll. 11-26, p. 754)

Blake's interpretation of the New Testament and of Christ is as unusual as his reading of the Old Testament. Blake perceives Christ as the embodiment of the Imagination or the "Poetic Genius". He believes that Christ, through the Incarnation, has disclosed to Man the way to restore unity to the fallen God-Man of which he is part. Through Christ the Imagination men are enabled to recognize the Divine in one another as well as the unity of all things in God. This is what the true apocalypse and redemption involve. Blake does not regard the Incarnation of Christ - the core of the New Testament - as important because it foretold the coming of a Day of Judgment and a separation of good and evil. Rather, he considers it significant because it cleansed the doors of perception, removed error, and opened the way to the unification of individual men into the larger Human and Divine Body, the God-Man. His reinterpretation of the Bible frequently emphasizes these central ideas of his myth.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

> But when once I did descry
> The Immortal Man that cannot Die,
> Thro' evening shades I haste away
> To close the Labours of my Day.
> ("The Gates of Paradise", ll. 13-15,
> p. 771)

The present study has attempted a systematic examination of Blake's interpretation of the Bible. It has been found that Blake's earlier works often foreshadow notions incorporated into later writings. It appears, also, that Blake interprets the history of the Hebrews as that of Man in general and views Man as progressing from a Creation-Fall toward Apocalypse and Redemption. It has been observed in this study, also, that Blake views Creation as the continuation of a Fall from the Golden Age and that he believes Man is eventually enabled to achieve an Apocalypse and Redemption through Christ the Imagination.

Several ideas appearing in Blake's reinterpretation of the Bible are already present in his earlier works. Included among these are his ideas regarding the unity of all things in God, the Divinity in Man, the positive nature of contraries with regard to human "progression",[1] and the

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[1] The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Keynes, Pl. 3, p. 149.

fragmentation induced within and among men by institutionalized religions and other systems. Significant also are such ideas as the Creation-Fall as an act of Mercy, the association of Imagination with Christ, the "Poetic Genius" as the doorway to Vision, the importance of the Apocalypse, and the occurrence of cycles and phases in human experience. Blake's earlier works also foreshadow personae important in his later writings. The ideas relevant to Blake's interpretation of the Bible occur largely in embryonic form in his earlier works.

Blake's first real attempt to reinterpret the Bible is found in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. Here, in arguing for the virtue of Energy as a vital element in Man, he inverts the Bible, presenting Heaven as Hell and Hell as Heaven and in the process accusing "all Bibles or sacred codes"[2] as being the causes of artificial and indefensible divisions within and among men. In Blake's more mature works, he seems to view human history as reflecting a continual adherence on Man's part to such Error, with glimpses of Vision being achieved periodically through "prophets". Man's history, then, consists of repetitions of Orcan cycles, with Man being ultimately enabled to break out of this chain through Christ the Imagination.

In his version of the Creation-Fall, Blake depicts

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[2] Ibid., Pl. 4, p. 149.

Creation as the act of two fallen Gods which produces an imperfect world, a world of fragmentation within and among men. The Fall commenced before the Creation, beginning when the harmony within and among the Eternals was disturbed. The Creation, which resulted in the endowment of the fallen God Urizen with the human form, was an act of Divine Mercy preventing his complete annihilation. Since the God-Man retains part of his Divinity, however, he possesses the potential to regain unity with the Eternals. Fragmentation continues after the Creation and the God-Man consequently becomes further removed from Vision. Laws and codes are devised by the fallen God-Man under the sway of Reason, with the result that artificial categories and distinctions are introduced and further fragmentation within and among men promoted. The regaining of Vision becomes even more difficult.

Blake believes, however, that the God-Man can regain true Vision, that the God-Man can apprehend the unity of all things in God and thus recapture the state existing within and among the Eternals prior to the disturbance of their perfect harmony. By following Christ the Imagination Man will recognize the brotherhood of men and the unity of all existence in God. Through Christ the Imagination Man is able to achieve Apocalypse and Redemption.

