

# GENESIS, CREATION, AND EARLY MAN

*The Orthodox Christian Vision*



FR. SERAPHIM ROSE

*Introduction by Phillip E. Johnson*

**A**MIDST the creation/evolution debate that is now raging, with evidence being offered for both sides, few have made use of what Fr. Seraphim Rose called “the missing evidence”: the timeless teaching of the Orthodox Holy Fathers on the events of creation, the first-created world, the natures of created things, the original nature of man, and the cosmic consequences of man’s fall.

In the present volume, this teaching has been gathered and set forth in a thorough, detailed, and above all *honest* manner. Perhaps more than anyone else in our times, Fr. Seraphim Rose searched, studied, prayed, and struggled to understand how the Holy Fathers noetically apprehended the beginning of the world as revealed in the Divinely inspired book of Genesis. Having acquired their mind, he has presented to the modern world the harmonious Patristic *vision* of the cosmos.

A much-needed answer to today’s “crisis of meaning,” this book sheds unique light on the origin and primordial condition of man and the cosmos, showing how these mysteries are inextricably tied to those of our redemption by Jesus Christ and of creation’s redeemed state beyond the general resurrection. The Divine vision of the Fathers opens up deeper levels of awareness concerning God’s creation and His ultimate intention for it—levels that cannot be reached through merely rational or scientific means.

**FR. SERAPHIM ROSE** (1934–1982) was an Orthodox monk in the ancient tradition who dedicated his life to reawakening the modern West to forgotten spiritual truths. From his remote cabin in the mountains of northern California, he authored works that have had a profound international impact.

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“A presentation of the traditional, Patristic understanding of Genesis, which at the same time bravely exposes the lie of the modern philosophy of evolution. This is a vital, pathfinding work, which can serve as a true foundation for all sides in future discussions.”

—His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese  
of the USA, Canada, and Australia

“It is with great joy and tremendous interest that we greet the publication of the second edition—containing much additional theological and scientific material of great value—of this remarkable work by Hieromonk Seraphim of blessed memory. Having myself employed the first edition of this work as a sourcebook in our courses on Apologetics and Comparative Theology, I can testify to the clarity and meticulousness of Fr. Seraphim’s presentation of the traditional Orthodox doctrine of creation. I can moreover witness to the satisfaction with which students, previously instructed in evolutionist theories, encounter the truth about our God-breathed origins in the pages of this book. As an antidote against the fashionable but spiritually and intellectually corrosive ‘dogma’ of evolution, this work is unsurpassed. As such, it belongs everywhere—parishes, monasteries, seminaries, and homes—where Orthodoxy is taught and studied.”

—Archimandrite Luke, Rector, Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary, Jordanville, New York

## GENESIS, CREATION, AND EARLY MAN



HIEROMONK SERAPHIM ROSE  
1934–1982

# GENESIS, CREATION, *and* EARLY MAN

*The Orthodox Christian Vision*

FR. SERAPHIM ROSE

Edited by Hieromonk Damascene

*Second Edition*



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*Icons on front cover and spine:* The creation of the sun, moon, and stars (“lights in the firmament of the heavens”) on the Fourth Day of Creation.  
*Interior frescos from Sucevita Monastery, Moldavia, Romania, 1595–1596.*  
*Photographs by Mihai Tabacu.*

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Scenes from the life of Adam and Eve.  
*Russian icon of the eighteenth century (detail).*

# ABBREVIATIONS

- ACCS Thomas C. Oden, general ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001–.
- ACT Thomas C. Oden and Gerald L. Bray, series eds. *Ancient Christian Texts*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009–.
- ACW *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1946–.
- ANF A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. 10 vols. Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature, 1885–1896. Reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1951–1956. Reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994.
- AW H.-G. Opitz, ed. *Athanasius Werke*. Berlin: Kirchenväter-Kommission der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1934–1940, 1996–.
- CCSG *Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols/Leuven University Press, 1977–.
- CCSL *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols/Leuven University Press, 1953–.
- CSCO *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*. Louvain, Belgium, 1903–.
- CSEL *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*. Vienna, 1866–.
- Dobrotolyubiye* St. Theophan the Recluse, trans. *Dobrotolyubiye v” Russkom perevode, dopolnennoye* (The Philokalia in Russian translation, supplemented). 5 vols. Moscow: Athonite Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon, 1877–1889. 2nd ed., 1883–1900. 3rd ed., 1913.
- FC *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1947–.
- FCM Fr. Seraphim Rose, trans. *St. Symeon the New Theologian: The First-Created Man*. St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1994.

## ABBREVIATIONS

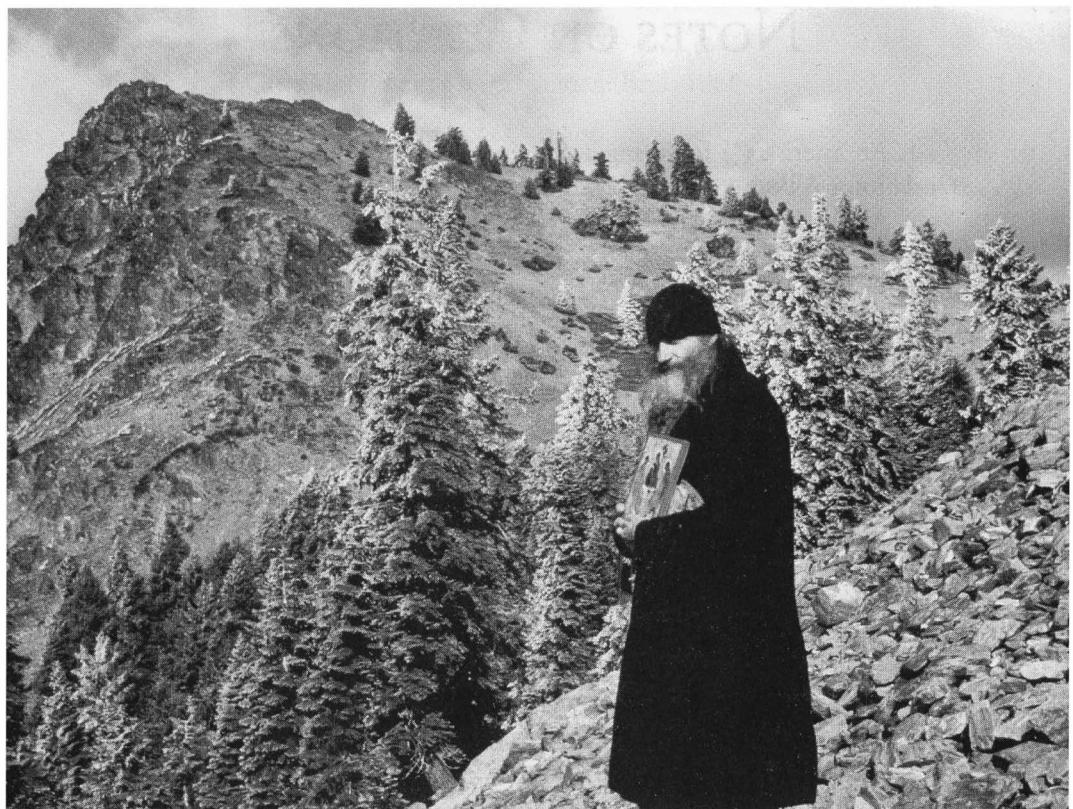
	Originally published in 1979 under the title <i>The Sin of Adam and Our Redemption</i> .
GCS	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte. Leipzig/Berlin, 1897–.
GNO	Gregorii Nysseni Opera. Leiden: Brill, 1960–.
KJV	Holy Bible: King James Version
LEC	The Library of Early Christianity. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007–.
LFC	A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church: Anterior to the Division of the East and West. Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1838–1881.
LXX	Old Testament: Septuagint (Greek) Version
NPNF	P. Schaff et al., eds. A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. 2 series (14 vols. each). Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature, 1887–1894. Reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1952–1956; Reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994.
PG	J.-P. Migne, ed. Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graeca. 166 vols. Paris: Migne, 1857–1886.
<i>Philokalia</i>	G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, trans. <i>The Philokalia: The Complete Text, compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth</i> . London: Faber and Faber, 1979–.
<i>Philokalia</i> (Greek)	<i>Philokalia: Ton ieron niptikon</i> (The Philokalia of the neptic fathers). Athens: Astir Publishing Company, 1957–1963. 5 vols. Reprint, Athens: Publishing House “Sotir,” 1976. Based on the earlier editions published in Venice, 1782, and Athens, 1893.
PL	J.-P. Migne, ed. Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Latina. 221 vols. Paris: Migne, 1844–1864.
PPS	Pocket Patristics Series. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1977–.
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1963–.
SC	H. de Lubac, J. Daniélou et al., eds. Sources Chrétiennes. Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1941–.

# NOTES ON CITATIONS

1. An asterisk (\*) following a reference indicates that the cited English translation has been modified based on the original text.
2. All the Psalm references follow the numbering of the Septuagint version of the Old Testament.
3. In the footnotes, foreign-language titles of works of recent centuries are given only in English translation, while in the endnotes and bibliography such citations are given both in the original language and in English translation.
4. For two of his main Patristic sources—*Homilies on Genesis* by St. John Chrysostom and *Commentary on Genesis* by St. Ephraim the Syrian—Fr. Seraphim translated from and referred to Russian editions. After his repose, both of these works have been made available in English translation, in the FC series.

The section divisions of the Russian translation (1898) of St. John Chrysostom's *Homilies on Genesis* correspond with those in the original Greek text published in PG, vols. 53 and 54 (1862), while those in the FC volumes (74, 1986; 82, 1990; 87, 1992) were made by the translator. In each citation of *Homilies on Genesis* found in the present book, we have provided the section numbers found both in PG and in the Russian edition, as well as those in the FC volumes.

The original Syriac text of St. Ephraim's *Commentary on Genesis* (first published in 1732–1743) has no chapter or section divisions. The Russian edition of 1887, which Fr. Seraphim used, contains added chapter divisions. In 1955, a critical edition of the work (CSCO, vols. 152–53) was published containing added chapter divisions that differ from the Russian, as well as section divisions. The English translation in FC (vol. 91, 1994) follows the divisions found in the critical edition. In the present book, wherever Fr. Seraphim refers to the Russian translation, we have provided the chapter numbers for the Russian edition and the chapter and section numbers for the FC edition. In references given by the editor alone, only the FC chapter and section numbers are indicated.



Fr. Seraphim Rose amidst one of the oldest stands of living trees on earth,  
atop Mount Yolla Bolly in northern California, October 1981.

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

### *The Story behind the Book*

**T**HIS BOOK, compiled and published posthumously, represents one of the most important achievements in the life of the revered Orthodox writer Fr. Seraphim Rose. It is an exhaustive collection of all the relevant material—from manuscripts, transcriptions of tape-recorded lectures, and letters—that Fr. Seraphim produced on the subject of Genesis and creation over the course of nine years, until his repose in 1982. Broad in scope and rich in detail, it can serve as a source book and an invaluable reference for students of Orthodox Patristic teaching.

Behind the gathered components of this book there lies a story integral to Fr. Seraphim's life and work, which were always concerned with the beginning and end of all things. It is our purpose here to tell that story.

#### *1. The Intellectual Milieu of Fr. Seraphim's Formative Years*

In the 1950s, when Fr. Seraphim (then Eugene) Rose was attending high school and college in Southern California, the evolutionary worldview of secular science was at the height of its prestige. The scientific establishment had long since come to be defined by the philosophy of naturalism: the belief that “nature is all there is.” Since it logically follows from such a philosophy that nature itself must have brought all things into existence, it was assumed *a priori* that natural and material explanations could be found not only for repeatable phenomena presently observed in nature, but also for the unrepeatable, unobserved *origin* of the universe, including biological systems and

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

man himself. Belief in a spontaneous, undirected, materialistic origin of all things actually requires more faith than does belief in supernatural creation by a Divine intelligence, particularly when one confronts the marvelous order and complexity of the natural world. Nevertheless, scientists working from naturalistic presuppositions were successfully promoting the idea that their own origins story—that of molecules-to-man evolution, without need for God—relied not at all on faith but only on “science,” and that the concept of Divine creation was “unscientific.”

The ascendancy of evolutionary theory as a naturalistic origins story culminated in the grand Darwin Centennial celebration at the University of Chicago in 1959, commemorating the publication of Charles Darwin's evolutionary treatise *The Origin of Species* one hundred years earlier. Scientists came from all over to share in the triumph, not only of a scientific theory, but of a worldview. As Phillip E. Johnson writes:

“The participants in the Darwin Centennial were understandably in a triumphal mood. The prestige of science was never higher. Polio had been conquered by a vaccine; atomic power seemed to promise abundant, cheap energy; space travel loomed in the near future. Besides these technological achievements, science had seemingly established that a purposeless process of evolution was our true creator and hence had dethroned the God of the Bible. The religious implications of this intellectual revolution were frankly emphasized by the most prominent speaker at the centennial, the British biologist, philosopher and world statesman Sir Julian Huxley.

Julian Huxley was the grandson of Thomas Henry Huxley, who was known as ‘Darwin's bulldog’ because he was the most important early champion of Darwin's theory. T. H. Huxley had also invented the word *agnostic* to describe his own religious views. Julian Huxley, a zoologist, was one of the scientific founders of the neo-Darwinian synthesis, the modern version of Darwin's theory.\* He was also the promoter of a naturalistic religion called evolutionary humanism, and

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\* Neo-Darwinism attempts to combine Darwin's idea of evolution through natural selection with the findings of modern genetics. See p. 823n below.

## THE STORY BEHIND THE BOOK

the founding secretary general of UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. In short, Julian Huxley was one of the most influential intellectuals of the mid-twentieth century, and 1959 was the high-water mark of his influence. Here are some excerpts from Huxley's remarks at the Centennial:

Future historians will perhaps take this Centennial Week as epitomizing an important critical period in the history of this earth of ours—the period when the process of evolution, in the person of inquiring man, began to be truly conscious of itself.... This is one of the first public occasions on which it has been frankly faced that all aspects of reality are subject to evolution, from atoms and stars to fish and flowers, from fish and flowers to human societies and values—indeed, that all reality is a single process of evolution.

In 1859, Darwin opened the passage leading to a new psychosocial level, with a new pattern of ideological organization—an evolution-centered organization of thought and belief.

In the evolutionary pattern of thought there is no longer either need or room for the supernatural. The earth was not created, it evolved. So did all the animals and plants that inhabit it, including our human selves, mind and soul as well as brain and body. So did religion.

Evolutionary man can no longer take refuge from his loneliness in the arms of a divinized father figure whom he has himself created, nor escape from the responsibility of making decisions by sheltering under the umbrella of Divine Authority, nor absolve himself from the hard task of meeting his present problems and planning his future by relying on the will of an omniscient, but unfortunately inscrutable, Providence.

Finally, the evolutionary vision is enabling us to discern, however incompletely, the lineaments of the new religion that we can be sure will arise to serve the needs of the coming era.

"In short, the triumph of Darwinism implied the death of God and set the stage for replacing Biblical religion with a new faith based on evolutionary naturalism. That new faith would become the basis

not just of science but also of government, law and morality. It would be the established religious philosophy of modernity.”<sup>1</sup>

Some of the world’s most eminent scientists—from Richard Owen and Louis Agassiz in the 1860s to Richard Goldschmidt and Otto Schindewolf in the 1940s—had shown to the scientific community the embarrassing difficulties of the neo-Darwinian synthesis that was being heralded at the Centennial, but these scientists had been censured and their valid objections dismissed out of hand.\* In addition to these vocal critics, there was a silent group of scientists who disagreed with neo-Darwinism but were afraid to challenge the prevailing model. The existence of this group was even acknowledged at the Darwin Centennial by the paleontologist Everett Claire Olson of the University of California, who said, “It is difficult to judge the size and composition of this silent segment, but there is no doubt that the numbers are not inconsiderable.”<sup>2</sup>

Whether they were silenced or chose to remain silent, the many scientists who questioned neo-Darwinism were not heard by the American people. Consequently, when Fr. Seraphim began studying science in high school and college in the early 1950s, he was taught that the evolution of all life from a primeval soup was an undisputed and unassailable fact, as sure (in Julian Huxley’s words) as the fact that the earth goes around the sun.

## *2. From the Evolutionary Worldview to the Orthodox Worldview*

Possessed of a brilliant mind, Fr. Seraphim from a young age exhibited a burning desire to *know*, to understand reality in the highest sense. In high school he zealously sought knowledge in science (chemistry, biology) and mathematics. Graduating at the top of his class, he was granted a scholarship to Pomona College in Southern

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\* A list of some of the scientists who had openly challenged neo-Darwinian claims was included in the English edition of *Evolution above the Species Level* by German evolutionary biologist Bernhard Rensch, published during the same year as the Darwin Centennial (Columbia University Press, 1959, pp. 57–58).

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California, thanks to the enthusiastic endorsement of his math teacher.

At Pomona he continued his study of science, which he now combined with a study of philosophy. Under the influence of the humanists of his time, he joined in the grand enterprise of thinkers like Julian Huxley: to explain the universe without God. In a freshman philosophy paper (1953), he stated:

All science points to the existence of the Universe, the totality of all things. Nothing in science points to the existence of a God removed from the Universe. For the present time, since I have not yet developed my own theory of knowledge, I assume for convenience' sake that I can gain knowledge (as certain as it *can* be obtained) through science. Therefore, I believe in the findings of science that point to the existence of the Universe; I reject the concept of an independent God for insufficient evidence.<sup>3</sup>

This statement may seem naive nowadays, when the equating of science with naturalism is being increasingly challenged by both scientists and non-scientists, but it must be considered in the context of the 1950s, the decade of the ascendancy of Humanism and the triumphal pronouncements of the Darwin Centennial.

"At one time I believed entirely in evolution," Fr. Seraphim was later to recall. "I believed not because I had thought very much about this question, but simply because 'everyone believes it,' because it is a 'fact,' and how can one deny 'facts'?... I still remember my freshman professor of zoology expatiating on the 'great ideas of man': for him the greatest idea man ever invented was the idea of evolution; much greater, he believed, than the 'idea of God.'"<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately, Fr. Seraphim's striving to understand the meaning of reality could not be satisfied by modern science, limited as it was by materialism, nor by Western philosophy, which had been born in rationalism. "I was an undergraduate," he later recalled, "looking for some kind of truth in philosophy, and not finding it. I was very bored with Western philosophy."<sup>5</sup> During his sophomore year he began to seek higher wisdom in the philosophy of ancient China, for which he

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undertook a study of the Chinese language, both ancient and modern.

Fr. Seraphim graduated from Pomona College in 1956 and pursued his study of ancient Chinese language and philosophy at the Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco and later at the University of California in Berkeley. While at the Academy, he discovered the writings of the twentieth-century French metaphysician René Guénon, a traditionalist who looked to the ancient, orthodox expressions of the world's religions for answers to ultimate questions. Guénon both clarified and transformed Fr. Seraphim's intellectual outlook. Later he wrote, "It was Guénon who taught me to seek and love the truth above all else, and to be unsatisfied with anything else."<sup>6</sup>

Fr. Seraphim's education had taught him to view all things in terms of historical *progress*, according to the evolutionary worldview of the modern age. Upon discovering Guénon, he began to see things in terms of historical *disintegration*.

In his book *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, Guénon explained how the elimination of traditional spiritual principles has led to a drastic degeneration of humanity. He showed how twentieth-century science, with its tendency to reduce everything to an exclusively quantitative level, had corrupted man's conception of true knowledge and confined his vision to what is temporal and material.

Guénon wrote elsewhere that, "in attempting to reduce everything to the stature of man taken as an end in himself, modern civilization has sunk stage by stage to a level of his lowest elements and aims at little more than satisfying the needs inherent in the material side of his nature."<sup>7</sup> Trying to fill in the gap left by science and materialism in the modern age, "pseudo-religions" have sprung up; but in their confusion of psychic with spiritual reality, they have only further obscured the truth.

