

CHAPTER 5

God and Genesis

It is common among lay circles to think that a religion ought to have some form of theistic framework which would offer an answer to the question how the world and beings in it came into existence. It was considered natural that atheism meant a-religion. Even among learned circles a definition of religion usually only referred to theistic systems. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* puts it this way: "Then religion consists in intercourse with God, which is the immanence of the omnipotence of God, and the obedience of a full submission that would conceive his presence and accept his command in every experience."¹ The extent to which the identification of religion with theism has been made can be seen in some general statements in which atheism has been understood as the very opposite of religion. "A little philosophy inclineth a man's mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bring the men's minds to religion." said Sir Francis Bacon.² The connected problem of the origin or beginning of the world and soul was also usually considered in conjunction with the concept of God, and any attempt to propose a non-theistic genesis theory was considered ludicrous. As one author puts it:

"Only in Atheism does the spring rise higher than the source, the effect exist without the cause, life come from a stone, blood from a turnip, a silk purse from a sow's ear, a Beethoven symphony or a Bach Fugue from a kitten's walking across the keys."³

Orthodox religion, with which Buddhism had to co-exist, was one of theistic character. Indra had developed a full fledged theistic pattern of thinking even as early as sixth century B.C. What has Buddhism to say then about this very important problem? It has surprised many with its distrust in a creator God. Buddhism has no God to whom it can refer as Creator, Lord, Saviour etc, who can be

1. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, p.456.

2. Essays XVI. As quoted in the *Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations*, p.10.

3. James M. Gillis, 'On almost everything' as quoted in the *Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations*, p.11.