In formulating his myth, Blake is no passive recipient of tradition. Many ideas from the traditions

accessible to Blake and his contemporaries are certainly reflected in Blake's myth but not necessarily in a form identical to the original. For example, the notion of some of the Gnostics that the Fall of Man involved a fall in part of the divine nature is echoed in Blake's myth in the descent of the fallen God Urizen into the form of the God-Man who still retains an element of his initial divinity. Again, the associating of Creation with division and fragmentation occurs in Paracelsus and Boehme as well as in Blake. In Blake's myth, however, the fragmentation begins before the Creation occurs: disharmony arises within Urizen and leads to disunity among the Eternals. The subsequent creation of the physical world is associated in Blake's myth with additional fragmentation and further dimming of Vision. Blake apparently finds congenial, also, the Neoplatonist belief that the fall of the soul into its lowest state, the material world, is necessary for its fulfilment and for its ultimate return to God, but he incorporates this principle into his more complex Circle of Destiny according to which the descent into the phase of Experience can lead to regeneration and a return to the Edenic state. Again, Blake agrees with Paracelsus and Boehme that there is Divinity in Man, viewing the imagination as a manifestation of God in Man. He also believes with Boehme that the regeneration of the world is possible through Christ, but in Blake's myth Christ is

equated with the Imagination.

Blake does not simply modify many of the ideas that he finds attractive; he often rejects ideas which he regards as inconsistent with a "correct" reading of the Bible. For example, he is quite comfortable with the principle of contraries advanced by Boehme and Swedenborg as well as with the idea of the holiness of sexual energy supported by Milton. He is firmly opposed, however, to Milton's belief in the control of passion by reason and Milton's designation of Reason as Man's supreme faculty. He rejects as well Boehme's conception of the ideal human condition as one in which the rational is in command. Whatever concessions they may have made to the notion that the Dark Side of human existence is a necessity, Milton, Boehme and Swedenborg persist in defining "evil" in moral terms. All believe in an eventual separation of the "good" from the "evil", of the elect from the damned, asserting that when judged the damned will go to everlasting hell-fire. All believe that "evil" exists and will bring just retribution at the hands of God. On the other hand, Blake's acceptance of the principle of contraries is unconditional. He believes in a free interaction of contraries, in the vital nature of all dimensions of Man. He does not adopt a moral view of the Dark Side of Man but regards it simply as an element vital to Man's creative growth. His interpretation of the Bible is intended to a substantial degree to communicate these ideas.

Blake's writings constitute in part a revolt against certain elements of thought which held an important place in eighteenth century intellectual life. One of these was a tendency to view human beings in materialist terms. Bacon and Locke, for instance, emphasized sense perception as the means by which Man apprehends reality. Newton advanced a materialist conception of the universe, viewing the universe as a self-sufficient machine. While Blake recognizes that all three were in pursuit of Truth he feels that they were in Error in ignoring the spiritual and imaginative dimensions of Man.[3] He expresses his distaste for their ideas in the following terms:

> Burke's Treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful is founded on the Opinions of Newton and Locke; on this Treatise Reynolds has grounded many of his assertions in all his Discourses. I read Burke's Treatise when very Young; at the same time I read Locke on Human Understanding and Bacon's Advancement of Learning; on Every one of these Books I wrote my Opinions, and on looking them over find that my Notes on Reynolds in this Book are exactly Similar. I felt the Same Contempt and Abhorrence then that I do now. They mock Inspiration and Vision. Inspiration and Vision was then, and now is, and I hope will always Remain,

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[3]While Blake regarded Bacon, Newton and Locke as being in error, he recognized their essential genius, and in the final cataclysm in Jerusalem he has the three appear in the heavens in the company of Milton, Shakespeare and Chaucer. See Jerusalem, Keynes, Pl. 98, ll. 1-11, pp. 744-45.

> my Element, my Eternal Dwelling place;
> how can I then hear it Contemned without
> returning scorn for scorn?
> (Annotations to Reynolds, pp. 476-77)

Blake opposes the Rationalist view of the world in general. He objects in particular to its exaltation of Reason over other faculties of Man. The separation and exaltation of Reason from other faculties in his view generate compartalization in life. The inner integration of Man crumbles when each faculty seeks to carve out its own domain but particularly when Reason asserts its supremacy over other faculties. Furthermore, critical analysis with its obsessive application of Reason militates against an awareness of the organic wholeness of being. In this regard, Blake writes:

> Why wilt thou Examine every little fibre
> of my soul,
> Spreading them out before the sun like
> stalks of flax to dry?
> The infant joy is beautiful, but its
> anatomy
> Horrible, Ghast and Deadly; nought shalt
> thou find in it
> But Death, Despair and Everlasting brooding
> Melancholy.
> Thou wilt go mad with horrow if thou dost
> Examine thus
> Every moment of my secret hours.
> (The Four Zoas, Night I, ll. 47-53, p. 265)

Blake again reveals his rejection of Rationalism when he writes:

O Divine Spirit! sustain me on thy wings,
That I may awake Albion from his long and
cold repose!
For Bacon and Newton, sheath'd in dismal
steel, their terrors hang
Like iron scourges over Albion. Reasonings
like vast Serpents
Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute
articulations.
I turn my eyes to the Schools and Universities
of Europe,
And there behold the Loom of Locke whose
Woof rages dire,
Wash'd by the Water-wheels of Newton: black
the cloth
In heavy wreathes folds over every Nation,
cruel Works
Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel,
with cogs tyrannic
Moving by compulsion each other; not as
those in Eden which
Wheel within wheel in freedom revolve in
harmony and peace.