Guénon wrote that "the modern world, considered in itself, is an anomaly, and even a sort of monstrosity"; and he regarded the modern scientific theory of evolution, which was developed in an attempt to explain the universe purely naturalistically, as an offspring of this monstrosity. In evolutionism, he wrote, "all reality is placed exclusively in 'becoming'; involving the final denial of all immutable principle, and consequently of all metaphysic."<sup>8</sup>

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It is likely that Guénon caused Fr. Seraphim to question evolutionism even before the latter began his conversion to Orthodox Christianity. “I began to think more deeply on this question [of evolutionism],” Fr. Seraphim later recalled. “I began to see that very often what calls itself ‘science’ is not *fact* at all, but *philosophy*, and I began very carefully to distinguish between *scientific facts* and *scientific philosophy*.<sup>9\*</sup>

In his freshman year at Pomona, Fr. Seraphim had trusted the modern scientific outlook. After his study of Guénon, he was still to regard science as a way to knowledge, but now he saw this as “knowledge of the lowest, commonest sort.”<sup>10</sup>

Guénon had shown Fr. Seraphim what to leave behind and had started him on the path to Truth, but he had not shown him his final destination. Fr. Seraphim found this destination when, by a miracle, he discovered that the Truth he was seeking was a Person—Jesus Christ—Whose image was preserved undistorted in the Orthodox transmission of the very Christianity he had previously rejected.

In the Orthodox Church, Fr. Seraphim found the true, ancient worldview to replace the modern evolutionary one; and the key to this worldview he found in the writings of the Orthodox Holy Fathers. The theology of the Holy Fathers, he understood, was based on the living, personal revelation of God to man, and thus was of an infinitely higher order not only than science, but even than the metaphysical insights he had gained through Guénon. He never ceased to appreciate the crucial step that Guénon had given him on his path to Truth, but now he saw that the path of metaphysics, which places human intellection above the Divinely inspired theology of the Church, is fraught with dangers, leading to subtle errors mingled with higher truths. Whereas before he had relied on his mind to arrive at Truth, now he knew he had to humble his mind before the Truth as Person: Jesus Christ. Shortly after his conversion he wrote, “When I became a Christian I voluntarily crucified my mind, and all the crosses that I

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\* On the distinction between “fact” and “philosophy” in this context, see p. 421n below.

bear have only been a source of joy for me. I have lost nothing, and gained everything.”

### *3. The Roots of Evolutionism*

During the early years following his conversion, Fr. Seraphim made a thorough examination of the philosophical history of Western civilization, in order to fully understand the past causes, present state, and future development of the West’s apostasy from the “Old Order” of traditional Christian civilization. Out of this study was to come his philosophical magnum opus, entitled *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*.

In chapter 4 of the proposed work, Fr. Seraphim was to discuss the new physics propounded at the end of the Renaissance by the rationalist Descartes, which aimed at assigning natural (i.e., not Divine) causes to all physical phenomena, and thus made way for the eventual identification of science with philosophical naturalism.\* In the same chapter he was to describe the modern philosophy of *progress* which arose at the end of the Enlightenment, displacing the stable worldview that had characterized much of Enlightenment thought. These two *a priori* philosophical commitments—to naturalism and to progress—formed the seedbed out of which came ideas of biological evolution: ideas first propagated by Western European thinkers in the second half of the eighteenth century,\*\* long before the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. As Fr. Seraphim later observed, “This theory [of evolution] developed *together with the course of modern philosophy from Descartes onward*, long before there was any ‘scientific proof’ for it.”<sup>11</sup>

The research Fr. Seraphim did for his proposed book was prodigious. He wrote thousands of pages of notes but, due to new avenues of Orthodox activity that opened up to him, he never completed the work,

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\* On the historical roots of naturalism, see Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, pp. 71–73. On the modern identification of science with philosophical naturalism, see Phillip E. Johnson, “Evolution as Dogma: The Establishment of Naturalism” (1990).

\*\* For a list of these thinkers, see p. 462n below.

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save for chapter 7, on Nihilism.\* By 1963, along with his co-laborer, the future Fr. Herman, he was heavily involved in beginning an Orthodox Christian Brotherhood in San Francisco and opening the first city storefront in America that sold exclusively Orthodox materials.

### *4. The Mind of the Holy Fathers*

In the meantime, Fr. Seraphim's archbishop and spiritual mentor, the miracle-worker St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, had begun a series of theological courses in San Francisco, which Fr. Seraphim attended several times a week for three years. Although Fr. Seraphim was an American convert and all the courses were conducted in Russian, he graduated at the head of the class. Among the many subjects covered, he was taught Patristics by Bishop Nektary (a disciple of St. Nektary of Optina Monastery in Russia) and Old Testament by Archimandrite Spyridon (a clairvoyant elder and the closest disciple of St. John). Here, in contrast to the rationalistic evolutionary ideas he had been taught while growing up, Fr. Seraphim learned the revelation of God Himself regarding the creation of the universe and the nature of the first-created world, as passed on in the Sacred Scriptures and in the writings of the God-bearing Holy Fathers throughout the centuries. Having such rare instructors as St. John, Bishop Nektary, and Fr. Spyridon, Fr. Seraphim was able to receive the transmission of Patristic wisdom not only from books, but from living bearers of that transmission. It was through living repositories of sanctity that the meaning of Genesis was opened to him.

In 1969 Fathers Seraphim and Herman moved to the mountains of northern California, where they became monks and continued their Orthodox missionary work through writing, translating, and printing Orthodox material. There, in their forest hermitage, Fr. Seraphim continued to fill himself with the Scriptures and the writings of the Fathers. Over years of study, he acquired extensive knowledge of Patristic teaching, which had already been placed in the proper context for him

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\* Published posthumously as a separate book: Eugene (Fr. Seraphim) Rose, *Nihilism: The Root of the Revolution of the Modern Age* (1994).

through the courses he had attended in San Francisco. In addressing a particular issue in his writings, he would make use of a wide range of Patristic sources both ancient and modern, from both Eastern and Western Christendom, many of them never before rendered in English.

Fr. Seraphim's aim, however, was not to become simply a scholar whose specialty was Patristic studies. As always, he had to go deeper, to get the whole picture. He had not only to grasp the Fathers' writings intellectually, but to *acquire their mind* and spiritual orientation: to learn to think, feel, and look at things as they did, and to imbibe the true meaning and intention of Holy Scripture as they did. "In the Holy Fathers," he wrote, "we find the 'mind of the Church'—the living understanding of God's revelation. They are our link between the ancient texts which contain God's revelation [i.e., the Scriptures] and today's reality. Without such a link it is every man for himself—and the result is a myriad of interpretations and sects."\*

Fr. Seraphim struggled in his quest to acquire the mind of the Fathers, praying fervently to God. He supplicated the ancient Holy Fathers as living members of the Body of Christ, that through their prayers to God he would be given to see how they apprehended reality. He felt especially close to the fourth-century Father St. Basil the Great, who, among the many sacred treasures he bequeathed to the Church, wrote the most authoritative Patristic commentary on the Six Days of Creation.

Too often in contemporary Orthodox scholarship the tendency is to revise the Faith of the Holy Fathers in order to conform it to the mind-set of modern man. This approach is informed by the modern notion of "progress" mentioned above: the idea that, since we live in "enlightened" times, with more knowledge and research tools at our disposal, we are better equipped than the Fathers of previous times to answer the fundamental questions of interpretation, doctrine, and even life. Sometimes Orthodox scholars who adopt this approach will try to spot contradictions between the teachings of various Fathers, thereby calling the authority of the Fathers into question and freeing the scholars themselves to revise the Faith according to modern conceptions.

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\* See p. 112 below.

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Categorically rejecting this approach of “we know better than they,” Fr. Seraphim both practiced and advocated a humble, reverent, and loving approach to the Holy Fathers. He knew that, rather than conform Orthodoxy to modernity, he had to do just the opposite: to conform his consciousness to that of the Fathers, to enter fully into the two-thousand-year continuity of Christian experience. The tradition of the Fathers, he understood, was a continuation of the tradition of the Apostles—of “the faith that was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3), of the truth (in the phrase of St. Irenaeus of Lyons) that the Apostles “deposited” in the Church.<sup>12</sup> In acquiring the mind of the Apostles and Fathers, and through them the mind of the Church, Fr. Seraphim was at the same time acquiring the mind of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 2:16), Who is the Head of the Church.

As Fr. Seraphim stated, we are not to be looking for “contradictions” in the Fathers; rather, we are to view the Orthodox teaching of the Fathers as “one single whole”:

Since the whole of Orthodox teaching is obviously not contained in any one Father (for all the Fathers are human and thus limited), we find parts of it in one Father and other parts in another Father, and one Father explains what is obscure in another Father; and it is not even of primary importance for us who said what, as long as it is Orthodox and in harmony with the whole Patristic teaching.\*

Fr. Seraphim’s approach was to find the consensus or accord of the Holy Fathers, the “whole Patristic teaching”; and if a difficult or obscure passage from one Father might seem to contradict it, he sought to find how that passage might rather be harmonized with the broader Patristic heritage, and he never felt free to discard the com-

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\* See p. 447 below. Compare the words of St. Barsanuphius the Great of Gaza (†ca. 570): “Just as God revealed the way of life through the Prophets and Apostles, so also each of these spoke the truth partially. So the truth was not spoken through one person alone; but what one person left out, another spoke according to God’s will. God made the same happen also in the case of saints who followed after them” (Sts. Barsanuphius and John, *Letter 605*, FC 114, p. 189).

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mon teaching.\* This approach to the Fathers was not at all new with Fr. Seraphim: it was the same approach that the Holy Fathers themselves took to those Fathers who came before them.\*\*

Fr. Seraphim held to the common Patristic teaching because he believed that it has been “deposited” in the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Who Christ promised would lead His people “into all truth” (John 16:13). The same Holy Spirit Who inspired the Apostles also inspired the Fathers,\*\*\* enabling the God-bearing teachers of each era to testify truly to what had been deposited in the Church from the very beginning. The Fathers imparted the mind of the Church in light of the unique needs and challenges of their respective times: not by revising the substance or content of what had been taught before them, but rather by expressing the same Faith in new ways, in order to

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\* In those cases where a saying of a Holy Father could in no way be harmonized with the prevailing Patristic view, Fr. Seraphim followed the dictum of St. Photius the Great of Constantinople (+891): “We ... do not take as doctrine those areas in which they strayed, but we embrace the men” (quoted in Fr. Seraphim Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church*, 2nd ed., p. 67). Specifically, Fr. Seraphim took this approach with regard to those teachings of Blessed Augustine that were clearly at odds with the overriding Patristic vision. In accordance with the mind of the Church, he regarded Augustine not as a Father of theological authority, but as a “Father of Orthodox piety” (*ibid.*, p. 80).

\*\* Thus, for example, St. Maximus the Confessor composed an entire work, *Ambigua* (Difficulties), in order to reconcile some difficult—and in some cases seemingly heretical—passages of St. Gregory the Theologian with the common Patristic teaching. Elsewhere, in his *Opuscula*, St. Maximus explained how certain expressions of St. Cyril of Alexandria, which might seem to contradict the Patristic consensus, could be understood in a way that harmonizes with Orthodox teaching (*Opuscula 8*, PG 91.89C–112C).

\*\*\* The decrees of the Ecumenical Councils testify that the teaching of the Holy Fathers as a whole partakes of Divine inspiration and constitutes a consensus that needs to be followed. In the Definition of Faith of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, for example, we find the Council’s decision authenticated by such phrases as “renewing the unerring faith of the Fathers,” “following the Holy Fathers,” and “this is the faith of the Fathers”; while in the Decree of the Seventh Ecumenical Council we hear proclaimed: “Following the royal pathway and the Divinely inspired authority of our Holy Fathers and the traditions of the Catholic Church (for, as we all know, the Holy Spirit indwells her) ...” (*The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, NPNF 2 14, pp. 264, 550).

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clarify different aspects of the unified, internally consistent theology of the Church, aspects which had not been previously scrutinized. Sometimes they were obliged to find different modes of expressing the abiding truths of the Church precisely so that these truths could *not be altered* amidst changing contexts of interpretation and vocabulary over time. Later Fathers drew from and commented on the theology of earlier Fathers, contributing to a theological framework within which to understand some of the difficult passages from earlier times. Thus, the common vision of the Fathers—as an integral and harmonious teaching—is a reality accessible to all. In the words of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, a Holy Father of nineteenth-century Russia for whom Fr. Seraphim had great love and admiration: “What was it that above all struck me in the works of the Fathers of the Orthodox Church? It was their harmony, their wondrous, magnificent harmony. Eighteen centuries, through their lips, testified to a single unanimous teaching, a Divine teaching!”<sup>13</sup>

In order to find and be nourished by this single teaching, however, one must approach the Fathers with reverence and humility. As Fr. Seraphim wrote:

We must go to the Holy Fathers *in order to become their disciples*, to receive the teaching of true life, the soul’s salvation.... We shall find true guidance from the Fathers, learning humility and distrust of our own vain worldly wisdom, which we have sucked in with the air of these pestilential times, by means of trusting those who have pleased God and not the world.<sup>14</sup>

Having seen the falsity of the modern idea of progress, Fr. Seraphim called on his contemporaries to turn to the timeless wisdom of the Fathers in order to find answers to all the questions and problems they face in today’s world, including the question of “evolution”:

There is no problem of our own confused times which cannot find its solution by a careful and reverent reading of the Holy Fathers: whether complex philosophical questions such as “evolution,” or the straightforward moral questions of abortion, euthanasia, and “birth

control.”... In all these questions the Holy Fathers, and our living Fathers who follow them, are our only sure guide.<sup>15</sup>

### *5. Evolution and Chiliasm*

While working on *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*, Fr. Seraphim had identified the faith of modern man as a secular form of *chiliasm*: a belief in the inevitability of progress and in the perfectibility of this fallen world.\* Evolutionism, in its belief in the gradual development from the lower to the higher, was closely related to chiliasm. Although secular evolutionists claim that evolution is random and not directed toward any end, it is difficult not to see the principles of progress and perfectibility in a process which—in the words of Charles Darwin—has brought about a “perfection of structure ... which most justly excites our admiration,” and “the most exalted object of which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, as Fr. Seraphim noted, “chiliasm is almost an inevitable deduction from evolution”\*\* and it was precisely this deduction that evolutionist thinkers like Teilhard de Chardin have drawn from the modern evolutionary paradigm.\*\*\*

Together with chiliasm, evolution was what Fr. Seraphim called “a deep-seated primordial force, which seems to capture people quite

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\* In its original form, chiliasm is the belief, based on a misinterpretation of the book of the Apocalypse (Revelation), that Christ will come to reign over an earthly Kingdom for a thousand years before the Last Judgment. It was held by some early Christian writers before being condemned in 381 at the Second Ecumenical Council, which introduced into the Symbol of Faith the phrase “and His [Christ’s] Kingdom shall have no end.” Fr. Seraphim spoke of “chiliasm” sometimes in its strict theological sense, and sometimes in a more general sense, as referring to any religious or secular belief in this-worldly perfectibility.

\*\* See p. 656 below.

\*\*\* Other thinkers who have formulated chiliastic, teleological versions of evolutionism include the philosophers Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, and Jean Gebser; the esotericists and occultists Max Théon, C. W. Leadbeater, H. P. Blavatsky, Alice Bailey, and Rudolph Steiner; the Hindu teachers Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo; and the “integral” theorists Edward Haskell, Arthur M. Young, Ken Wilber, and Don Beck.

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apart from their conscious attitudes and reasoning. (There's a good reason for that: it's been drilled into everyone from the cradle, and therefore is very hard to bring out and look at rationally.)” Echoing the words of Julian Huxley, who at the Darwin Centennial had called evolution a “pattern of thought,” Fr. Seraphim said that it was “a *rival thought-pattern* to Orthodoxy, not just another idea.”<sup>17</sup> And this thought-pattern, he observed, followed a course that was “just the opposite of what Christianity teaches”:

The whole “evolutionary philosophy” which grasps people today leads them to believe, often unconsciously, in a view of creation and life which is just the opposite of what Christianity teaches: simple begets complex, savagery “evolves” to civilization, imperfect gives rise to perfect, “progress,” etc. According to Orthodoxy, the perfect\* falls to the imperfect (Paradise to fallen world ...), and man in the last days will be much lower spiritually than in the early Church ...; incorruption and immortality precede corruption and mortality. The perfection and immortality of the coming age (heaven) are not a *development* or “evolution” from the present world ... but a radical transformation.\*\*

It was the chiliastic-evolutionary thought-pattern which produced such politico-religious movements as international socialism and ecumenism in the twentieth century, and which underpins the globalist hopes and dreams of today. All such movements share the same chiliastic goal: a coming “new order” in which all previous standards, seen as relative to a particular stage in a process, will be changed. Just as all distinctions between organisms are blurred in the idea of biological

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\* “Perfect,” that is, in the sense of a “flawless” or “impeccable” creation. As will be seen in this book, the Holy Fathers sometime speak of “perfection” in this limited sense, and sometimes in the absolute sense of something having reached its final, eschatological state. (The Greek term for “perfect,” τέλειος/τελειότης, is derived from τέλος, which means consummation or end). Thus, at the time of their creation man and the cosmos were “perfect” in the first sense of the word, but not yet in the second.

\*\* See the full quotation on pp. 655–56 below. On this theme, see also the reflections of Holy Hieromartyr Hilarion Troitsky, Archbishop of Verey, pp. 799–801 below.

evolution from a molecule to a man, so too all distinctions between nations and religions are blurred in the chiliastic vision of this-worldly perfection.

### *6. The Holy Fathers on Genesis*

To Fr. Seraphim it was self-evident that evolutionism, with its innumerable corollaries in modern thought and life, was antithetical to the Orthodox worldview that he had embraced. He wrote:

I have always regarded evolution, in all its ramifications, as an important part of the “modern American” intellectual baggage which I left behind when I became Orthodox, and it never occurred to me that any aware Orthodox Christian would regard it as unimportant, especially now when many scientists have abandoned it (purely on scientific grounds), [and] when the pseudo-religious presuppositions of its supporters are so evident.<sup>18</sup>

As Fr. Seraphim noted, all attempts by Christians to add God to the Darwinian theory of evolution

are self-contradictory because the whole purpose and intent of the theory of physical evolution is *to find an explanation of the world without God*; i.e., physical evolution is *by its nature atheistic*,\* and it's

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\* As atheist evolutionists Stephen Jay Gould and Ernst Mayr have shown through researching Charles Darwin's notebooks, Darwin identified himself as a philosophical materialist (hence, in essence an atheist) as early as May 1838, several months before he developed the idea of natural selection as the driving force behind evolution (Gould, *Ever Since Darwin*, pp. 24–25; Mayr, *One Long Argument*, p. 15). Moreover, his early notebooks show that he entertained two other mutually exclusive materialistic theories of evolution before finally arriving at his final theory, which indicates that he was attempting to make empirical data conform to his prior philosophical outlook by means of various hypothetical models and mechanisms. Having settled on natural selection as the mechanism, he was well aware that the thoroughgoing materialism of his theory rendered a supernatural Creator superfluous. He wrote: “The old argument of design in nature, as given by [William] Paley, fails, now that the law of natural selection has been discovered” (*Autobiography of*

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only ridiculous when “theologians” run after the latest “scientific” theory in order not to be left behind by the times.<sup>19</sup>

Just how far his fellow Orthodox Christians had gone in accepting the reigning evolutionary paradigm was first made known to Fr. Seraphim in 1973. In February of that year he helped and encouraged his spiritual son Alexey Young, a public school teacher,\* to write and publish an Orthodox article against evolution.<sup>20</sup> This article, as Fr. Seraphim later wrote, “touched something very deep.”<sup>21</sup> It broached a volatile subject which until then most Orthodox Christians in the West, either swayed or confused by the bold claims of naturalism posing as science, had preferred not to discuss.

Soon after Alexey’s article appeared, articles began coming out in major Orthodox journals in support of evolutionism. This was not surprising to Fr. Seraphim, for he had known ever since his conversion that many Orthodox in America were—largely unconsciously—influenced by the spirit of this world and its intellectual fashions. However, he was genuinely surprised when his fellow “traditionalist” Orthodox, who like him were critical of the modern ecumenical movement, also came out in favor of evolutionism, and roundly censured Alexey for his article.

