GENESIS: IN THE BEGINNING

Synopsis
The second half of this series will be concerned with seven phases of revelation, beginning in this program with that of creation. The idea of creation raises serious questions about the adequacy of our ordinary concept of time to comprehend what the Bible means by eternity. Eternity does not mean endless time: it means a condition that is free of time altogether. Consequently, the Bible insists on an absolute beginning and end of time, in contrast to what is true of the order of nature, in order to assert that the category of time is not ultimate. The metaphorical kernel of the idea of a beginning is not so much that of being born as of waking up from sleep, thereby abolishing a dark world of chaos.

Program Lecture Outline: Key Facts
1. The Biblical idea of creation is linked to an insistence on an absolute beginning. By asking the paradoxical question, what happened before that? we become aware that we grasp reality with a category of time that is completely unreal.

2. Therefore, the idea of eternity as endless time is a notion that is still mixed up with the category of time, a notion that quickly becomes demonic, as in the doctrine of everlasting torment in hell (or everlasting boredom in a changeless heaven). Eternity is rather a condition transcending time altogether.

3. The Bible asserts an absolute beginning and end of time in order to make clear that time is not an ultimate category, even though it may be ultimate within the limits of the order of nature, where time can have neither a conceivable beginning nor an end.

4. The metaphorical kernel of the idea of beginning is that of waking up from sleep. This explains the Biblical emphasis on the day, a day which begins with darkness and ends with light: the metaphor is not so much one of being born as of dispelling a confused dream or nightmare world of chaos with the power of 'reality' and light.

Biblical Passages Cited

Genesis 1. The Priestly narrative.
Genesis 2:4ff. The older Jahwist account of creation.
The Teacher's Perspective

1. The Order of Types: The Second Part of This Series

This program, appropriately concerned with the idea of a beginning, marks a new beginning for this series. In the first fifteen programs, we were concerned with the imaginative elements of the Bible, those elements that it has in common with literary works, and which give the Bible its imaginative unity. For those who are, so to speak, just tuning in, we might summarize the content of our series thus far. The imaginative unity of the Bible has a structural unity of metaphor: programs 3-10 were concerned with building up a pattern of Biblical imagery on divine, spiritual, paradisal, human, pastoral (animal), agricultural (vegetable) and urban (mineral) levels of existence. It has a narrative unity of myth: programs 2 and 11-15 examined various aspects of the basic Biblical myth of fall and deliverance, of which there are several versions.

But the Bible is a unity which, as Prof. Frye says, has passed beyond unity: beyond the perfected, finished and complete, into that which is continuous, alive and always recreating itself. In programs 16-30, we will examine a series of seven phases of revelation, each one recreating in a larger context the phase before it: creation, revolution, law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel and apocalypse. The idea of a sequence of progressive understandings of the Word is an aspect of the third element of the Bible, introduced in programs 3 and 12, that of typology.

Just as the Old and New Testaments form a 'double mirror', whereby each event of the Old Testament is a type, of which an event in the New Testament is the fulfillment or fully revealed form, called the antitype, so our series follows the 'double mirror' structure of The Great Code itself, whereby 'The Order of Words' (Part I), Prof. Frye's term in the Anatomy of Criticism and elsewhere for the imaginative unity of literature, is recreated by 'The Order of Types' (Part II), which is an aspect of the Bible's human concern. We shall continue our rhythm of alternating between the literary and the Biblical in these teacher's guides, in the hope that these two aspects may recreate each other also.

2. In the Beginning

Don Juan in Shaw's Man and Superman found that all the interesting people were in hell, because they eventually all got bored with a changeless heaven of Victorian morality and interminable harp playing. It is a good work to discuss in relation to the idea of the Bible's concept of aionios, the everlasting, because Shaw makes it obvious that the static morality and the static idea of heaven are connected; and he picked Don Juan as his hero.
because Don Juan is one of those people that Prof. Frye speaks of, to whom we owe a lot more because they went on sinning. Shaw's Don Juan is a philosopher, and what we owe to him in the play is Shaw's philosophy of creative evolution, which is clearly an attempt to find a dynamic and recreative element in time as an alternative to popular Christianity. Whatever it may owe to Nietzsche, Shaw's creative evolution is something like a return to the vision of Biblical typology with its God become, however, an immanent 'life force' rather than the transcendent tyrant of a changeless status quo. The particular choice of Don Juan as hero points to the theme of sexual experience and selfconsciousness that is traditionally a part of the Fall; see The Great Code, pp. 109-110. All of these themes are present in Byron's Don Juan also, to which Shaw's play can be compared, except that Byron does not present the evolutionary alternative. Incidentally, Shaw's view of heaven and hell is not exclusively modern; in the Middle Ages itself the hero of the old French romance Aucassin and Nicolette says that he would much rather go to hell than heaven because all the things worth living for seem to be headed for hell, whereas nobody seems interested in heaven except a bunch of old crooks who are fit for nothing else.