(Jerusalem, Pl. 15, ll. 9-20, pp. 635-36)

Blake claims in the above lines that "reasonings", the systems of thought, of Rationalists had enslaved men. This had occurred even in places of learning. The pursuit of formal logic and sterile scientific experimentation, symbolized by the black cloth of death,[4] had resulted in the loss of spontaneity in human life. The awareness of the wholeness of Man had been dulled. Men everywhere were exposed to "wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic", to systems of ideas which constrained them intellectually and morally.[5] This is in contrast to the Edenic state,

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[4]Asloob A. Ansari, Arrows of Intellect (Aligarh, India: Naya Kitabghar, 1965), p. 69.

[5]Ibid., p. 69.

characterized by harmony and reciprocity among all elements. Blake is here indirectly pleading for the recovery of the completely harmonized human psyche, for the unification of Man.

Blake is opposed also to the "Natural Religion", or Deism, which was espoused by such Rationalists as Voltaire, Gibbon, Hume and Newton. He finds particularly objectionable their denial of a personal God. The Deists accepted the notion of God the Creator but believed that once the Creation was accomplished God ceased to intervene in human affairs. Blake sees in such ideas only the tyranny of nature and reason. He views the Deist God as remote and impassive and as inaccessible to Man. Blake's God, however, exists actively within each individual. Indeed, all existence is united in God. In Blake's opinion, Deism was similar to pagan systems in overlooking the major Christian virtues of love, humanitarianism and forgiveness as exemplified in Christ. The notion of a personal God consequently eluded them.

Blake objects not only to Rationalism but to forms of restraint and regimentation in general. Institutions on the whole are anathema to him. His abhorrence of institutions is evident, for example, in his poem "London". The narrator in this poem wanders through life in directions that are fixed by social codes, for in this city order is imposed by such institutions as the Church, the Law and the

family. In this ordered society the individual's life is so regimented, so controlled, that the full flowering of all dimensions of his being becomes impossible. He is restricted by "mind-forg'd manacles"[6] and dwells in an elaborate prison which Man has constructed for himself. The "manacles" are "mind-forg'd"; Man uses his intelligence against himself. He labours to establish and maintain controls over himself in the form of religion and other institutions.

Blake regards as undesirable, also, all traditions, theories, conventions and systems of thought which suppress the free interplay of all dimensions of Man. As Bottrall suggests, Blake detests "the system-making tendency in the human mind, whether it expressed itself in the establishment of legal codes or forms of worship".[7] Once systems of any kind are established, they spread their insidious roots - like the Tree of Mystery in Blake's "The Human Abstract" - throughout the society, with the result that Man is forced to conform to their dictates or principles.

Because of institutions, conventions and systems of various kinds, the creative imagination has in Blake's view been suppressed or relegated to a position of lesser

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[6]"London", Keynes, l. 8, p. 216.

[7]Margaret Bottrall, The Divine Image (Roma: Edizioni, Di Storia E Letteratura, 1950), p. 38.

importance. Convention has associated the driving forces of human life, such as instincts and energy, with "evil" or "irrationality". Blake equates such forces in Man with the creative imagination, however, and he feels that in suppressing them Man has tended to devalue the imagination. His interpretation of the Bible, addressing itself to the fragmentation and eventual reintegration of Man, is in effect a plea for the recognition and restoration of the imagination.

Blake sees himself as a latter day poet/prophet and consequently feels impelled to reveal to his people the truth as he sees it in his interpretation of the Bible. In this regard, he writes:

> I give you the end of a golden string,
> Only wind it into a ball,
> It will lead you in at Heaven's gate
> Built in Jerusalem's wall.
>
> (Jerusalem, Pl. 77, p. 716)

In such works as Visions of the Daughters of Albion, America and Europe he also attempts to convey this truth in contemporary terms, using events, issues and personages of his time. Blake is thus adopting a stance taken by Milton, who in his Areopagitica had pleaded for freedom of the press, implying that prophets - whether latter-day or modern - were obliged to present their truths even when they were in conflict with the status quo. Like the prophets of the past, Blake seeks to warn his people that it is time for

reassessment, for again attempting to bring about the reintegration of the fragmented God-Man.

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