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*Charles Darwin*, p. 87). Accordingly, he referred to Natural Selection as “my Deity” (letter to Asa Gray, June 5, 1861), and to his theory as “the devil’s gospel” (letter to T. H. Huxley, Aug. 8, 1860). As historian of science George James Grinnell (McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario) has concluded after years of research into Darwin’s public and private writings: “I have done a great deal of work on Darwin and can say with some assurance that Darwin also did not derive his theory from nature but rather superimposed a certain philosophical worldview on nature and then spent twenty years trying to gather the facts to make it stick” (Grinnell, “Reexamination of the Foundations,” *Pensée*, vol. 2, no. 2 [May 1972], p. 44).

On the inherent godlessness of Darwinian evolution, see also Phillip E. Johnson’s introduction, pp. 100–101 below, as well as Jerry Bergman, “Why Orthodox Darwinism Demands Atheism,” *Answers Research Journal*, vol. 3 (2010), pp. 147–52.

\* Alexey Young was ordained to the priesthood in 1979; hence, he is referred to as “Fr. Alexey” later in this book. In 2002, following the repose of his wife, Fr. Alexey was tonsured a monk with the name Ambrose, and in 2007 he was tonsured into the Great Schema, becoming a hieroschemamonk. He now resides at a skete of the St. Gregory Palamas Monastery in Hayesville, Ohio.

"Frankly," Fr. Seraphim wrote, "we are astonished that people who are so keen on ecclesiastical matters, ecumenism, etc., should seem never to have given much thought to such an important thing as evolution; apparently it is because it seems to be outside the Church sphere."<sup>22</sup>

To one of these "traditionalist" Orthodox, Fr. Seraphim wrote:

We fully agree with Alexey that "evolution is one of the most dangerous concepts that faces Orthodox Christians today"—perhaps it is the very key (intellectual) to the assault upon the Church, to the very "philosophy" (and there is such a thing!) of the coming Antichrist.<sup>23</sup>

With this in mind, he encouraged Alexey to write a booklet on evolutionism. In the meantime, he made his own in-depth study of the teaching of the Holy Fathers regarding creation, the first-created world and the first-created man. His starting point was the main Orthodox Patristic commentaries on Genesis—by Sts. Basil, Ambrose, Ephraim the Syrian, and John Chrysostom—but he went well beyond these, drawing material from a wide range of Patristic sources.

Concurrently with his study of the Orthodox teaching on creation, Fr. Seraphim did extensive research into the teaching of evolution as a scientific theory. Comparing the two teachings, he discovered that the ancient Fathers, although they of course did not refute Darwinian evolution *per se* (since it had not been invented until recent times), provided a definite refutation of its main tenets. In the first place, they explicitly rejected the scientific-philosophical speculations of their own days which posited a naturalistic origin of the cosmos, and which thereby anticipated the modern theory of evolution.\* As against such theories, they affirmed that God's supernatural acts of creation were direct, instantaneous, and effortless, showing forth His omnipotence. Secondly, they spoke at length on the distinction between the "kinds" of organisms (cf. Gen. 1:11–12, 20–26)\*\* both at the time of their creation and afterwards, and were clearly against any philosophy that would confuse that distinction. Their teaching allowed for *variation*

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\* See pp. 132, 132n, 503–4n, 557n below.

\*\* On the difference between the "kinds" mentioned in Genesis and the modern concept of "species," see pp. 181–86, 181n, 184n below.

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within each kind, which is observable and scientifically demonstrable, but was adamantly opposed to the idea that one kind could be transformed into another: an idea intrinsic to modern evolutionary theory but scientifically unprovable.

In the course of his research into the Patristic understanding of Genesis and creation—which he undertook, as always, with heartfelt prayer—Fr. Seraphim perceived the profound harmony which, as we have seen, characterizes the testimony of the Fathers. Concerning the various Patristic commentaries on Genesis, he said:

Here we can see how, when one Father speaks specifically on one passage, another Father will perhaps say something in detail about a different passage. If you keep it all together, you get a very good overview of how the mind of the Church, how the Fathers in general look at these passages. You might find a disagreement over some little interpretation, some small point, but concerning the big points you will see they all say the same thing in different ways, that they are quite in harmony over how to interpret the book of Genesis.\*

In finding the consensus of the Fathers—the “whole Patristic teaching”—concerning the first book of the Old Testament, the most basic question that Fr. Seraphim addressed was: Did the Fathers view the Genesis account as a record of real events and people? Having become familiar with the ideas brought forth by “Christian evolutionists,” including Orthodox ones, Fr. Seraphim knew that the most common—and perhaps inevitable—means they employed to make evolutionism and Christianity appear compatible was to de-historicize the book of Genesis (especially the early chapters), viewing it as merely a parable, allegory, or mythological narrative. According to this approach, theological, spiritual, and typological meanings can be derived from the Genesis narrative while the historical meaning can be dismissed as unimportant and expendable.

As Fr. Seraphim understood from his own immersion in the Patristic literature on this subject, such an approach runs directly counter to

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\* See p. 114n below.

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that of the Holy Fathers. In interpreting Genesis, the Fathers did draw out its theological meaning, seeing it in the light of New Testament revelation, in the light of Christ's redemptive work. They applied the truths of the Genesis narrative to the daily lives of Christians, and offered symbolic, spiritual, and typological interpretations of certain elements of the narrative. However, the Fathers did not, as do today's evolutionists, offer such interpretations to the exclusion or at the expense of the historical meaning. They regarded the early chapters of Genesis as a Divinely inspired *prophecy of the past*, telling of real events and people.\*

The de-historicizing of Genesis is not a problem unique to our times. The ancient Fathers dealt with it also, counting it among the heretical tendencies of the Origenists. As Fr. Seraphim noted, the fourth-century Fathers John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, and Ephraim the Syrian—all of whom, as we have seen, wrote commentaries on Genesis—specifically warned against treating Genesis as an unhistorical myth or allegory.\*\*

In the integral Orthodox worldview of the Holy Fathers, neither the theological nor the historical meaning of Holy Scripture can be regarded as expendable. One cannot exist without the other, for the higher theological, spiritual meaning is founded upon humble, simple faith in the historical reality. As St. Cyril of Alexandria wrote, one cannot “apprehend rightly” the Scriptures if one attempts to draw out spiritual meanings from them without believing in the historical reality of the events and people they describe.\*\*\* If an element in the historical record of Scripture can be given a symbolic or spiritual interpretation, the value of this interpretation is tied to the very historicity of the record.\*\*\*\* Thus, according to St. John Chrysostom, when we view an event in the Old Testament as a “type” of an incident in the life of

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\* In viewing the early chapters of Genesis as a record of actual events, we must of course take into consideration that we can understand only imperfectly the realities described therein. See p. 131 below.

\*\* See pp. 120–22 below.

\*\*\* See p. 123n below.

\*\*\*\* Patristic scholar Hieromonk Irenaeus (M. C. Steenberg) writes of this in connection with the teaching of St. Irenaeus of Lyons on the early chapters of

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Christ, we must at the same time view the former as having actually happened.\*

Speaking specifically of those who would de-historicize the account of Paradise in the book of Genesis, St. John Chrysostom warned:

Let us not pay heed to these people, let us stop up our hearing against them, and let us believe the Divine Scripture, and following what is written in it, let us strive to preserve in our souls sound dogmas.<sup>24</sup> \*\*

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Genesis. Noting that St. Irenaeus saw Adam and Eve as representing the created state of *all* human beings, Fr. Irenaeus goes on to observe: “But this symbolic or iconic value, far from encouraging Irenaeus to view Adam and Eve and their lives as substantially legend or myth, causes him to endeavor with all the greater urgency to establish the full ‘facts’ of their existence, for therein can be learned the true anthropological reality of present-day man. The symbolic value of the creation account is, for Irenaeus, bound up in its very historicity—a notion evidenced in Irenaeus’ tireless charges of Gnostic modification or alteration of that very history.... There is symbolism to be had in the histories, but the symbolism is lost if the history did not in actuality take place *as history*” (M. C. Steenberg, “Children in Paradise: Adam and Eve as ‘Infants’ in Irenaeus of Lyons,” pp. 9–10; see also M. C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, p. 87). Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.12.11, where this second-century Father refutes the Gnostic notion that Old Testament events, as recounted by the Apostles in the New Testament, should be treated as mere allegories.

\* See the quotation by St. John Chrysostom, and a similar one by his disciple St. Nilus of Sinai, on pp. 122–23n below.

\*\* St. John Chrysostom took pains to defend the historicity of the Gospels just as he did to uphold the historicity of Genesis and the rest of the Old Testament. In his *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew* 1.6 (NPNF 1 10, p. 3), he countered those who would point out the alleged discordances in the Gospels, and he harmonized those places where the Evangelists recounted the same event in different ways. (As he explained, the minor differences between the Gospels testify to the truth of the events they describe, since this demonstrates that the Evangelists were not in collusion with each other and that they described the same actual events from different points of view.) St. John’s rebuttal of those who would question the historicity of the Gospels on the basis of their alleged contradictions, as well as his counsel not to listen to those who would de-historicize Genesis, indicates that the spirit of modern rationalistic criticism of the Bible is not in fact unique to our times, but was met in different forms, and inveighed against, by the early Fathers of the Church.

Fr. Seraphim, in quoting this passage, pointed out the connection St. Chrysostom drew between the right understanding of dogmas and the upholding of the historical meaning of Genesis. For St. Chrysostom as for the other Fathers, the dogmas of the Church cannot be divorced from history. All the areas of the Church's theology—Triadology (particularly those aspects pertaining to the economic actions and revelations of the Holy Trinity), protology, anthropology, Christology, Pneumatology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology—are tied in some way to objective, real events that have happened or will happen.\*

Furthermore, since each area of Orthodox theology is connected to the others as in a seamless garment, the historical dimension of one area of theology is tied to the same dimension of other areas. Thus, the Church's understanding of the creation, the first-created world and the fall of man is linked inextricably to her understanding of the world's redemption by Jesus Christ. As we learn from the Genesis account of the fall, and especially from its explication by the Holy Apostle Paul and the Holy Fathers after him, death entered the world as a consequence of man's first act of sin. The fall of man through eating of the

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\* If the foundation of belief in the real events described in Holy Scripture is taken away, the edifice of one's Christian faith rests on the shifting sands of one's personal predilections, and one falls victim to the same relativism that has infected the whole of the modern secular world. This is recognized and openly spoken about by contemporary atheists. Richard Dawkins, who is today's most prominent popularizer of evolutionism and a virulent opponent of theistic religion, writes in his book *The God Delusion*: "Of course, irritated theologians will protest that we don't take the book of Genesis literally any more. But that is my whole point! We pick and choose which bits of scripture to believe, which bits to write off as symbols or allegories.

"Such picking and choosing is a matter of personal decision, just as much, or as little, as the atheist's decision to follow this moral precept or that was a personal decision, without an absolute foundation. If one of these is 'morality flying by the seat of its pants', so is the other" (*The God Delusion*, p. 269).

Here Dawkins acknowledges that his own atheistic "morality" is relative, and he rightly points out that, if theologians "pick and choose" which historical narratives in Scripture to "write off as [i.e., reduce to] symbols or allegories," they too are conceding that truth is relative. In the Orthodox Christian context this is even more apparent, since Orthodox believers who would reduce the historical narratives in Scripture to allegories must "write off" not only the historical meaning of Scripture itself, but also the Patristic interpretation of Scripture, which upholds that very historical meaning.

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tree, said Fr. Seraphim, “was a real, physical event, bringing about an actual change in man’s spiritual and bodily condition.” Likewise, Christ’s death on the Cross, in which He took upon Himself the ultimate physical consequence of sin in order to overcome all the consequences of sin, “was a real, physical event, not an image or an allegory; and through it comes an actual change in man’s condition.... It gives us salvation: not figurative salvation, but actual salvation.”\*

If, on the contrary, one de-historicizes the book of Genesis in order to make the Christian Faith compatible with the modern evolutionary outlook, one breaks the physical, causal connection between Adam’s act of sin and the presence of death in the world. In so doing, one removes the theological basis for understanding the physical, causal connection between Christ’s death and the overcoming of the consequences of sin in the world.

As Fr. Seraphim understood, belief in Genesis as history is also bound up with faith in what will come into being in the future age, beyond the general resurrection. According to St. Paul and the Holy Fathers, the entire visible creation was incorrupt (without decay) before the fall of man, and this incorruption will be restored at Christ’s Second Coming. Thus, belief in the incorrupt first-created world is linked specifically with belief in the future age of incorruption. “If we believe and think as the Holy Fathers do,” Fr. Seraphim affirmed, “then our future incorruptibility will be *real*, as was that of the creation and of Adam before his disobedience.”\*\*

Thus, one’s understanding of the book of Genesis has implications that go far beyond the basic question of literal and symbolic interpretations. As Fr. Seraphim saw, it is foundational to one’s Orthodox Christian worldview.

### *7. Alexander Kalomirov*

In his study of the doctrine of the Holy Fathers touching on the creation of man and the world, Fr. Seraphim found it so clear and compelling that he said he was “simply amazed at the power ‘evolution’

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\* See p. 282 below.

\*\* See p. 650 below.

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has over even educated Orthodox minds. Such is the power of this world and its fashionable ideas.”<sup>25</sup>

All the living transmitters of Patristic tradition whom Fr. Seraphim knew in the Russian Orthodox Church were aware that evolutionary theory was a naturalistic faith hiding behind a pretense of scientific objectivity. He was heartened to hear that in Greece there were respected Orthodox Patristic scholars who rejected evolutionism as well. The critics of Alexey’s article, however, kept holding up a traditionalist Orthodox writer and medical doctor in Greece, Dr. Alexander Kalomiros, as one who was pro-evolution. Not being able to read Kalomiros’ article in Greek, Fr. Seraphim was frustrated at having his name repeatedly thrown at him in this way. He had appreciated the English translation of Kalomiros’ strong critique of ecumenism, *Against False Union*, and could not imagine how the same author could be in favor of evolution. He wrote to Kalomiros asking his views, and the latter promised to send a detailed reply in English, with quotes from the Holy Fathers. “We look forward to this with open mind and some expectation!” wrote Fr. Seraphim to Alexey Young. “We hope to receive a confirmation of our suspicion that he is quite wrongly used as virtually a proponent of evolution.”<sup>26</sup>

Several months later Fathers Seraphim and Herman received a forty-page epistle from Kalomiros. “I must confess,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “that it is shocking beyond our expectations—giving the ‘evolutionary’ teaching quite unadorned and unqualified, complete with the ‘evolved beast Adam’ and ‘he who denies evolution denies the Sacred Scriptures.’ In a way, however, we are rather glad of this—because now *for the first time* we have found a reputable Orthodox ‘evolutionist’ who is willing to be quite frank about matters which others, I believe, are afraid to speak up about.”<sup>27</sup>

Fr. Seraphim put all his energy into composing a reply, which turned out to be as long as Dr. Kalomiros’ letter. Fr. Seraphim’s letter—a treatise, actually—is a profound work of Patristic exegesis, and we today can only be grateful that his correspondence with Dr. Kalomiros impelled him to write it. Although he was to hone his understanding of the subject in subsequent years, it is widely regarded today as the clearest Patristic refutation of evolution ever written.

### *8. The Scientific Side of the Question*

By this time, the original idea of coming out with a booklet on evolutionism no longer seemed adequate to Fr. Seraphim. Now he and Alexey Young began to plan the writing of a complete book. Fr. Seraphim was to write about the Patristic teaching on creation and early man, and also about the philosophical origins of evolution, while Alexey was to write about evolution as scientific theory and about “Christian evolution.” “Our study,” wrote Fr. Seraphim, “is supposed to give a ‘complete’ picture, which hopefully will clarify many minds. It’s certainly clarified my own mind, since previously I hadn’t thought in detail on many aspects of the question.”<sup>28</sup>

Fr. Seraphim’s correspondence with Dr. Kalomiros had underlined for him the importance of being abreast with scientific discussions on the subject of evolution. Dr. Kalomiros had claimed to be standing superior to these discussions, since they were “Western” and thus “not Orthodox.” As Fr. Seraphim pointed out, however,

The question of evolution can’t be discussed at all if one doesn’t have a basic grasp of the scientific side of it (the “scientific proofs” of it) as well as the broader philosophy of evolution based on it (Teilhard de Chardin, etc.).... By this I don’t mean that one has to be a scientific specialist in order to discuss the scientific side of the question—the scientific side is not *the* most important one, and specialists usually trip themselves up by concentrating too much on it; but if one isn’t sufficiently aware of the scientific side one won’t be able to grasp the question in its full scope. One can’t say with assurance, for example, whether man has been on earth some seven or eight thousand years (“more or less,” as the Fathers often say) if one is totally ignorant of the principles of radiometric dating, geologic strata, etc., which “prove” that man is “millions of years” old. And such knowledge is not esoteric at all—the basic principles of radiometric dating (enough to show its strong and weak points) can be explained in a rather short article....\*

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\* We have provided such an article, as appendix 4, pp. 861–82 below.

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This is just a sample to show that to get anywhere in this question one must have a basic, layman's awareness of the scientific evidences for and against evolution. If one is reasonably objective and not out to "prove one's point" at any cost, such questions need not arouse passionate debates. As a basic principle, of course, we must assume that scientific *truth* (as opposed to various opinions and prejudices) cannot contradict revealed *truth* if only we understand both correctly.<sup>29</sup>

During the first half of the twentieth century, as we have seen, scientists were loath to question the evolutionary model. They would test every hypothesis save that one, for otherwise they might appear to be questioning the hegemony of naturalism over modern science. Those few scientists—including some very important ones—who dared to question this dogma were considered "heretics" and were blacklisted. When Dr. Kalomiros was going to school in the 1950s, it was not only unfashionable but positively anathema not to believe in evolution; and hence his attempt, as an interpreter of Patristic teaching, to make the ancient Fathers believe it as well.

After the 1950s, this situation began to change. One by one, the "silent dissenters" mentioned at the Darwin Centennial began to surface. Reputable scientists began raising serious doubts about evolution, and there were simply too many of them to be silenced. New advances in the "hard sciences" of molecular genetics, embryology, etc., were making it very difficult for scientists to reconcile their data with the neo-Darwinian model. Scientific books came out which were critical of Darwin's theory, including *Implications of Evolution* (1961) by G. A. Kerkut, professor of physiology and biochemistry at the University of Southampton, England, and *L'Evolution du vivant* (1973) by Pierre P. Grassé, one of the world's greatest living biologists and ex-president of the French Academy of Sciences. Dr. Grassé ended his book by issuing this devastating indictment of Darwinian evolution:

Through use and abuse of hidden postulates, of bold, often ill-founded extrapolations, a pseudoscience has been created. It is taking root in the very heart of biology and is leading astray many biochemists and biologists, who sincerely believe that the accuracy of

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fundamental concepts has been demonstrated, which is not the case.<sup>30</sup>

In spite of such statements by mainstream scientists, the debate concerning the viability of evolutionary theory remained for the most part within the walls of the scientific establishment; it was still not known to the public. As far as the American public was concerned, evolution was still just as much an incontrovertible fact in the 1970s as it had been in the 1950s. People wishing to learn what was really happening in the scientific community would have to familiarize themselves with specialized books and journals.

In his sincere desire to know what modern science had to say about evolution—what was actually known and what was speculation—Fr. Seraphim studied the mainstream scientific literature, as well as popular treatments of the “proofs” of evolution and human origins. He also spoke to scientists working within the prevailing establishment, who told him that many of the evolutionists themselves admitted that there was not actual *proof* for it, but that it “makes more sense,” or “the alternative is unthinkable”—i.e., creation by a Divine agency.