They are also present in Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. The fall of Stephen Dedalus from the naive piety of his Catholic childhood is due to his sexual awareness, and the enormous sermon on the everlasting agonies of hell in the center of the book is surely the definitive example in literature of the perversion of the Biblical concept of eternity. Stephen, who, incidentally, is bullied as a child for professing a love of Byron, bears the names of the first Christian martyr and of the Greek Daedalus, whose son Icarus enacted one Classical counterpart to the Fall. (There are others: for example, the fall of Phaeton or the Judgment of Paris).

Protestant versions of eternity as unending time, whatever their real nature, tend to get characterized as 'Calvinist'. The class may take a look at the original Pauline source of the doctrine of predestination, the Epistle to the Romans, chapters 8 and 9. In 9:15, Paul quotes an Old Testament precedent for the idea, Exodus 33:19. A connection of the Epistle to the Romans to Joyce occurs in Finnegans Wake, where the number 11 symbolizes cyclical return (1 to 10 and then begin over) and the number 32 symbolizes the Fall (the 32 feet per second per second at which falling bodies accelerate); Romans 11:32 is an expression of the idea of the 'fortunate fall', the felix culpa (happy fault) of St. Augustine, also a leit motif in the Wake.

The Calvinist interpretation of predestination got transplanted to America, where it
had a thriving career in the 17th century. Students may compare the sermon in the Portrait to Jonathan Edwards' 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'. The protagonist of Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow finds that he is one of the Preterite, one of the 'vessels of wrath fitted to destruction' (Romans 9:22) who are the opposite of the elect: Pynchon connects this demonic idea of time to the kind of pseudoscientific determinism found in distorted versions of behavioristic psychology.

At this point, students may be ready to ask, somewhat impatiently, whether the western world has managed to come up with images of eternity that are better than ironic distortions. An example of the continuing expansion of the Biblical vision in history that is extremely close to this series' conception of seven phases of revelation is that of Blake's 'Seven Eyes of God' (see Prof. Frye's Fearful Symmetry). Blake's Seven Eyes are themselves recreations of the visions of Zechariah and Revelation that were discussed in programs 9 and 12. The image mentioned by Prof. Frye in the seminar portion of the show, of dancing as a symbol of an unfallen telos, of time as an expression of inner energy and of a change not headed in the direction of death, is constant in literature from the Elizabethan John Davies' poem Orchestra (alluded to in Theodore Roethke's Four for Sir John Davies) to Eliot's 'Burnt Norton': 'there the dance is'. The idea of the timeless present occurs in all these writers: it is in Joyce's epiphanies; in Pynchon's idea of random sequence; in Eliot's 'history is a pattern of timeless moments'; in the past recaptured by Proust through the vivid remembrance of a single childhood experience; in the momentary insights of the characters in Virginia Woolf's Between the Acts. Such visions or epiphanies often take place on a height or mountain: see program 2 and the discussion of the point of epiphany in Prof. Frye's Anatomy of Criticism. They are far from being only fictional: historical personages from St. Paul to Paul Tillich have reported experiences which have seemed to transcend the limitations of time and ordinary experience; Paul apparently describes his, modestly in the third person, in II Corinthians 12:2-4. The students may compare Abraham Maslow's concept of 'peak experiences' in The Farther Reaches of Human Nature.

The ambiguities bound up with the notion of an absolute beginning, and of a creation myth that necessitated the idea of a Fall, led early to the assumption that the Creation itself was a fall into imperfection: various Gnostic and Cabbalistic versions of this idea as they later exerted influence on English Romanticism are discussed in M.H. Abrams' Natural Supernaturalism. Both Blake in The Four Zoas and Joyce in Finnegans Wake accept this notion thoroughly, and combine it with the theme of redemption as the
awakening from a nightmare world of chaos. The Four Zoas is 'A Dream of Nine Nights' by the universal human and divine figure Blake calls Albion; Joyce's Irish variation is the drunk and sleeping Finnegans. The theme is by no means treated necessarily as sublime and cosmic: it is just as evident in Alice in Wonderland and 'Sleeping Beauty'.

The teacher may want to go into the original association of Hebrew religion with lunar symbolism; Thomas Mann makes a great deal of this in his Joseph tetralogy, and Yeats' A Vision is a cyclic vision of history as controlled by the phases of the moon, a kind of extended demonic counterpart to the lunar symbolism woven into the three-day rhythm of the Passion.

**Supplementary Reading**

1. Biblical Passages
   Romans 8:9. Predestination.
   Exodus 33:19. 'And will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy'.
   Romans 11:32. The fortunate fall.
   II Corinthians 2-4. 'he was caught up into paradise'.

2. Corresponding Passages in *The Great Code*
   Chapter Five. Typology II.
   pp. 105-06. Phases of revelation.

3. Other

**Suggested Essay and Discussion Questions**

1. What might Paul's statements about the predestined and the elect come to mean if they were reconsidered as freed from the category of ordinary time?

2. Discuss Tennyson's *In Memoriam* in light of what we have discussed in this program about eternity and time, evolution, epiphany, and telos.

3. Compare Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* with what we said in this guide about Man and Superman. Can Shaw's 'creative evolution' be said itself to have got free of the category of time?
4. Discuss Blake's short poem 'To the God of This World' in the light of this program, especially in light of what we have said about dreaming and waking, night and day.

5. Compare the story of the loss of immortality in the Gilgamesh Epic to the story of the Fall in Genesis.