Although he possessed no scientific degrees, through his studies and personal contacts Fr. Seraphim became more abreast of the current status of evolutionary theory than Dr. Kalomiros. Assuring Dr. Kalomiros that he was not “against science,” he wrote to him:

You seem to be unaware of the great mass of *scientific literature* in recent years which is highly critical of the evolutionary theory, which talks about relegating it to poetry and metaphors instead of scientific theory (Prof. Constance, professor of botany at the University of California, Berkeley), or even deny its validity altogether. If you wish (but it is quite pointless!), I could indeed compile a list of *hundreds* (if not *thousands*) of reputable scientists who now either disbelieve in evolution entirely or state that it is highly questionable scientific theory.<sup>31</sup>

In his studies, Fr. Seraphim appreciated the work of creation scientists (also known as scientific creationists, Biblical creationists, and young-earth creationists): Christians, primarily from Protestant

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churches, who as professional scientists rejected the presuppositions of naturalistic philosophy and instead worked from presuppositions derived from the Biblical view of origins and history. The creation science movement had been catalyzed in America with the publication of the seminal textbook *The Genesis Flood* by Dr. John Whitcomb and Dr. Henry Morris in 1960 (only a year after the Darwin Centennial),\* and its growth had precisely coincided with the growing doubts about evolutionary theory within the scientific establishment. While upholding the Biblical view, its strategy was to emphasize not how much evolution contradicts the Bible, but how much it contradicts scientific evidence. Its early success and influence caused evolutionists to take the offensive, caricaturing the creationists and accusing them of faith-based bias while not acknowledging their own faith-based bias. As Dr. Henry Morris wrote:

The answer of the evolutionary establishment to the creationist arguments has not been scientific, but emotional. Intimidation is evidently the game plan. The A.C.L.U. files or threatens to file lawsuits wherever a two-model [creation/evolution] approach is considered in a school district. A veritable stream of anti-creationist tirades has poured forth from the liberal news media, as well as the journals and books of the educational/scientific establishment. Evolutionists publicly gloat over the merest suggestion of a misquotation or misrepresentation which they can discover in the copiously documented creationist literature, while their own writings are saturated with out-of-context quotes and flagrant distortions of the creationist arguments.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, by the time Fr. Seraphim was making an in-depth study of this subject in the early 1970s, the creationist movement had been made an object of ridicule in the public mind. Fr. Seraphim himself was at first somewhat skeptical about the movement, not because he

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\* In 1932 a similar movement had started in England, calling itself the Evolution Protest Movement. Its prime mover was ornithologist Douglas Dewar. Continuing its work to this day, it is now known as the Creation Science Movement.

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was swayed by public opinion (in which he had no trust at all), but because he saw the movement as being based on the rationalistic, “common sense” Scriptural interpretation of Protestantism rather than on the Divinely revealed interpretation of the Orthodox Holy Fathers.<sup>33</sup> However, when he actually studied books by leading creation scientists, he was impressed by their sober, thoughtful presentation. “Their presentation of the ‘Creation Model,’” he wrote, “is a promising approach to a more objective view of the whole question.”<sup>34</sup>

Fr. Seraphim looked to creation scientists not to resolve questions of theology and philosophy. (For these questions, of course, he turned to the Holy Fathers and saints of the Church, as well as to traditional Orthodox writers such as Ivan V. Kireyevsky and Constantine Leontiev.) Rather, he used the work of the creation scientists exclusively to deal with questions raised by modern science, in order to support the teachings he had *already found* in Patristic theology. Although these scientists indeed lacked the Patristic understanding of the nature of man and the first-created world (and in general the whole field of Patristic commentary on Genesis), their books presented facts which pointed to the fixity of the “kinds” of animals, the global Flood, and a (relatively) recent creation—all of which Fr. Seraphim had found stated unequivocally in the writings of the Holy Fathers. Hence, without intending to, these Protestant scientists were in many ways serving as active defenders of Patristic Orthodoxy.

Fr. Seraphim’s respect for this courageous group of scientists only increased when he made contact with the Institute for Creation Research, located in his hometown of San Diego. He subscribed to their newsletter, *Acts & Facts*, often discussing interesting new articles with the brothers at the monastery. Frequently he referred his fellow Orthodox Christians to the many books put out by the Institute.

### 9. *The “Survival Course” and the Courses on Genesis*

The book that Fr. Seraphim planned was never finished. Alexey Young sent rough drafts of his own sections to Fr. Seraphim, which the latter revised and augmented with his own writings, even sending one

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section to a professor of natural sciences for review; but still the book remained in a rough and fragmentary state.

In the meantime, however, Fr. Seraphim continued to do research, write and speak on evolution and the Patristic view of creation.

In the summer of 1975, with the aim of giving pilgrims to the monastery a foundation in Orthodoxy, Fathers Seraphim and Herman held a three-week course, naming it the “New Valaam Theological Academy.” Fr. Seraphim gave a series of lectures on the development of Western thought from the Great Schism to the present. For all the talks he wrote extensive outlines, organizing the vast historical and philosophical research he had done for *The Kingdom of Man and the Kingdom of God*. This was the ripened fruit, not only of that early research, but also of his rich store of experience as an Orthodox Christian. He was now much better equipped than before to present his knowledge in a way that would have a practical application to the lives of contemporary people. He called his lecture series a “Survival Course” because of his belief that, in order for people to survive as Orthodox Christians nowadays, they have to understand the apostasy, to know why and how modern Western society has fallen away from the traditional Christian worldview. Once Orthodox Christians are able to identify the philosophical roots of the modern age, Fr. Seraphim held, they can more readily discern what in society is potentially beneficial to the soul, and can better protect and defend themselves from what is harmful. With this in view, he also called his classes “a course in Orthodox self-defense.”

Twelve lectures were given by Fr. Seraphim, each of them several hours long. The eleventh lecture was on the subject of evolution. Here Fr. Seraphim brought to bear not only his early research, but also his more recent studies for the proposed book on the Patristic understanding of creation. In the lecture, he discussed evolution from several points of view—the historical, scientific, philosophical, and theological—and ended with a presentation of the various expressions of “Christian evolutionism,” especially that of Teilhard de Chardin. The lecture was thus a rich summary of all his thoughts on the subject up until 1975.

In subsequent years Fr. Seraphim continued to write notes and outlines on creation and evolution. Then, in 1981, a little over a year

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before his death, he took up the subject again in earnest. During the “New Valaam Theological Academy” course in the summer of that year, he gave a series of classes on the Patristic interpretation of the first three chapters of the book of Genesis. He put much effort into these classes beforehand, writing out an extensive manuscript of a verse-by-verse commentary filled with Patristic quotations, many of which he translated himself. His eight years of contemplating, reading, and praying about this subject had not been in vain. His series of classes was the product of a matured Patristic mind, of one who, perhaps more than any of his contemporaries, had searched through the whole sum of the teaching of the Fathers in order to find and elucidate the single Patristic *doctrine of Creation*. And how exalted was the teaching of the Fathers that he poured forth! To his listeners, his presentation was all the more inspiring for the fact that he did not in any way compromise Orthodox teaching out of deference to modern intellectual fashions.

At the next Academy course in the summer of 1982, Fr. Seraphim continued his commentary on Genesis, this time discussing the fourth to the eleventh chapters. Within two weeks after finishing these classes he unexpectedly fell ill, and within another week he reposed in the Lord. His Patristic commentary on Genesis, therefore, was the last achievement of his life.

### *10. The Plan of the Book*

In Fr. Seraphim’s early plans for the proposed book, he thought it best to begin with a discussion of evolution first, showing that it has no coercive scientific evidence to support it, and then to present the Patristic understanding of creation. At that time, he thought that this was necessary because, before people could even take the Patristic teaching seriously, they first had to understand that what they had learned all their lives about the “fact” of evolution was, in actuality, disputed.

At the end of his life, Fr. Seraphim thought differently. In his last stated plan of the proposed book, he said it should begin with his Patristic commentary on Genesis (i.e., his 1981 and 1982 lecture series),

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which would be followed by a discussion of evolution. "The whole outline of it now becomes clear to me," he wrote. "It should be called something positive (no evolution in the title), such as *Genesis, Creation, and Early Man: An Orthodox View*, and the first and main part should be simply an Orthodox interpretation (according to St. John Chrysostom, St. Ephraim, etc.) of the first chapters of Genesis, discussing 'problems' raised by modern men in the course of the discussion. Then, as the secondary thought (less than half the book), a discussion of the whole question of evolution."<sup>35</sup> In the present, posthumous compilation, we have followed this plan.

Why did Fr. Seraphim change his plan for the book? One clue may be found in the following words, which he wrote to Alexey Young in February 1981:

Thinking about my Genesis course this summer, I was rereading part of Dr. Kalomirov's letters. How discouraging! One loses all inspiration to get tangled up in this subject, seeing how he handles it.... Anyone who is really *converted* to Christianity will surely begin to rethink his whole intellectual outlook, won't he? Isn't the real problem that Dr. Kalomirov ... and others are intellectuals who haven't fully converted, or have brought their intellectual baggage with them into Orthodoxy?<sup>36</sup>

Fr. Seraphim had frankly become bored with the idea of having to present the Patristic teaching on creation exclusively as it related to the modern intellectual baggage of evolutionism. He had done this in his letter to Dr. Kalomirov back in 1974, but now, as he was preparing his Patristic commentary eight years later, he had distanced himself from the controversy. He saw that the whole weight of the Patristic teaching on creation was so powerful and compelling that the unproved assumptions and confused thinking of modern evolutionists paled in comparison. The Patristic teaching, Fr. Seraphim saw, could stand on its own divine authority, even before modern minds raised on evolutionary teaching; and a discussion of evolution was only needed as a secondary consideration.

### *11. Developments in the 1980s*

This was probably the main reason why Fr. Seraphim wanted to reverse the original order of the book. But there was possibly another reason: in the last two years of Fr. Seraphim's life, a change had begun to occur in the public's acceptance of evolution. We have mentioned earlier how, in the 1960s and 1970s, the growing doubts of scientists about neo-Darwinism had been mostly hidden behind the walls of the scientific community. By the end of the seventies, these walls began to crumble. The first fissure occurred when the prominent paleontologists Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould publicized their new evolutionary theory of "punctuated equilibrium" to account for the lack of transitional, evolutionary forms in the fossil record—which forms would be expected according to classical neo-Darwinism. The new theory was of no great interest to the general public, but what was regarded as really newsworthy was that, contrary to popular belief, the fossil record did not at all fit Darwinian expectations. Gould went so far as to call the lack of transitional forms the "trade secret of paleontology." This became international news, and helped set in motion the next phase in the crumbling of the Darwinian edifice. Aware of this development, Fr. Seraphim spoke about it in his course on Genesis.\*

Another extremely important development, beginning in 1980, was the resurgence of catastrophism in geology. Geologists began to challenge the reigning uniformitarian model that had inspired Darwin (the idea that the sedimentary layers were formed gradually, at constant rates), demonstrating that it was incapable of accounting for the rock beds of the earth's crust, especially the fossil deposits. A number of geologists, calling themselves "neocatastrophists," have thus returned to the idea that practically all the strata were formed by floods

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\* See Fr. Seraphim's indirect reference to Stephen Jay Gould's popular article, "The Return of Hopeful Monsters" (1977) on pp. 381–82 below. In this article, Gould argued against Darwinian gradualism, saying that "the fossil record with its abrupt transitions offers no support for gradual change." On Eldredge and Gould's "punctuated equilibrium" theory, see also Phillip E. Johnson's introduction, pp. 96–97 below.

and other such catastrophes. Although they reject Biblical catastrophism and retain the standard evolutionary/uniformitarian framework of billions of years, these non-creationist geologists have offered secular confirmation of much of what Flood geologists (i.e., geologists who believe in the global Flood) have been saying for years.<sup>37</sup>

In the years immediately following Fr. Seraphim's repose in 1982, new developments continued to be seen. More non-creationist scientists made public the fact that the neo-Darwinian theory does not account for new data in the fields of geology, paleontology, genetics, physics, biochemistry, and other sciences.

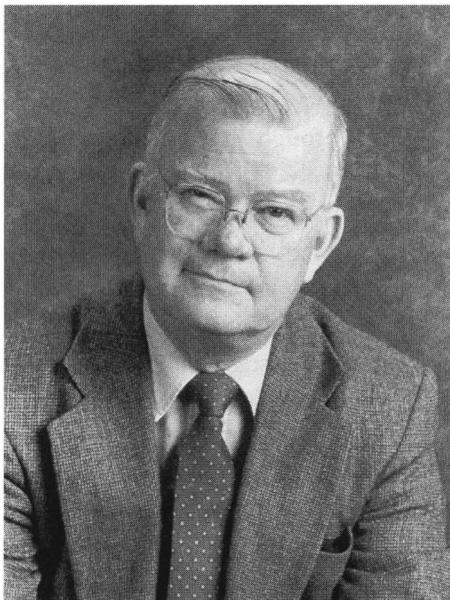
In 1984 three scientists published a polite but rigorous critique of the then-current theories of chemical evolution of the first cell. Entitled *The Mystery of Life's Origin*, the book was authored by Charles Thaxton, a chemist and historian of science; Walter Bradley, a materials scientist; and Roger Olsen, a geochemist. With its technical presentation devoid of religious overtones, the book received endorsements from well-known evolutionists (including chemist Robert Shapiro and physicist Robert Jastrow), with the *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* acknowledging that "this volume as a whole is devastating to the relaxed acceptance of current theories of abiogenesis [chemical evolution]."<sup>38</sup>

During the following year there appeared another pivotal book, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, by Australian molecular biologist and agnostic Michael Denton. Systematically critiquing the current evolutionary model from a variety of scientific disciplines, Denton showed from his own specialty that the discoveries of molecular biologists are casting more and more doubt on Darwinian claims.

## *12. Phillip E. Johnson and the Intelligent Design Movement*

At the beginning of the following decade, an interesting and unexpected event in the evolution debate was seen with the rise of a professor of law, Phillip E. Johnson, as one of the world's leading critics of Darwinism. Johnson, who taught law at the University of California at Berkeley for nearly thirty years, says that one of his specialties is "analyzing the logic of arguments and identifying the assumptions that lie behind those arguments." In 1987, in reading the arguments for evolu-

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Phillip E. Johnson.

tion in the recent book *The Blind Watchmaker* by biologist Richard Dawkins, he noticed that they were based on rhetoric rather than hard science. “I could see,” he recalls, “that Dawkins achieved his word magic by the very tools that are familiar to us lawyers.... I picked up one book after another, and became increasingly fascinated with the obvious difficulties in the Darwinist case—difficulties that were being evaded by tricky rhetoric and emphatic repetition.”<sup>39</sup>

Johnson also noticed the way his scientific colleagues responded when he asked hard questions about Darwinism:

Instead of taking the intellectual questions seriously and responding to them, they would answer with all sorts of evasions and vague language, making it impossible to discuss the real objections to Darwinism. This is the way people talk when they’re trying very hard not to understand something.

Another tip-off was the sharp contrast I noticed between the extremely dogmatic tone that Darwinists use when addressing the general public and the occasional frank acknowledgments, in scientific circles, of serious problems with the theory....

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It was an enormous shock to me getting into this to see, in fact, how bad the reasoning really is, how illogical the whole scientific field of evolution is and how resistant the scientists are to having any logic brought into it. So I felt like there was a real opportunity for somebody outside of science whose interest was in good logical thinking rather than promoting any one particular set of solutions, and that's the mission I've been on ever since....

Biologists who spend their lifetimes studying biology will be legitimate authorities, obviously, on the details of what they've learned in that investigation, and an outsider can't really challenge that, but an outsider definitely can challenge their thinking, particularly when it turns out that they believe in what they believe in not because of what they know as biologists, but *in spite of* what they know as biologists. It's a philosophical movement based on materialism.... So, that's a thinking issue, and it's really more within my discipline than it's within theirs.<sup>40</sup>

In 1991 Professor Johnson came out with the book *Darwin on Trial*. His clear-headedness in cutting through the rhetoric of Darwinism and exposing the logical foundations of the controversy quickly won him the respect of creationists and non-creationists alike, and also the ire of die-hard evolutionists.

No sooner had Johnson's book been published than he began working on a plan to raise a broadly based challenge to the Darwinian stronghold. At a symposium at Southern Methodist University in spring of 1992, which featured high-level academic discussion between Darwinism's supporters and critics, Johnson began to galvanize the critics—mainly scientists and philosophers—into a fledgling movement. In 1993 he organized a private, several-day meeting of potential leaders of this movement at Pajaro Dunes, south of San Francisco. At that time, although networking over the Internet had not yet become common, he insisted that all the participants in the meeting be part of a computer network that he would run from Berkeley. In this way, he created an ongoing forum for skeptics and critics of Darwinism to share their ideas and research, and to support each other when attacked in the academic milieu by staunch Darwinists. Out of this com-

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munity of thinkers organized by Professor Johnson, the movement known as intelligent design (ID) was born.

Johnson sees the work of the intelligent design movement in terms of a “wedge” strategy. “The idea,” he says,

is that you get a few people out promoting a new way of thinking and new ideas. It’s very shocking, and they take a lot of abuse.... Then you get people used to talking about it. It becomes an issue they are used to hearing about, and you get a few more people and a few more, and then eventually you’ve legitimated it as a regular part of the academic discussion. And that’s my goal: to legitimate the argument over evolution and particularly over the Darwinian mechanism and its supposed creative power, to legitimate that as a mainstream scientific and academic issue. As soon as we can do that and put the spotlight on it, then everybody knows that there is no evidence. So, we can’t lose the argument. We’re bound to win it. We just have to normalize it, and that takes patience and persistence, and that’s what we are applying.<sup>41</sup>

The intelligent design movement is distinguished from the above-mentioned creation science movement in that it has a much more narrowly defined position, thus allowing it to include people of more widely disparate views. While creation science takes a stand on the identity of the Creator and the veracity of the Biblical account of the origin and history of the universe, the ID movement takes no such stand. Its only stated position is that “certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection.” It detects intelligence without speculating about the nature of the intelligence. Thus, the movement can count among its members scientists and philosophers from a wide variety of religious traditions, as well as agnostics. It can accommodate young-earth creationists, old-earth creationists, and even evolutionists who acknowledge the empirical evidence of intelligent design in nature. Among its most well-known members are Michael Behe, a professor of biochemistry whose landmark 1996 book *Darwin's Black Box* demonstrated that the astonishing new discoveries of biochemistry cannot be

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accommodated by any form of Darwinism; and William A. Dembski, a professor of mathematics and philosophy whose 1997 book *The Design Inference* showed on the basis of mathematical probability that undirected natural causes cannot account for biological complexity. Among young-earth creationist members of the ID movement is an Orthodox Christian, John Mark Reynolds, associate professor of philosophy at Biola University;\* a Roman Catholic, Dean H. Kenyon, retired professor of biology at San Francisco State University; and a Protestant, Marcus R. Ross, professor of paleontology at Liberty University.

In the years following the historic meeting in Pajaro Dunes in 1993, Phillip Johnson's "wedge" strategy has seen remarkable gains. By paring the issues down to only one—was intelligence required to design living things?—the ID movement has made it more difficult for Darwinists to avoid discussing the overwhelming evidence for such intelligence. Further, with its inclusive approach of allowing disparate views, the ID movement has succeeded in moving discussion of the weaknesses of Darwinism into the broad public sphere in ways that the creation scientists have not. In so doing, it has helped inspire a number of legislative bills in various U.S. states, either already passed or currently pending, which encourage public-school students to examine scientific evidence both for and against molecules-to-man evolution.\*\* Evolutionist lobby groups such as the "National Center for Science Education," as if fearing that once both sides of the debate are closely

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\* In a 1999 anthology on creation and evolution, Dr. Reynolds affirmed: "The Fathers from the first century forward overwhelmingly took a young-earth, global-flood view.... Simply discarding the views of the Fathers is not an option for any thoughtful Christian" (Moreland and Reynolds, ed., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, p. 97). In 2010 Reynolds coauthored a book with Phillip Johnson entitled *Against All Gods: What's Right and Wrong about the New Atheism*.

\*\* According to the Discovery Institute, a public policy think tank based in Seattle, "Seven states (Alabama, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas) have science standards that require learning about some of the scientific controversies relating to evolution. Additionally, Louisiana has a statewide law that protects the rights of teachers 'to help students understand, analyze, critique, and review scientific theories in an objective manner,' specifically naming evolution as an example" ("Discovery Institute's Science Education Policy," posted Aug. 17, 2010, <http://www.discovery.org/a/3164>).

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examined they will have lost the war, are fighting hard against such bills, and decry the fact that more are sprouting up all the time.

The ID movement has made another significant contribution in that, by shining a light on the fact that Darwinists deny the possibility of *any* supernatural causes behind the formation of living things, it has made the public more aware that the teaching of Darwinism is not philosophically or religiously neutral, but is based on the presuppositions of naturalism: in Johnson's words (which echo those of Fr. Seraphim quoted earlier), it is "inherently godless." Going beyond its critique of Darwinism, the ID movement has also brought forth a positive research program wherein intelligent causes are seen as the key for understanding the diversity and complexity of life.

Creation scientists, such as those with whom Fr. Seraphim was familiar, view the ID movement as a natural ally in the debate over Darwinian claims, and have both appreciated and utilized its contributions. At the same time, some of them have pointed out the limitations inherent in ID's theologically minimalist position.\* Indeed, from the traditional Christian perspective on origins, the ID approach—which allows for the possibility of any designer and even of intelligently directed

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\* For example, since the ID position does not include the Christian teaching on the fall of man, ID theorists have no theological/philosophical answer to the logically deduced challenge of their Darwinist opponents, as indeed of Darwin himself (cf. *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, pp. 85–96): How could an all-knowing and all-benevolent God have created a world full of suffering, carnivory, and death, as well as of defective living things? The traditional Christian answer to this challenge, as found in the Holy Scriptures and Patristic writing, is clear and unequivocal: these negative aspects of the creation were not part of God's original, "very good" world that God designed (Gen. 1:31), but entered the world because of man's sin, through which the creation was subjected to the "bondage of corruption" (Rom. 8:21). Without this answer from Christian theology, one who believes in intelligent design is forced to admit the possibility that the Designer was either monstrous or inept in creating a corrupted world. Thus, when addressing the Darwinist challenge, some ID theorists who are also Christians (notably, Behe and Dembski) *have* mentioned the Biblical teaching of the fall as a possible answer, but in so doing they have stepped outside the bounds of the ID position. It should also be noted that the Christian teaching on creation's "bondage of corruption" through human sin makes sense only within a young-earth framework, and that this framework also lies beyond the stated position of the ID movement.

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evolution—addresses only part of the problem posed by Darwinism. Dethroning unconditional naturalism and materialism in science is not enough. As Fr. Seraphim said in his “Survival Course”: “The period in which agnosticism and atheism are replacing Christianity is only a temporary period. Its purpose is to do away with the true God of traditional Christianity.” In place of the true God people will turn to false gods and pseudo-spiritualities, including those of deism, pantheism, panentheism,\* paganism, and mediumism. In this Fr. Seraphim saw the seeds of the “religion of the future”; and in evolutionism, as we have seen, he saw a possible key to the “philosophy of the coming Antichrist.” Thus, while a weakening of the hegemony of naturalism in science may be a boon for believers in traditional Christianity and for those seeking the true God, for others it may lead to pseudo-spiritual forms of the evolutionary worldview.

As the founder and unofficial head of the ID movement, Phillip Johnson is not unaware of these dangers. A Christian who has profound admiration for the life and writings of Fr. Seraphim,\*\* Johnson agrees with the prognosis Fr. Seraphim made over three decades ago. “It’s what all my friends and I have been discussing,” he says. “Scientific materialism is waning, but unhealthy forms of religion will largely take its place.”<sup>42</sup> For Orthodox Christians, this is all the more reason to cling firmly to the common teaching of the Holy Fathers, whom Fr. Seraphim called a “sure guide to true Christianity.”<sup>43</sup>

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\* Here we refer to panentheism according to its commonly accepted definition: “The doctrine that God includes the world as a part though not the whole of his being” (*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*). According to Orthodox Patristic teaching, God is present and participates in His creation through His Energies; however, the world is not part of His Being. In the words of St. John Damascene: “[God] penetrates everything without mixing with it, and imparts to all His Energy in proportion to the fitness and receptive power of each.... All things are far apart from God, not in place but in nature” (*On the Orthodox Faith* 1.13, NPNF 2 9, pp. 15b–16b). See pp. 216–17, 216–17n, 477n below.

\*\* See Phillip Johnson’s review of Fr. Seraphim’s biography, published first in *Books & Culture* (Sept.–Oct. 1997) and later in the collection of Johnson’s essays, *Objections Sustained*, pp. 173–78.

### 13. Evidence from Genetics

In the last decade, while media coverage of the creation/evolution debate has been focused primarily on the ID movement, some of the most devastating critiques of neo-Darwinism have been made in the field of molecular genetics by scientists not formally associated with the movement. According to the modern evolutionary synthesis of neo-Darwinism, the basic mechanism of evolution is natural selection acting together with chance genetic mutations. If mutations can be shown to be incapable of accounting for the vast complexity of living things on a genetic level, neo-Darwinism falls apart as a theory of origins. This is precisely what advances in molecular genetics have demonstrated.

In 1997, the publication of the book *Not by Chance!* by Dr. Lee Spetner landed a strong blow against neo-Darwinism. An Israeli biophysicist, Spetner had spent thirty years researching the possibility of evolution on the genetic level. While it is true that mutations can produce beneficial adaptive changes in organisms, Spetner showed that they cannot produce grand-scale evolution, since they result not in an increase of prescriptive, functional genetic information, but rather in a *loss* of information. (This, incidentally, supports the traditional Christian view that the universe is in fact *devolving* due to the corruption that entered the world at the fall of man.)

In 2005, at an Orthodox Christian conference in Moscow (of which more will be said later), doctor of biology Alexey N. Lunyy presented conclusions along the same lines. In the review article he presented, “Mutations and New Genes,”<sup>44</sup> Dr. Lunyy noted the great amount of experimental data that researchers in molecular biology and genetics have acquired about adaptive mutations precisely during the previous ten to fifteen years. To investigate claims by critics of neo-Darwinism that mutations do not increase genetic information for specified complexity, he undertook a search of all the relevant scientific literature up to the present, checking and comparing the evidence, and found not a single clear example of such an increase. Experimental data, he concluded, do not confirm neo-Darwinian claims; and the

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Darwinists' defense that evolution takes millions of years and thus cannot be observed in the laboratory is simply a faith-based argument, employed to explain away a lack of empirical evidence.

In the same year, another powerful book was published that carried this line of research even further: *Genetic Entropy & the Mystery of the Genome* by Dr. J. C. Sanford. Sanford, who taught plant genetics at Cornell University for twenty-five years, has made several major scientific contributions, including the invention of the biolistic "gene gun" process that is used on a large percentage of the world's transgenic crops today. Late in his career, he began to question neo-Darwinian theory, and now he counts himself among the creation scientists. In his cogent presentation of genetic evidence, he shows that the mechanism of mutation/selection cannot create a single functional gene, because the net information must always be declining, even within a single gene. "Mutation/selection," he writes, "cannot stop the loss of genomic information, let alone *create* the genome."<sup>45</sup> Specifically, he details the new genetic evidence that the human genome has been continually deteriorating due to a constant agglomeration of mutations. "This situation," writes Phillip Johnson in his endorsement of the book, "has disturbing implications for mankind's future, as well as surprising implications concerning mankind's past."

More recently, in 2009, a leading figure in the ID movement, Stephen C. Meyer, explored yet other aspects of the origin of genetic information in his important book *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design*. Whereas the books of Dr. Spetner and Dr. Sanford focus on whether natural selection and mutation can account for the massive *increase* in genetic information that would be necessary for molecules to evolve into human beings, Dr. Meyer takes up the prior question of whether the digital code embedded in DNA molecules—which cannot be explained by natural selection because it makes natural selection possible—could have come into being in the first place without an intentional cause. He describes the most recent discoveries that have been made as the exquisitely complex technical system for processing and storing information in the cell has been progressively revealed, and he amply demonstrates that all attempts to find a non-purposive chemical explanation of the origin of biological infor-

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mation have failed. While best-selling atheist writers like Richard Dawkins have claimed that Darwin's explanation of the origin of living things has rendered belief in God irrelevant and irrational, Meyer shows that, on the contrary, the latest scientific findings are serving to confound materialistic theories of life's beginning, and point powerfully to the existence of a designing Intelligence.

### 14. *A Turning of the Tide*

The success of the "wedge" strategy of which Professor Johnson speaks has not been without repercussions in the Orthodox world. In 1998 *The Christian Activist*—a popular Orthodox journal that reached seventy-five thousand Orthodox Christians of all backgrounds—published an article by Dr. Kalomiros (who had recently reposed) which claimed that modern evolutionary theory was compatible with Orthodox Christianity. There was of course nothing unusual about this. As we have seen, Orthodox journals in America had shown acceptance of evolutionism many times in the past. What *was* unusual and surprising was the readers' reaction to Dr. Kalomiros' article. *The Christian Activist* had always received large amounts of mail, but this time they were inundated. In the following issue the publisher wrote:

We received more letters to the editor about issue #11 than any other prior issue. We also received more letters on "Eternal Will," the article on creation by Dr. Kalomiros, than any article we have ever published, all of them in disagreement with his views.

The editor then decided to print large portions of Fr. Seraphim's letter to Dr. Kalomiros, with a statement that Fr. Seraphim's presentation of the Church Fathers on the subject of evolution was indeed the traditional, Orthodox one.<sup>46\*</sup>

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\* Fr. Seraphim's letter to Dr. Kalomiros had previously been published in a special double-issue of the Orthodox journal *Epiphany* (Fall 1989–Winter 1990). This issue, the first work of its kind to appear in the American Orthodox press, also included scientific and philosophical refutations of evolution by William Dembski, Wolfgang Smith, and others.

The response to the 1998 *Christian Activist* article appeared to represent a shift since the 1970s, when pro-evolution articles evoked nothing but cautious silence or open approval in Orthodox circles in America. At that time, Fr. Seraphim had gone against the most commonly endorsed view in contemporary American Orthodoxy, and was therefore subjected to criticism by fellow Orthodox Christians. By the end of the twentieth century, with the public legitimatization of doubts about neo-Darwinism, the tide had begun to turn.

### *15. Developments in Russia*

Also at the end of the last century, much more notable signs of Orthodox dissatisfaction with evolutionism began to be seen. Over the last ten to fifteen years, Russia, which is the traditionally Orthodox nation with the largest and most advanced scientific establishment, has also become the Orthodox land with the most visible and organized opposition to evolutionism, on both the scientific and theological fronts.

Criticism of evolutionism had arisen in Russia within decades of the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859. From the theological side, refutations of evolution were voiced by Sts. Theophan the Recluse, John of Kronstadt, Barsanuphius of Optina, and others who would later be glorified as saints by the Russian Orthodox Church.\* From the scientific side, the most sustained critique of evolution was the fourteen-hundred-page tome *Darwinism: A Critical Study* (1885) by the Russian naturalist Nikolai Yakovlevich Danilevsky, which was based in part on the research of the Baltic German biologist Karl Ernst von Baer, one of the founders of embryology.

With the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, any such criticism was suppressed by the new atheist regime. Soviet Communism bound itself to evolutionism from the beginning, regarding it as a parallel in the natural sciences to Marxist doctrine in the social sciences, and using it as a propaganda tool to destroy people's faith in God. In the wake of the Revolution, the banner of evolutionism was also taken up by the "Living Church," a movement of Orthodox clergymen of a liberal, modernist

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\* See pp. 787–97, 799–804, 808–9 below.

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persuasion who allied themselves with Communist ideology. In addition to attempting to introduce radical liturgical reforms, establish a married episcopate, and replace monasteries with Communist fraternities, the “Living Church” saw as a key element of its program the adoption of evolutionism as a cardinal Christian teaching.<sup>47</sup> For a time the “Living Church”—thanks to favorable status granted by the Soviet government, coupled with ruthless persecution by the same government of the canonical Orthodox hierarchy—was able to take over a large sector of the Orthodox churches in Russia. The faithful Orthodox people of Russia, however, did not accept the new robber “Church,” and thus it eventually died out. Darwinian evolutionism, however, continued to be taught as dogma in all Soviet schools. Orthodox Christians were not allowed to speak out against it, and some of those who did are now counted among Russia’s New Martyrs and Confessors.\*

This situation changed drastically with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, when religious freedom at last returned to the Russian Orthodox Church. Within five years, books against evolution and in favor of the Orthodox doctrine of creation began to come out from the Orthodox press. The year 1997 saw the publication of a Russian translation of Fr. Seraphim’s letter to Dr. Kalomiros, with the title *An Orthodox View of Evolution*. Significantly, the book was published by the newly re-opened Optina Monastery, where the aforementioned Bishop Nektary—Fr. Seraphim’s Patristics instructor and his spiritual father after the repose of St. John—had once received his spiritual formation under the holy Optina Elders. This book was followed by a plethora of other books and articles in Russian, authored by both theological writers and scientists, which upheld the Orthodox Patristic teaching on creation, and contrasted it with the secular view of evolutionism.\*\* Often acknowledging a debt to the pioneering work of Fr. Seraphim, these later authors came to the same conclusions as he did regarding the Six Days of Creation, the state of man and the world before the fall, the age of the earth, the global Flood, etc., simply because the Orthodox tradition is so clear on these topics. Most of their books were published with

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\* See pp. 796–97, 799–804, 808–9 below.

\*\* See a partial listing on pp. 907–10 below.

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the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia (†2008) or other hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Also with the blessing of Patriarch Alexy II, the Orthodox Missionary Center “Shestodnev” (Six Days) was founded in the year 2000 by Archpriest Constantine Bufeyev. Fr. Constantine is the rector of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God Church in Arkhangelskoye-Tyurikovo (north Moscow), a doctor of geology and mineralogy, a lecturer at the St. Nicholas-Ugresh Seminary, and a member of the International Academy of Science (Russian Section). He was moved to establish the society after one of his parishioners, a teenaged girl named Anna Kuryatova, was reprimanded and given a failing grade for a paper at an Orthodox church school because she accepted the Orthodox Patristic understanding of creation over the secular evolutionary one. If a pious young Orthodox Christian is not even allowed to confess the faith of the Holy Fathers at an *Orthodox* school, Fr. Constantine thought, something must be done to make Orthodox believers more aware of the Patristic teaching and of the scientific evidence that supports this teaching. His main inspiration in taking on this task was the life and work of Fr. Seraphim Rose. As he wrote:

In the work of the Shestodnev center, we have always set down as a principle to base ourselves, in the realm of science, only on trustworthy and verified facts. In theology we prefer to use primarily Patristic sources, and we allow no departure from dogmatic Orthodox teachings. In this we are trying to be continuers of the work of Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) of blessed memory, who, it seems to us, has set forth the only right direction in the theological interpretation of the problems posed by the modern unchurched world.<sup>48</sup>

Having an extensive educational background in both theology and natural science, Fr. Constantine was well prepared to head the Shestodnev center, while Anna's mother Elena became the main organizer.

From the society's inception, the well-known missionary priest and author Fr. Daniel Sysoyev served as its secretary. Fr. Daniel was among the first in post-Soviet times to come out with books defending the

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Orthodox doctrine of creation and critiquing evolutionism. Before his death in 2009, he wrote two books, edited two anthologies, and gave many talks on the subject.\*

The society was also joined from the start by Dr. Alexander Lalomov. Having, like Fr. Constantine, a doctorate in geology and mineralogy, Dr. Lalomov serves as director of the ARCTUR geological research laboratory in Russia. Besides helping with the work of Shestodnev, he has compiled three volumes of an anthology of scientific articles entitled *Sotvorenije* (Creation). Interestingly, he was initially brought back to the Orthodox Church through his scientific research, when the most reliable methods of measuring the age of placer mineral deposits confirmed for him the Scriptural-Patristic reading of the earth's age rather than the generally accepted secular view.

Beginning in 2005, the Shestodnev center has sponsored conferences in Moscow on "The Orthodox Interpretation of the Creation of the World and Contemporary Science," as part of the International Nativity Educational Readings held annually throughout the Russian capital by the Moscow Patriarchate. Presided over by hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church,\*\* the Shestodnev conferences have featured talks on both theological and scientific subjects. While most of

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\* A tireless and fearless evangelist, Fr. Daniel authored many missionary works on a broad range of topics, gave weekly Bible classes, trained "street missionaries," and counseled people who were recovering from involvement in pseudo-religious cults. Through his labors, many people were brought to Christ in the Orthodox Church, including atheists, Satanists, and skinheads. He was especially active in the mission to Muslims, over eighty of whom he converted to Christ. For this he received several death-threats and was finally murdered in his own church on the night of November 19, 2009. At his funeral—in which 237 priests took part—His Holiness Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow and All Russia spoke of his death in terms of martyrdom. He is widely regarded as a martyr by believers in Russia today, where his work is being carried on by the Prophet Daniel Orthodox Missionary Movement which he founded. About Fr. Daniel, see *The Orthodox Word*, no. 268 (2009) and nos. 270–71 (2010).

\*\* Archbishop Dimitry of Tobolsk and Tyumen and Archbishop Alexy of Orehovo-Zuevo have presided over different conferences, inaugurating them with a hierarchical Divine Liturgy or Moleben. At the conferences in 2008 and 2009, Archbishop Dimitry gave the opening talk on some of the primary aspects of the Orthodox teaching on creation.



Archpriest Constantine Bufeyev speaking at the second Shestodnev conference, with the presiding hierarch, Archbishop Alexy of Orekhovo-Zuevo, at his left. Chapel of the Moscow State University of Railway Engineering, February 1, 2006.



The first conference, held in the same university chapel, January 25, 2005.



Dr. Alexander Lalomov speaking at the second conference, February 1, 2006.



The missionary priest Fr. Daniel Sysoyev (†2009) at the communal meal following the second conference, February 2, 2006.

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the speakers have been native Russians, some have come from the United States, Georgia, Serbia, Canada, France and Italy. The theological talks have been given by bishops, priests, monastics, seminary instructors, church-school teachers, catechists, and missionaries. The scientific talks, which comprise the majority, have been given by doctors and professors of biology (biochemistry, molecular and population genetics, zoology), physics, mathematics, geology, and astronomy, who are currently working in secular scientific/academic institutions. Having decades of experience in their specialized disciplines, these scientists testify that they have not seen conclusive proofs against the Scriptural-Patristic understanding of creation and history, and that on the contrary they have found much evidence substantiating it and offering glimpses into the wisdom and majesty of God.

The Shestodnev center has published books of the proceedings of each year's conference. Patriarch Alexy II acquainted himself with these anthologies, and in his public statements expressed his support of the Orthodox position confessed in them. In contrast to the view of the Orthodox school teacher of the aforementioned teenager Anna, His Holiness endorsed the instruction of Orthodox young people in the traditional Biblical teaching on origins. Thus, at the opening of the International Nativity Educational Readings in 2007, he told the assembled faithful at the Moscow Kremlin:

A polarity of worldviews poses the task today of introducing students to a wide range of views on fundamental questions. Such questions traditionally refer to the problems of the origin of life, the origin of the universe, and the appearance of man. And no harm will be done to a schoolboy if he knows the Biblical theory of the origin of the world. Man's realization that he is the crown of God's creation will only elevate him; if someone wants to think that he has descended from apes, let him think that way, but let him not thrust it on someone else.<sup>49\*</sup>

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\* More recently, in June 2010, the head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of External Church Relations, Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk, said concerning the education of children in Russia: "The time has come to end the

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In the realm of Orthodox education in Russia, a significant development has been the publication of the high school textbook *General Biology* by Dr. Sergei Y. Vert'yanov. Written with the help of Russian scientists from a number of disciplines, this work presents scientific evidence for the Scriptural-Patristic understanding of the creation, history, and age of the world. The second edition (2006) was carefully reviewed and edited by the late Dr. Y. P. Altukhov, a world-renowned population geneticist whose seminal research into the limits of genetic change led him to the inescapable conclusion that the neo-Darwinian paradigm is founded on an impossible premise. An Orthodox believer nearing the end of his life, Dr. Altukhov was more than happy to assist Dr. Vert'yanov in producing a book of high scientific standards which would help free the minds of young students from the shackles of Darwinism. Having labored long over the book with a concilium of fellow scientists from Moscow State University (MGU), Dr. Altukhov stated only a few days before his repose: “Everything was written correctly. There are no mistakes. Now I can say that I have not lived in vain.”<sup>50</sup> The book was blessed by Patriarch Alexy II, published by the Patriarchal Publishing House of the Holy Trinity–St. Sergius Lavra, and—in an act equally inconceivable in the former Soviet Union and in contemporary America—approved by the Russian Ministry of Education as a supplemental textbook for public schools.

Through the Shestodnev center, Orthodox scientists in Russia

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monopoly of Darwinism and the deceptive idea that science in general contradicts religion. These ideas should be left in the past. Darwin's theory ... should be taught to children as one of several theories.... Children should know of other theories, too.” Metropolitan Hilarion went on to note that the theory that one kind of creature can evolve into another has never been proven, and that children “should know about the religious picture, the creation of the world, which is common to all the monotheistic religions” (Conor Humphries, “Russian Church Wants End to Darwin School ‘Monopoly,’” *Reuters*, June 10, 2010). A year earlier, the metropolitan explained that “Darwin's theory contradicts Biblical revelation, because this theory proposes to us ... that man developed from some kind of animal state by way of gradual evolution to the point that people have reached now. The Biblical picture is quite different. The Bible states that God created man perfect, and that the imperfection of today's human life is bound up first of all with sin” (Metropolitan Hilarion, interview by Dmitry Didrov and Dmitry Gubin, *Temporarily Open*, ATV, May 1, 2009 [in Russian]).

who uphold the Scriptural-Patristic view of origins have been able to form a network through which to share their ideas and research. At the completion of the 2008 Shestodnev conference, thirty-two of these scientists, each holding a Kandidat or Doctor of Sciences degree in their respective fields,\* sent a letter to Patriarch Alexy II, which read in part:

In the era dominated by “scientific” atheism, which ended not long ago in our country, as is well known it was difficult to propose and discuss scientific models based on the idea of creation. Now, thanks be to God, atheism is not forced as a dogma in political and ideological circles of our society. However, in scientific circles and the realm of education, the deeply rooted ideology of evolutionism is dominant, contradicting the Biblical worldview and the teaching of the Holy Fathers of the Church.<sup>51</sup>

#### *16. A Comparison of Orthodox and Protestant Scientists Who Uphold the Biblical View*

While a number of creation scientists in the West work in Protestant creationist organizations in order to freely pursue their research, all of the Orthodox scientists in Russia who believe in the Biblical view of creation are employed by mainstream scientific and academic institutions. This is indicative of the fact that, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the scientific/academic milieu in Russia is more open to criticism of evolutionism than it is in the West, and the Russian doubters of Darwinism are much less likely to be blacklisted and lose their positions than are their Western counterparts.\*\*

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\* The Russian Kandidat of Sciences degree is usually recognized as equivalent to a Ph.D. in the U.S. The Doctor of Sciences degree in Russia is distinctly higher than a Ph.D., and is roughly equivalent to a full professor rank in the U.S. system.

\*\* See Dr. Jerry Bergman, *Slaughter of the Dissidents* (vol. 1, 2008) for an extensively documented account of how Darwin doubters, including university students and accomplished scientists and educators, have faced all manner of discrimination for their views. For a popular presentation of the subject, see the film *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* (2008), hosted by Ben Stein.

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The Russian Orthodox scientists who support the creation model often make use of the research done by Protestant and Roman Catholic creation scientists, as well as by scientists associated with the ID movement, but more often they refer to the work of fellow Russian scientists, including evolutionists whose findings inadvertently support the Scriptural-Patristic teaching on creation. In general, these Russian scientists, as well as scientists from other Orthodox countries who hold to the creation model, highly value the work of creation and ID scientists in the West. Some have noted that the Protestant creationist literature is at times marked by an overly triumphalistic tone, not sufficiently acknowledging the questions that remain unresolved within the creation paradigm.<sup>52</sup> At the same time they affirm that, overall, the work of Western creationists is just as scientifically valid as that of secular evolutionists, and if the former are sometimes too facile in making claims from the evidence and explaining away problems, they are certainly no more guilty of this than are the latter.\*

As the above-mentioned Orthodox scientists understand, the reason why creationists and evolutionists come to such different conclusions about the same empirical evidence lies not in the quality of their respective scientific work, but rather in the fact that they rely on different metaphysical/philosophical assumptions. Because these foundational assumptions—the Christian and the naturalistic—concern the question of the origin of all things, they are ultimately untestable.\*\*

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\* The secular establishment's portrayal of Western creation scientists as inept, unprofessional, and dilettantish is a feature of the caricature mentioned earlier. Such a view is contradicted by distinguished and accomplished scientists from secular academia who have taken up the creation paradigm. At a recent conference of Creation Ministries International, for example, one of the world's foremost geneticists, the above-mentioned Dr. John Sanford of Cornell University, remarked about his fellow presenters: "I'm impressed with their professional and scientific rigor. Everything I've seen thus far has a great deal of scientific integrity" (Sanford, *The Mystery of Our Declining Genes* [2009]). As in any legitimate scientific enterprise, creation scientists in the West peer-review each other's work and continually challenge and test each other's hypotheses.

\*\* On the distinction between origins science and operational science, see p. 421n below. On the role of foundational assumptions in science, see pp. 666, 666n, 683, 903–5.

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Thus, as Fr. Seraphim observed, neither creation nor evolution can be conclusively “proved” scientifically: both are founded on faith.\*

While the diametrically opposed assumptions of Christians and materialists make for essential disagreements in how scientific evidence is interpreted as it relates to origins, the difference in confessions of faith makes for some comparatively minor but nonetheless notable disparities between Orthodox and Protestants as they approach scientific evidence in light of the Biblical account of beginnings. Both the Orthodox and Protestant creationists confess a special creation, a young earth, an historical Adam and Eve, an incorrupt creation until the fall, a global Flood, and other basic Biblical teachings. Since, however, the Orthodox have at their disposal a rich Patristic tradition of Scriptural elucidation, they are able to penetrate further into the meaning of the Biblical text. The Orthodox Holy Fathers, as Fr. Seraphim observed, spoke about the Scriptural narrative of the creation and the first-created world from a common experience of Divine grace in the Church, which illumined their understanding and enabled them to go beyond the level of merely rational exegesis. Living within the same Ark of grace as did the ancient Fathers, and following them, Orthodox scientists of today know not only that the creation during the Six Days and up until the fall was without death and corruption (as the Protestants also rightly confess from the Bible), but also that it was of a nature radically different from the creation as we know it today. As Fr. Seraphim wrote, drawing from the teaching of St. Symeon the New Theologian:

*The law of nature before Adam's disobedience is different from the law of nature now in force, and it is therefore totally unknowable by science.... Certain it is that science cannot, on the basis of observing a creation which is everywhere corruptible and mortal, make even the slightest inference about a creation not subject to these laws. What was before the disobedience of Adam, and what is beyond the end of this corruptible world (when the creation will not be destroyed but totally transformed)—are totally outside the sphere of science and may*

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\* See pp. 423–24, 620–21, 668 below.

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be known only through Orthodox theology in accordance with God's revelation to mankind.\*

This Patristic perspective prevents Orthodox scientists from trying to investigate what occurred during the Six Days and in the pre-fall cosmos, as some Protestant scientists (geologists, physicists, astronomers, biologists) have done.\*\* Knowing that physical laws and principles—and very likely also the properties of matter and time—were different before the fall of man, Orthodox scientists are content to leave the nature of God's original "very good" world as a mystery outside the scope of scientific inquiry: a mystery to be penetrated only in the realm of theology, through the Divine revelation imparted to the saints.

### *17. The Present Book*

As noted earlier, the present volume is an anthology of various materials that Fr. Seraphim left at the time of his repose, either in manuscript form or as taped lectures. The main body of the book has been compiled from the following materials, all of them by Fr. Seraphim:

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\* See p. 650 below.

\*\* See pp. 894–95, 905–6 below. Examples include speculation into the properties of humans and other living things before the fall (an endeavor which Fr. Seraphim saw as futile; see p. 458 below), conjecture about the transformation of radioisotopes during the Six Days of Creation, attempts to investigate astronomical events during the Six Days according to the principles of modern physics, and suppositions regarding how the laws of physics (including the second law of thermodynamics) operated before the fall. Some Protestant creationists have objected to this approach, arguing as did Fr. Seraphim that present laws should not be applied to the pre-fall cosmos (see, for example, Jeffrey Wilson, "Pre-Fall Physics" [letter to the editor], in *TJ* [now *Journal of Creation*], vol. 18, no. 2 [2004], pp. 64–65); but at the current time theirs is not the prevailing opinion within Protestant creation science.

It may be added here that Protestant creationists sometimes bring forward interpretations of the Genesis narrative that are contrary to the common Patristic view. For example, while the Holy Fathers taught that Adam and Eve did not have sexual relations or even passions before the fall, the Protestant creationist reading generally assumes that they did have them.

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1. Letter to Dr. Alexander Kalomiros, 1974;
2. Lecture 11 of the "Orthodox Survival Course" in 1975, which includes both Fr. Seraphim's "Brief Critique of the Evolutionary Model" and his discussion of "Christian Evolutionism";
3. Patristic Commentary on Genesis, 1981 and 1982, taken both from Fr. Seraphim's manuscript and from his oral delivery, including the question-and-answer sessions;
4. Letters from 1974 to 1981;
5. Miscellaneous notes, including outlines, brief essays, and Fr. Seraphim's own additions to Alexey Young's unfinished chapters.

Although Fr. Seraphim never lived to complete the book he planned, the present volume covers all the main areas that he wanted discussed. In fact, in a certain sense this posthumous collection is more full than the book he envisioned.\* For example, some of Fr. Seraphim's most interesting theological observations are found in the tape transcriptions of his question-and-answer sessions (part 1, chap. 10), and some of his most concise and penetrating thoughts about evolutionism are contained in the selections from his letters (part 4).

Fr. Seraphim's discussion of the scientific side of the creation/evolution issue does not represent as full a treatment as he had envisioned for the book, nor is it fully up to date. We have attempted to remedy this situation by including (1) explanatory footnotes to Fr. Seraphim's discussion of scientific themes, with references to more recent literature; (2) Phillip Johnson's introduction on the burgeoning reconsideration of Darwinism in the years following Fr. Seraphim's repose, up until 1997;\*\* (3) an article by Dr. Yuri Zharikov, Russian Orthodox Christian and doctor of zoology, which elaborates further on Fr. Seraphim's discussion and covers scientific developments through 2010

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\* Since this is a compilation of separate bodies of work done at different times for different purposes, there is some repetition of Patristic passages. Had Fr. Seraphim lived to complete this book himself, these repetitions would of course not occur. We have elected to allow for them in this posthumous collection so as not to disturb the integrity and continuity of each separate work.

\*\* Phillip Johnson's introduction was written for the first edition of this book, which was published in 2000.

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(appendix 3); (4) an article on the age of the earth by the above-mentioned doctor of geology in Moscow, Alexander Lalomov (appendix 4), and (5) an up-to-date list of suggested resources.

We have also added to Fr. Seraphim's discussion of theological themes. In footnoted material throughout the main body of the book, as well as in the appended article "Created in Incorruption" (appendix 1), we have cited many Patristic sources to supplement those quoted by Fr. Seraphim. In the article we have augmented Fr. Seraphim's examination of the Patristic teaching on the original state of man and the cosmos, and on the effects of the fall, and have explained at greater length how this relates to the Patristic teaching on the redemption of man and the cosmos by Christ, and on the state beyond the general resurrection. In so doing, we have attempted to highlight a vital point made by Fr. Seraphim: that our understanding of Genesis and creation affects the whole of our faith as Orthodox Christians, and thus when this understanding is undermined by the modern secular faith of evolutionism, our entire faith is compromised.

### *18. This Book's Primary Contribution*

While this book attempts to address many of the issues raised by the naturalistic paradigm of modern science, as we have seen this was a decidedly secondary aim in Fr. Seraphim's mind. As Fr. Seraphim understood, scientific conceptions lie within the sphere of relative knowledge and hence are always subject to uncertainty and change, whereas the dogmatic, theological teaching of the Church rests on the certainty of Divine revelation and does not change. Therefore, while scientific evidence may *support* one's faith in the veracity of revelation as shown forth in the Church through her Holy Scriptures and Patristic writings, this evidence cannot in any way constitute the substance of one's faith, nor should it be seen as being somehow comparable to revelation.

The uniqueness of this book does not rest in its discussion of scientific issues. As we have seen, there is now plenty of excellent material, by writers associated both with creation science and with the ID movement, which sheds light on these issues. Rather, this book adds a singu-

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lar dimension to the current creation/evolution debate by presenting, in a penetrating, detailed way, the otherworldly mind of the Holy Fathers as it interprets the Holy Scriptures, and as it perceives the creation, the first-created world, the natures of created things, and the original nature of man.

In overcoming the temptation, which had been bred in him from childhood, to feel he knew better than the ancients, Fr. Seraphim revealed how *noble*, how utterly treasurable is the Patristic mind. Clearly, from his writing one can see that this is no ordinary human mind, but one illumined by God.

As the Holy Fathers affirmed, the author of Genesis, Moses the God-seer, related what had been directly revealed to him by God regarding the Creation and the first-created world, and it was in this way that he was able to set forth his prophecy of the past. The Holy Fathers themselves, who commented on Holy Scripture in expounding the theology of the Church, were given to know something of these mysteries through Divine vision—*theoria* (*θεωρία*) in Greek—and thus they are the only sure interpreters of Moses' text. Fr. Seraphim, having immersed himself in the mind of the Fathers, presented to the modern world the Scriptural-Patristic *vision* of the cosmos, and thus raised the discussion far above the merely rational and scientific.

Protestant creationists, as we have seen, only present part of the picture, rightly defending the historical aspect of the Genesis narrative, but scarcely penetrating beyond the most obvious meaning of the text. Being as yet outside the fullness of revelation—a fullness given by Christ in His Church—they do not appreciate all that God has revealed about the original state and final end of man and the cosmos, nor do they plumb all the deeper typological and symbolical meanings in Genesis. “Orthodox evolutionists,” on the other hand, may follow the Holy Fathers in bringing out the typological and symbolic meanings, but in failing to follow them in upholding the historical meaning as well, they too miss a vital dimension. Thus, the Patristic teaching on God's instantaneous, effortless acts of creation during the Six Days cannot be adopted by them. Moreover, the testimony of the Holy Fathers on the original state of man and the world—as a true, historical reality—remains irrelevant for them, and they cannot fully appreciate

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how this reality relates to man's redemption by Christ and to the state beyond the general resurrection.

It is only in embracing without reservation what Fr. Seraphim called the "whole Patristic teaching" that one can see the whole picture—as much as God has revealed it to mankind. That is why Fr. Seraphim's contribution, gathered in these pages, is so invaluable for our times. All the levels of interpretation—historical, symbolical, typological—were embraced by Fr. Seraphim at once, just as they were by the Holy Fathers. But for him as for them, the historical reality of the Six Days and of life before the fall was viewed differently than the same reality in the post-fall world: it was viewed with spiritual eyes, informed by spiritual life in the Church.

Today, just as in Fr. Seraphim's day, one can find Orthodox scholars who hold to the traditional Christian understanding of Genesis and creation, as well as those who seek to combine evolutionism with Christianity. Since the posthumous publication of Fr. Seraphim's writings on the Patristic understanding of Genesis—which to date have appeared in English, Russian, Romanian, and Serbian—those in the former group have a precious resource through which to grow in faith and understanding, while those in the latter have a greater challenge before them. Nowadays the "Orthodox evolutionists," in addition to being faced with a growing public awareness of the flaws of evolutionism from the perspective of natural science, must confront a greater awareness among Orthodox Christians that evolutionism is in conflict with Patristic teaching. Thanks in large part to Fr. Seraphim's work, it is more difficult now than in former times to make such blanket statements as "the Holy Fathers read Genesis not as history but as allegory," or "Patristic teaching is compatible with evolutionism" without being called to account. To be sure, there are still "Orthodox evolutionists" who make such claims, backing them up with a few Patristic quotes one-sidedly interpreted and ignoring the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. But for those evolutionists who take up the challenge raised by Fr. Seraphim's exposition and actually reckon with the sum of Patristic teaching, such facile evasions are not possible. If they wish to retain their evolutionary ideas, it seems there remain but two ways to deal with the obvious incompatibility that exists between the

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Patristic and evolutionary worldviews: (1) try to find contradictions and errors in the Patristic teachings on Genesis and creation, thereby undermining the Fathers' authority so that it can be replaced by the authority of modern scientism; and (2) frankly acknowledge that the Fathers did regard the Genesis narrative as history and did have a very non-evolutionary view of origins, but that now we must adopt a different view, since we as moderns know better than they.

As should be evident from our previous discussion, both of these closely related methodologies are poles apart from Fr. Seraphim's reverent reception of Patristic wisdom. The present book is intended for those who, along with Fr. Seraphim, find the modern attitude of "knowing better" unsatisfactory or even repugnant, who are looking for an exposition that embraces the "whole Patristic teaching," not one that distorts or attenuates it in order to make it compatible with the modern secular worldview. For believers such as these, this book does not aim to be the last word on the subject of Genesis and creation, but rather a primer, an inspiration, and a guidepost for further study and contemplation. In the words of Fr. Constantine Bufeyev quoted above, it can help point believers in "the only right direction" as they seek the mind of the Fathers concerning first things. In perceiving, through Fr. Seraphim, how one is to approach the Church's tradition with regard to the doctrine of creation vis-à-vis evolutionism, one can understand how to do this with regard to any traditional Christian teaching as it interfaces with the modern secular world. Fr. Seraphim indicates how one is to receive and pass on the Faith of the Church as did the Holy Fathers themselves.

### *19. A Spiritual Awareness of Original Incorruption*

While Orthodox scholars continue to take various positions on the creation/evolution issue, among Orthodox saints and holy elders who have lived since the time of Darwin the issue has long been settled. From the time Darwinian evolutionism began to be widely propagated, these holy ones equated it with *unbelief*, recognizing that it is not a scientific discovery based on evidence, but rather a materialistic

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philosophy imposed on the evidence and based in modern Western society's loss of faith in the Christian God. Since they understood that the original aim of Darwin's theory was to find an explanation for the origin of living things without need for a Divine Creator, it never occurred to them—as it has to theistic evolutionists past and present—to try to insert God into a philosophy that had been devised in order to keep Him out. Participating in the Divine-human life of the Orthodox Church in full measure, they affirmed that evolutionism is foreign to the mind of the Church and thus to the mind of Christ. Their common witness shows forth the fact that evolutionism is in conflict with a basic spiritual awareness about God, man and the cosmos that is imparted to Christians, especially those closest to God. In the present book (appendix 2) we have included the testimony of some of these saints and righteous ones, from the Russian saints already mentioned to St. Nectarios of Pentapolis and Elder Paisios of Mount Athos in Greece, St. Nikolai Velimirovich and St. Justin Popovich in Serbia, Elder Sophrony Sakharov in England, and others.

Not only from sacred writings but also from spiritual experience, these saints and elders of recent centuries have known a Creator Who can and did make all things in instantaneous, effortless creative acts. Such a Creator, they have testified, could not be associated with the blind, fumbling, laborious process which, according to evolutionism, brought living things into being.\* Moreover, these saints and elders have known—again, not just from books but from living experience—a Creator Who made the world “very good” in the beginning, without death, suffering, disease, and all the other negative elements

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\* This spiritual awareness of modern-day saints and elders was expressed by saints of earlier ages in response to other forms of error. Thus, for example, in the second century St. Irenaeus of Lyons took pains to refute the Valentinian Gnostic doctrine of the creation of the world by an ignorant, fumbling demiurge. As Hieromonk Irenaeus (M. C. Steenberg) has pointed out, this Valentinian concept of origins bears a certain resemblance to today's concept of the blind, fumbling process of evolution, and any deity that a “theistic evolutionist” might associate with such a process must inevitably bear some unwelcome resemblance to the Valentinian demiurge itself (personal communication of Hieromonk Irenaeus; see M. C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, chap. 1, and pp. 156–57n below).

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that entered the world through human sin. Thus, they have rejected the evolutionary doctrine that regards all these aspects of corruption as having been present in the world from the beginning.

As Orthodox believers of holy life have drawn nearer to the Uncreated Source of incorruption, they have drawn nearer to incorruption itself, and have thereby gained spiritual insight into the original, incorrupt state of humanity and the entire visible creation. In the words of Fr. Seraphim's spiritual forebear St. Barsanuphius of Optina, the present world reveals only "hints" and "fragments" of "that wondrous beauty, incomprehensible to human thought, which was originally created," when everything—including the sun, the moon, and even the material nature of light itself—was different.\*

Fr. Seraphim himself, as he entered more deeply into the Patristic mind through study coupled with prayer and ascetic labor, lived in this awareness of creation's blessed condition in the beginning. In the morning, before church services, he had a practice of circling the entire monastery grounds. As the morning light filtered through the broad canopy of oak leaves, Fr. Seraphim could be seen blessing and even kissing the trees. Once, when he was asked why he was doing this, he only looked up, smiled radiantly, and continued walking.

Those who knew Fr. Seraphim understood that there could be no chiliastic worship of the earth in this routine of his. Fr. Seraphim was acutely aware that this weary earth, "groaning" under the "bondage of corruption" that had entered it through human sin (cf. Rom. 8:21–22), was not his true home, that it would be one day recreated, transfigured into a new earth. For this reason, he did not even like nature photography that attempted to make this corruptible earth look as attractive as possible. Why then, did he kiss the trees of the monastery? Was it not because he saw in them the very "fragments" of the lost beauty of the original creation, as well as the promise of the transfigured world to come? The very tree he kissed was a reminder of the incorrupt realm which man had lost at the fall—for trees too, according to the teaching of St. Gregory the Sinaite, partook of incorruption in the beginning.

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\* See pp. 709–10 below.

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In his commentary on Genesis, Fr. Seraphim made a self-revelatory statement which confirms that this awareness was behind his unusual practice of kissing trees:

In the peaceful murmur of the forests (where so many ascetic strugglers have taken refuge) can we not see a reminder of the Paradise of vegetation originally intended for our dwelling and food, and still existing for those able to ascend, like St. Paul, to behold it?\*

There also may have been a sense of repentance behind Fr. Seraphim's practice—a sense of mankind's responsibility for creation's "groaning." As Metropolitan Joseph of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church suggested at the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Fr. Seraphim's repose, in blessing and kissing trees Fr. Seraphim was "as if begging forgiveness that because of our sins they also suffer."<sup>53</sup>

As with the forest of vegetation in which he lived, Fr. Seraphim had a profound appreciation for the animal kingdom around him: both the many wild animals which freely roamed through the monastery, and the monastery's many domesticated animals. Ever since he was a boy he had shown this appreciation for God's creatures, which had moved him to spend three summer vacations studying zoology at the Summer School of Science in San Diego. Now that he was an Orthodox monk living in the wilderness, he viewed animals in a more sublime light, even while realizing that they too had been affected by man's primordial fall. His monastic co-laborer Fr. Herman recalls a quiet moment when some of the monastery's animals came up to them. "From your point of view," he asked Fr. Seraphim, "what are animals all about?" Fr. Seraphim replied: "They have something to do with Paradise."

### *20. The Original Nature of Man*

As Fr. Seraphim lived in the awareness of the original incorruption of the creation around him, even more so was he aware of the

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\* See p. 252 below.

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original incorruption of man: spiritual, intellectual, and physical. More than anything else, it was this awareness of man's original nature, which he shared with the Holy Fathers before him, that revealed to him evolution's opposition to the Orthodox Christian worldview. As he wrote to Dr. Kalomiros, "The most important question which is raised for Orthodox theology by the modern theory of evolution is *the nature of man*, and in particular *the nature of the first-created man Adam*."<sup>54</sup>

Through faith in naturalism, and in particular through its offspring evolutionism, modern secular man has lost an understanding of what he was like before the fall. While Orthodox Patristic theology teaches that man fell from a blessed state in which he had no bodily needs, was dispassionate, possessed ineffable intelligence and the gift of prophecy, and was "wrapped about" by Divine grace—a condition that St. John Chrysostom likened to that of the angels<sup>55</sup>—evolutionism teaches rather that man came up from the beasts through the law of bloody tooth and claw. Thus, it is no wonder that St. Barsanuphius of Optina called evolutionism a "bestial philosophy," or that St. Justin Popovich of Celije observed: "That theology which bases its anthropology on the theory of 'scientific' evolution is nothing but a contradiction in terms. In reality, it is a theology without God and an anthropology without man."\*

As Fr. Seraphim came to realize, many of his fellow Orthodox Christians have, together with their surrounding society, also lost an awareness of man's original condition. And yet, as he also knew, without an apprehension of his original nature man cannot know what it is he should be striving to get back to, nor can he know what he was ultimately created for. For this reason, Fr. Seraphim felt it was essential to introduce his fellow believers to the wealth of Patristic teaching on this subject.

"With the opening of their eyes through the transgression," Fr. Seraphim told the assembled faithful at the monastery, "Adam and Eve have already lost the life of Paradise.... From now on their eyes will be open to the lower things of this earth, and they will see only

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\* See pp. 795–96, 812 below.

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with difficulty the higher things of God. They are no longer dispassionate, but have begun the passionate earthly life we still have today.”\*

It is by becoming dispassionate through prayer and ascetic struggle that Orthodox saints throughout the ages have restored in themselves, while yet in a corruptible body, some measure of the pre-fallen state of Adam.\*\* Like him, they have been shown to be impervious to the elements; like him, they have been masters and stewards of creation, and all creatures have obeyed them.

First-created Adam, Fr. Seraphim said, was in “a state called sobriety: *nepsis* [νηψις] in Greek.” “He looked at things and saw them the way they were. There was no ‘double thought’ like we have “in our fallen state,” no “looking at things and imagining something else.”\*\*\*

Through the grace of Christ in His Church, Orthodox saints have also returned to this pre-fallen state of sobriety or watchfulness. With pure, open awareness, they have perceived the original nature of man, the distinct natures of created things, and, beyond these, the “ideas” or “thought-wills” (*λόγοι—logoi*) of created beings that preexist in the

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\* See p. 259 below.

\*\* The restoration of man to his pre-fallen state is a regular theme in Orthodox ascetic literature. Nicetas Stethatos, a disciple of St. Symeon the New Theologian, writes about it as follows: “Unless through the labor of repentance and assiduous ascetic practice we first restore the soul’s powers to the state in which they were when God originally formed Adam and breathed into him the breath of life, we will never be able to know ourselves; nor will we be able to acquire a disposition that is master of the passions.... If we do not regain the beauty of our original high estate, continually renewing the impress of the image of Him Who created us in His likeness ... how can we ever enter into union with Him?” (*On the Practice of the Virtues* 17–18, *Philokalia* 4, pp. 83–84). In a similar vein, Metropolitan Theoleptus of Philadelphia, the spiritual father of St. Gregory Palamas, teaches: “He who stands aloof from the senses and sensory things—stands aloof, that is to say, from the world and the flesh—is energized by the Spirit and meditates on the things of the Spirit. One can learn of this from God’s relationship with Adam prior to the fall” (*Texts* 4, *Philokalia* 4, p. 189).

See also the Patristic passages quoted on pp. 235n, 472–73, 755–56 below.

\*\*\* See pp. 396–97 below.

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Mind of God.\* In Christ, they have experienced not only the closeness to God that Adam enjoyed in the beginning, but the spiritual union with God (*θέωσις—theosis*) that Adam would have attained if not for his disobedience.\*\*

Fr. Seraphim, in reading the Lives of the saints (especially the ascetic “desert dwellers” of both ancient and recent times) was inspired and elevated by these living icons of man’s original, incorrupt condition, and likewise of his future, redeemed state, when he will be raised in a body that is at once incorruptible, spiritual, and deified. In following in the footsteps of the saints, Fr. Seraphim prayed much, cultivated the lofty virtues of sobriety and dispassion, and began to ascend with them beyond this corruptible earth. From a higher vantage point gained through drawing closer to God, he was granted to share to some degree in the experience of the saints as they contemplated the original and final states of man and the cosmos, as well as the distinct created natures and Uncreated *logoi* of beings.

Through revelation from above, the Prophet Moses described the creation and the first-created world. Through the grace of Christ

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\* In Orthodox theology, the *logoi* are the Uncreated inner principles of created things. They are contained within the Divine Logos (Word), and are separate from the created things themselves, just as the ideas and will of a craftsman are separate from the work in which they are manifested. Proper to the Energies rather than to the Essence of God, the *logoi* determine the differences among created things, including the different modes according to which these things participate in the Uncreated Energies. Everything in the created order receives its existence, as well as tends toward its end, according to the *logoi*. The saints, in rising toward the vision of God in His Energies, can at the same time be given knowledge of the Uncreated *logoi*. See Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor*; Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, pp. 94–100; Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, pp. 203–23; as well as pp. 182n, 217n, 477n, 699 below.

\*\* Thus, for example, St. Macarius the Great (in the adaptation of his writings by St. Symeon Metaphrastes) teaches: “What is the purpose of Christ’s advent? The restoration and reintegration of human nature in Him. For he restored to human nature the original dignity of Adam, and in addition bestowed on it the unutterable grace of the heavenly inheritance of the Holy Spirit” (*On the Freedom of the Nous* 150, *Philokalia* 3, p. 353). See also pp. 396, 474, 757, 763–64, 772, 774 below.

## THE STORY BEHIND THE BOOK

working within them, the Holy Fathers provided further illumination of Moses' account. And finally, through the same action of grace, a man of our own times, Fr. Seraphim Rose, has pierced through the dark clouds of unbelief and shed light on the mind of the Fathers for contemporary seekers of truth.

It is our hope and prayer that more of these seekers will hear the message. Through the work of those in the intelligent design movement, one can find compelling evidence that the mechanism of Darwinian evolution cannot produce a man from a molecule, no matter how much time is allowed for the process. Through the work of non-Orthodox creation scientists, one can examine the great mass of scientific evidence that points to the veracity of Genesis as an historical narrative. Through the work of Orthodox scientists who uphold Scriptural-Patristic teaching, one can gain further perspectives on scientific issues according to a specifically *Orthodox* understanding of the boundaries of scientific inquiry. All of these sources of knowledge, however, can at most merely point to man's source of revealed truth about himself and the world: the Holy Scriptures of the Church, as elucidated by the Church through the Holy Fathers. Through this source, approached with reverence and humility, today's truth-seekers can raise their minds and hearts above this fallen, corruptible earth along with their fellow seeker, Fr. Seraphim. From there they will perceive God as the all-powerful Creator He truly is, man and the cosmos as they were in the beginning, and all things as they will be in the future age, redeemed forever by the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Hieromonk Damascene  
St. Herman of Alaska Monastery  
Great Lent, 2011

## *A NOTE ON THE SECOND EDITION*

In this second edition of *Genesis, Creation, and Early Man*, published a decade after the first, we have substantially added to the theological and scientific material in the footnotes and appendices, as well as in the above preface. One of our aims in this has been to provide a more representative treatment of the Patristic interpretation of the book of Genesis, quoting or at least listing the Patristic sources that touch upon each salient point of exegesis. Another has been to address theological and scientific issues that have come to our attention since the first edition was published. A number of these issues were brought up by our readers and by those whom we have met at conferences; others were found in various books and articles, including two lengthy reviews of the present book: “*Genesis and Creation: Towards a Debate*” by George Theokritoff, with Elizabeth Theokritoff (*St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 4 [Nov. 4, 2002], pp. 365–90), and “*Orthodoxy and Genesis: What the Fathers Really Taught*” by Terry Mortenson (*TJ* [now *Journal of Creation*], vol. 16, no. 3 [Dec. 2001], pp. 48–53). With help from Orthodox Patristic scholars and scientists and from the wealth of material that has been published on the subject since the first edition of this book came out, we have attempted to respond to the most pertinent questions and challenges that have been raised in recent times concerning the Orthodox doctrine of creation.

## INTRODUCTION

# *Fr. Seraphim Rose and Twenty-First-Century Science*

By Phillip E. Johnson

I FIRST HEARD of Fr. Seraphim Rose in the summer of 1996, while lecturing in the Seattle area. A young man who had been in contact with the monks at the Monastery of St. Herman in Platina, California, brought me a stack of books, saying that the monks would like me to write an essay to accompany a collection of Fr. Seraphim's writings on Genesis and evolution. I had most of the books mailed to my office but selected the slimmest one (*Nihilism*) to read on the trip. I was fascinated by the insight displayed in this early work, and needed no urging to read later all the other materials I received, including Fr. Damascene Christensen's biography and the previously unpublished writings collected in this volume. Fr. Seraphim Rose believed in and lived by the teachings of the early Christian Church, but (or should I say "and therefore"?) he also thoroughly understood the problems of modernity. I am honored to have been invited to assist in bringing his teaching to the attention of a broader section of the public.

My task is to review the state of the scientific questions today, to give the reader a sense of how well Fr. Seraphim's critique of evolutionary naturalism stands up now that a major reconsideration of Darwinism is beginning to occur in the secular world. I should explain first that my involvement with the subject of evolution has been quite different from his. Fr. Seraphim's primary objective was to explain the teaching of the Church Fathers, especially with respect to their understanding of the Scriptures, so that Orthodox believers would not be misled by

## INTRODUCTION

misguided efforts to reinterpret those teachings in the light of modernist evolutionary science. He dealt with scientific questions mainly in the context of defending the Patristic writings, and he directed his teaching towards fellow Orthodox believers. Although he understood the philosophical roots of evolutionary theory very profoundly, he was not extensively involved with the scientific community. He seems to have debated the subject only with Dr. Kalomiros, who was apparently esteemed within part of the Orthodox community but whose scientific views were confused and laden with misinformation.

My own writings are addressed to the world at large, including secular intellectuals and religious believers from a variety of traditions. My writing and speaking brings me into constant debate with a variety of scientific authorities of greater and lesser renown. Most of my critics would not consider the Church Fathers to be reliable authorities, or even recognize their names. Many of them are also strongly prejudiced against anything that smacks of “fundamentalism,” or even “religion,” and hence are repelled rather than persuaded by any reference to the Bible or its interpreters. To avoid endless confusion and distraction, and to keep attention focused on the most important point, I have firmly put aside all questions of Biblical interpretation and religious authority, in order to concentrate my energies on one theme. My theme is that, in Fr. Seraphim’s words, “evolution is *not* ‘scientific fact’ at all, but philosophy.” The philosophy in question is naturalism (the doctrine that nature is “all there is”), which for this purpose is identical to materialism (the doctrine that reality consists of nothing but the particles that physicists study). If materialism is true then nature had to be capable of doing its own creating, and the existence of a materialistic evolutionary process follows as a matter of inevitable logic. Hence, I have argued, scientific materialists believe in naturalistic evolution not because of the evidence, but regardless of it.

Although my own project has led me to avoid the questions of Patristic authority that most concerned Fr. Seraphim, some of my debating opponents have (like Dr. Kalomiros) invoked the Fathers in highly distorted form for their own purposes. I am therefore gratified to see that Fr. Seraphim has thoroughly demolished one of the favorite canards of accommodationists not only in Orthodoxy, but also in Roman

Catholic and Protestant circles. Desperately seeking anything that will support their program of melding Christianity with evolutionary naturalism, these theologians and scientists have claimed that such esteemed Fathers as Basil and Augustine taught a doctrine which is more or less like a primitive version of modern evolutionary theory. I need say no more on this subject, because no one who understands Fr. Seraphim's lectures on Genesis and creation, which are contained in this volume, is in danger of being misled by such perverse misinterpretations.\*

With those introductory comments out of the way, I will explain certain common misunderstandings of the scientific issues with which Fr. Seraphim had to deal, and in the course of doing this I will attempt to bring his discussion up to date. Fr. Seraphim's thought was thoroughly at odds with twentieth-century science, shaped as that science has been by its *a priori* commitment to metaphysical materialism. It may well be, however, that the science of the next century will be more modest and hence more realistic, in which case he may seem like a man who was far ahead of his time.

#### What is “evolution”?

A succinct and accurate definition of “evolution,” as the term is understood by today’s mainstream scientists and science educators, is given in the official (USA, 1995) policy statement of the National Association of Biology Teachers\*\* (NABT):

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\* See the article by Jonathan Wells, “Abusing Theology: Howard Van Till’s ‘Forgotten Doctrine of Creation’s Functional Integrity,’” in the journal *Origins & Design*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1998), pp. 16–20.

\*\* The complete text of the NABT statement on the teaching of evolution was published in *The American Biology Teacher* (Jan. 1996), pp. 61–62, and in the collection *Voices for Evolution* (Berkeley, Calif.: National Center for Science Education, 1995) pp. 140–44. Following public criticism by myself and others, the NABT amended the Statement to omit the words “unsupervised” and “impersonal.” This amendment was in no way a change in the substance of the NABT’s position; it merely deleted incautious words too obvious and undeniable. The Darwinian establishment prefers to make its main point—that God had nothing to do with evolution—by persistent insinuation rather than the kind of plain language that invites opposition. That evolution was never guided by an intelligent agent (until scientific man developed genetic engineering) remains the standard Darwinian teaching.

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The diversity of life on earth is the outcome of evolution: an unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable and natural process of temporal descent with genetic modification that is affected by natural selection, chance, historical contingencies and changing environments.

This definition contains three elements:

1. evolution is an unsupervised and impersonal process—i.e., it is not directed or guided by God;
2. evolution is a natural process of descent with modification by which all of today's living organisms descended by a natural process from a single primordial ancestor which itself evolved (without supernatural assistance) from non-living chemicals; and
3. the mechanism of evolution is a combination of random genetic changes (chance) and natural selection, operating in the context of historical contingencies and changing environments.

I will discuss these three elements below, in reverse order. As a preliminary matter, however, I should firmly correct one of Dr. Kalomiratos' many misunderstandings. Not every instance of change in nature constitutes "evolution," as that term is used today. The growth of a giant oak tree from an acorn is not evolution, nor is the development of a human baby from an embryo in the womb of its mother. These processes of what biologists call "development" are fundamentally different from biological evolution, because they are programmed by the information inherited from the parents and hence are highly predictable. A human embryo never grows into some animal other than a human being, and an acorn never turns aside from its programmed path to become a pine tree or a rose bush.

There is a persistent legend among evolutionists that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny"; that is, that the development of the human infant in the womb is a kind of rerun of evolutionary history, as the embryo goes from a fish stage to a reptile stage and so on. This nonexistent phenomenon is often called "Haeckel's Law," after Darwin's

most prominent German disciple.\* In another form, the “Law” states that the embryo goes through not the adult stages but the embryonic forms of earlier, “ancestral” forms. In either form, the “Law” does not exist, and is not defended by qualified embryologists in the professional literature. One can, however, find stages evident here and there of characteristics that, with imagination, can be made to fit the pattern of Haeckel’s Law, and these are continually cited to the public in popular treatments as proof of “evolution.” The most famous example is the supposed “gill slits” possessed by human embryos at one stage of development, although these slits are not gills and never develop into gills.

Although Haeckel’s Law was discredited many decades ago, it has such an irresistible appeal to the Darwinian imagination that it is still taught in many schools around the world. Even reputable museums and universities continue to propagate a version of it, in a vague and unfalsifiable form. For example, the online Paleontology Museum at the University of California at Berkeley has this to say about Haeckel’s Law:

The “law of recapitulation” has been discredited since the beginning of the twentieth century. Experimental morphologists and biologists have shown that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between phylogeny and ontogeny. Although a strong form of recapitulation is not correct, phylogeny and ontogeny are intertwined, and many biologists are beginning to both explore and understand the basis for this connection.<sup>1\*\*</sup>

In fact, research into embryology has shown that it is a tightly directed process which does not fit the Darwinian paradigm at all.

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\* In one of his letters to Fr. Seraphim, Dr. Alexander Kalomiros brought forth Haeckel’s Law as a “proof” of evolution. See pp. 633, 639 below.—Ed.

\*\* For an example of the continuing promotion of the recapitulation concept in presentations to the public, see the discussion of an American Public Television “NOVA” program on human embryology in my internet debate with Professor Kenneth Miller of Brown University: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/nova/odyssey/debate/index.html>.

## INTRODUCTION

Efforts to alter the process by inducing mutations can produce deformities of various sorts, but they do not succeed in changing the path of development so that the embryo develops into a viable creature of a different type.

### *1. The Mechanism of Evolution: Mutation and Selection*

At bottom, biological evolution is a theory of change, which undertakes to explain how it is possible for one kind of organism to change into something completely different. It also seeks to explain how extremely complex biological organs and organisms can come into existence without the need for a supernatural Creator. As the eminent Darwinist Richard Dawkins has explained, “Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose.”<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, Dawkins says that Darwin “made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist” by explaining how a mindless material mechanism could perform the apparent miracle of biological creation. The mechanism is therefore the heart of the theory, as Darwin himself explained:

In considering the Origin of Species, it is quite conceivable that a naturalist, reflecting on the mutual affinities of organic beings, on their embryological relations, their geographical distribution, geological succession, and such other facts, might come to the conclusion that each species had not been independently created, but had descended, like varieties, from other species. Nevertheless, such a conclusion, even if well founded, would be unsatisfactory, until it could be shown how the innumerable species inhabiting this world have been modified, so as to acquire that perfection of structure and coadaptation which most justly excites our admiration.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, simply postulating that change has occurred, or that primitive species are “ancestors” of modern species, is not much of an improvement over special creation unless a mechanism of change is specified. Our experience is that “like begets like.” An ape never gives

birth to a human (or vice versa), and it is still more unthinkable that a bacterium would give birth to a butterfly. So how does one kind of organism change into something completely different? Above all, how does this process of change build new complex organs (like eyes, wings, kidneys and brains) which did not exist before? The origin of the human mind is of course the ultimate problem, and Dawkins acknowledges the scope of the problem:

Physics books may be complicated, but ... the objects and phenomena that a physics book describes are simpler than a single cell in the body of its author. And the author consists of trillions of those cells, many of them different from each other, organized with intricate architecture and precision-engineering into a working machine capable of writing a book.... Each nucleus ... contains a digitally coded database larger, in information content, than all 30 volumes of the *Encyclopediæ Britannica* put together. And this figure is for *each* cell, not all the cells of the body put together.<sup>4</sup>

How does an unsupervised material process create such an intricate marvel, which is far more complex than a computer or a space ship?

The Darwinian answer is that tiny changes—the sort of variations that appear in each generation and differentiate a juvenile organism from its parents—accumulate gradually over many generations until they produce an entirely new kind of creature with new organs and adaptive features. This mechanism has never been shown to be capable of generating anything other than minor variations (such as back-and-forth variations in the size of finch beaks, or variations in the relative frequency of light and dark varieties in a moth population).\* Because it is the only naturalistic possibility that has any plausibility

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\* Although the peppered moth experiment never proved anything of importance, readers should know that the experiment itself was the result of Darwinian enthusiasm. For details of how science has discredited the experiment, see the article by Jonathan Wells, "Second Thoughts about Peppered Moths," *The Scientist*, vol. 13, no. 11 (May 24, 1999), p. 13. [See also Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth?* (2000), pp. 137–57.—ED.]

## INTRODUCTION

whatever, Darwinists extrapolate wildly from these trivial examples to postulate a mechanism capable of creating countless adaptive wonders, including even the human brain. Such claims are poorly supported, to put it mildly, and in recent years they have come up against insuperable negative evidence. The details are given in my book *Darwin on Trial*, and in various articles which are collected at my website (<http://www.arn.org>). Very briefly, two independent lines of evidence are decisive:

1. *Fossil stasis.* The fossil record is pervasively characterized by a pattern of *sudden appearance* followed by *stasis*. New types of organisms appear suddenly and fully formed, and they remain basically unchanged thereafter. This pattern can be used to support the proposition that creation occurred not just at the beginning but throughout earth's history (assuming the dating of the rocks is accurate),\* but it consistently refuses to support the key Darwinian claim that one kind of creature changes step-by-step into something completely different. This pattern of evidence cannot be attributed to any incompleteness in the fossil record, because the pattern is most obvious and undeniable in just those areas (especially marine invertebrates) where the record is most complete.

The very anti-Darwinian state of the fossil record was known to insiders all along as the "trade secret of paleontology," but it first came to the attention of the general public in the 1980s, due to the publicity given to the theory of evolution by "punctuated equilibria." This theory attempted to reconcile Darwinism with the pattern of sudden appearance and stasis by supposing that significant evolution occurs in small groups, which go away from the (unchanging) main population, accumulate mutations, and then reappear as a new species without leaving a trace of the transformation in the fossil record. By this means the absence of evidence for evolution became transformed into evidence for invisible evolution. In the memorable (1995) words of Niles

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\* The currently accepted radiometric dating procedures, however, are based on unproven naturalistic and uniformitarian assumptions. See Fr. Seraphim's discussion of this subject on pp. 372–73, 529–33 below, as well as appendix 4, "The Age of the Earth and the Rate of Geological Processes," pp. 861–82.—Ed.

Eldredge, one of the founders of the punctuated equilibria theory, “Evolution cannot forever be going on somewhere else. Yet that’s how the fossil record has struck many a forlorn paleontologist looking to learn something about evolution.”<sup>5\*</sup>

As Eldredge’s remark implies, this spectacular pattern of fossil disconfirmation persists even after more than a century of determined efforts by Darwinist paleontologists to find evidence that will support their cherished theory. Any doubtful fossil that could conceivably be interpreted as an intermediate form in a Darwinian transition has been cited as proof that Darwinism is true, and yet even after these heroic efforts the bulk of the fossil record is as thoroughly inconsistent with Darwinian expectations as it was when Darwin proposed the theory in 1859.

2. *Irreducible complexity.* A 1996 book by molecular biologist Michael Behe\*\* has brought to public attention the fact that biological systems at the molecular level are irreducibly complex. This means that they are made up of many complicated parts and subsystems, all of which have to be in place in order for the system as a whole to perform a useful function. In other words, these intricate systems cannot be built up step-by-step as the Darwinian theory requires, and molecular biologists do not even attempt to present detailed scenarios of how evolution might have produced them. As with the pervasive stasis in the fossil record, irreducible complexity at the molecular level has long been known to specialists, but has been kept from public attention because biologists did not know how to explain it within a Darwinian framework. This illustrates the phenomenon famously described by Thomas Kuhn: facts which do not fit the dominant scientific paradigm tend to be systematically ignored, because they are a distraction from the prevailing research agenda.

When they are faced with the devastating evidence against the Darwinian mechanism, and reminded of the lack of positive evidence in its favor, Darwinists tend to retreat to what they think is a more

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\* For a general discussion of the punctuated equilibrium controversy, see chapter 4 of my book *Darwin on Trial*.

\*\* Michael Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*.

## INTRODUCTION

defensible line. They distinguish between “Darwin’s specific theory,” which they admit to be vulnerable, and something they call the “fact of evolution,” which they claim to be undeniably true.\* That takes me to the second subject.

### *2. The Common Ancestry Thesis*

The difference between the supposedly undeniable “fact of evolution” and “Darwin’s theory” is obscure, for the very good reason that the mere existence of a pattern of relationship has no great significance unless there is a theory that explains how the pattern came into existence. The “fact” is usually described as “common ancestry,” which is the proposition that humans (and other animals) share a common ancestor with plants, and fungi, and bacteria. The supposed proof of the fact is that living things exist in groups, and the groups are related by a pattern of greater and lesser similarity. Humans are similar in many ways to apes, somewhat less similar to rabbits, less similar still to snakes, still less similar to trees, and so on. All of the disparate groups of the taxonomic order (bacteria, plants, animals, etc.) have a common biochemical basis, indicating that they come from a common source. The Darwinian explanation of this pattern is that it results from common ancestry, with those groups having the greatest degree of similarity being the ones with relatively recent common ancestors. In reality the common ancestors are postulates in a theory, which aims to explain the fact of classification or relationship.

“Ancestry” implies a very gradual process of change, since offspring differ only slightly in each generation from their parents. Hence the common ancestry thesis implies not only that the common ancestors existed on the earth, but also that very long lines of gradual descent linked these ancient ancestors to their putative modern descendants. None of this can be confirmed from fossil studies, but Darwinists believe that the process must have occurred nonetheless because they

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\* For a general discussion of the elusive distinction between the “fact” and “theory” of evolution, see chapter 5 of my book *Darwin on Trial*.

think it is the only scientific (i.e., naturalistic) explanation for the pattern of life.

On the contrary, a pattern of greater and lesser similarities, or of variations within a basic type, is more likely to be evidence of a common design plan rather than of a natural evolutionary process. This was inadvertently demonstrated in a (1990) book by a Darwinist zoologist, who illustrated the “fact of evolution” by citing the example of a line of automobiles:

Everything evolves, in the sense of descent with modification, whether it be government policy, religion, sports cars, or organisms. The revolutionary fiberglass Corvette evolved from more mundane automotive ancestors in 1953. Other high points in the Corvette’s evolutionary refinement included the 1962 model, in which the original 102-inch was shortened to 98 inches and the new closed-coupe Stingray model was introduced; the 1968 model, the forerunner of today’s Corvette morphology, which emerged with removable roof panels; and the 1978 silver anniversary model, with fastback styling. Today’s version continues the stepwise refinements that have been accumulating since 1953. The point is that the Corvette evolved through a selection process acting on variations that resulted in a series of transitional forms and an endpoint rather distinct from the starting point. A similar process shapes the evolution of organisms.<sup>6</sup>

Of course the Corvettes, like the organisms, have common features because they were conceived in the mind of a designer, and not because some mindless process made either one. In other words, the fact of relationship is not evidence of the existence of a purely naturalistic or mindless mechanism of creation. Beethoven’s symphonies follow the pattern of common design with variations, but this pattern has no tendency whatever to support a theory that the symphonies composed themselves without any help from Beethoven.

Evolutionary theory today is in a state of confusion, in which major figures like Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Dawkins disagree violently over how evolution is supposed to have occurred. (See chapter 4

## INTRODUCTION

of my book *Reason in the Balance* for a review of these major disagreements.) These warring ideologues do have a common program of sorts, but it is a philosophical program rather than a scientific program. What they agree on is that, at all costs, God must be kept out of the picture. That brings us to the third and most important part of the definition of evolution.

### *3. Evolution (in the Scientific Sense) Is Inherently Godless*

We saw that the NABT definition states that evolution is by definition “unsupervised.” This requirement is not a conclusion that Darwinists reach from empirical evidence, but a philosophical assumption that reflects their starting point in metaphysical naturalism or materialism. If nature is all there is, then nature had to be able to do its own creating. That implies the existence of a naturalistic evolutionary process capable of making very complex things from simple beginnings. The process must be unguided at first, because a mind capable of guiding evolution would itself have to evolve from non-living matter. Once human beings have evolved, of course, evolution can become a guided process, through practice of eugenics and genetic engineering.

Given these assumptions, something at least roughly like Darwinism simply has to be true, regardless of the evidence. Evolution has to start with chance or random changes, and it has to have some mindless guiding force capable of producing the wonders of complex engineering that we call organisms. That is why Richard Dawkins has argued in lectures that, if complex life exists on other planets, Darwinian evolution would have to be responsible for it. There is no need for evidence or observations, because the Darwinian mechanism is the only plausible candidate for the job, given the starting point in naturalism. This logic explains why Darwinists are unperturbed by all the evidentiary problems that critics such as myself have identified. The theory has to be true regardless, because otherwise we would be without a materialistic explanation for life’s complexity and we would have to turn to God. This logic has been succinctly encapsulated in a paragraph from a 1997 essay by the leading geneticist Richard Lewontin:

We take the side of science *in spite of* the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, *in spite of* its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, *in spite of* the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.<sup>7</sup>

There is no need to say more. We can see the profound truth of Fr. Seraphim's comment that "EVOLUTION WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN THOUGHT OF BY MEN WHO BELIEVE IN THE GOD WHOM ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS WORSHIP" (emphasis in the original).\* Once the Divine Foot is in the door, there is no reason to postulate either legions of unobservable fossil ancestors, or a mindless material process that performs wonders of creation.

#### *4. Conclusion: Can Science Tell Us a True Story about Origins?*

Criticisms of evolutionary theory, however valid, cannot answer the most important question. If we wish to know the truth about origins, should we rely primarily upon Divine revelation or scientific investigation? Fr. Seraphim, like many creationists, believed that science was impotent when it comes to the subject of ultimate origins, and that true knowledge on this subject can only come from revelation. His reason was that the events of the Genesis creation week took place under a unique set of laws, laws which were entirely different from those which have operated since the Fall.

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\* On the inherent godlessness of Darwinian evolution, see also pp. 36–37n above and p. 607 below.—ED.

## INTRODUCTION

If true, that conclusion implies that the entire subject of origins is outside of scientific investigation. Science can only observe what is going on in the world today, and can draw inferences about the remote past only by assuming a uniformity over time of physical processes and physical laws. That is why evolutionary scientists, for example, assume that the process that created plants and animals in the first place is fundamentally the same process of small-scale variation we can observe today in the living world. There may be little evidence to support that assumption, but without it a science of origins would be helpless. Conceivably, there may have been some very unDarwinian creative evolutionary process operating in the distant past, which employed mechanisms which are no longer in operation today. Such a process would be nearly as unacceptable to scientific materialists as outright creationism, because a mechanism which is in principle unobservable is as inaccessible to scientific study as a miracle.

Science could discard the Darwinian theory without serious loss if there were at hand another materialistic theory, one likewise based on uniformitarian and naturalistic assumptions. But what if there *is* no alternative theory, or at least no theory with enough factual support to command widespread acceptance? Scientists who want to explain everything will always insist on making assumptions that permit them to achieve their grand objective, and they will always be extremely reluctant to admit that their methods may be inadequate to explain the mysteries of creation. Science does not like to tolerate rival ways of understanding, and hence ambitious scientists will bitterly denounce those religious thinkers who raise the possibility that physical laws and processes have profoundly changed since the time of creation. Fr. Seraphim was not intimidated by that sort of denunciation, nor should others be. Uniformitarianism, like naturalism, is a philosophical assumption, not a fact. It is perfectly rational to make other assumptions, including assumptions that point to the conclusion that we can only have knowledge about origins if God has chosen to reveal it to us.

July 1997\*  
Berkeley, California

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\* A few annotations were later made or updated by the author.—ED.

## PART I

# *An Orthodox Patristic Commentary on Genesis*

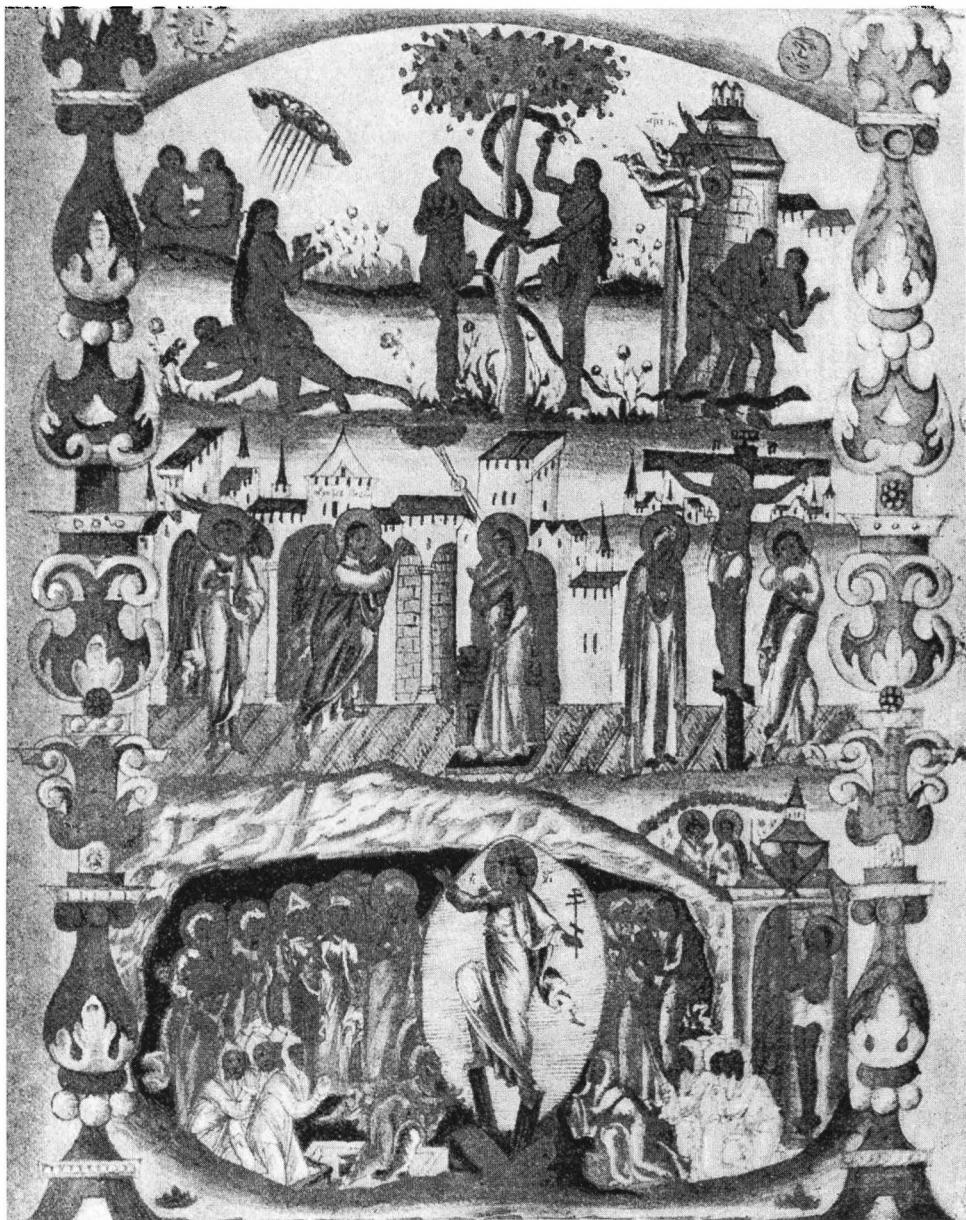


Icon of the Prophet Moses, author of the book of Genesis, painted on the walls of the Christian catacombs in Rome, second century A.D.

## *EDITOR'S NOTE*

*This commentary has been taken primarily from Fr. Seraphim's original manuscript, which he wrote in preparation for his course on Genesis at the New Valaam Theological Academy summer sessions in 1981 and 1982. During the oral delivery of his course, which was tape-recorded, he extemporaneously added valuable insights which were not in the manuscript. Not wanting to deprive the reader of this extra material, we have included much of it in the Commentary, both in the main text and in the footnotes (identified as author's notes [—AUTH.], as distinct from editor's notes [—ED.]). For this reason, the text at times changes from a polished to a more colloquial tone.*

*We have also included transcripts of Fr. Seraphim's tape-recorded question-and-answer sessions with his students during the Genesis course. These are found in chapter 10 below.*



Icon of the Creation and Redemption, showing the creation of Eve, the fall, the expulsion from Paradise, the Annunciation, the Crucifixion of Christ, Christ's Resurrection and descent into hell, and the entry of man into the Kingdom of Heaven. Icon from the Monastery of St. Anthony of Siya, Russia, printed in *Russkiy palomnik* (Russian pilgrim), no. 10, 1895.

## FOREWORD

### *Why Study the Book of Genesis?*

WHY SHOULD WE study such a book as Genesis? Why shouldn't we just be concerned to save our souls, instead of thinking about these things, like what is the world going to be like at the end, or what was it like at the beginning? We might get into trouble—Carl Sagan might come and fight with us.\* Isn't it safer to just occupy ourselves with saying our prayers, and not think about these great subjects? Why think about these remote things when we have to think about our salvation?

I've heard phrases like these. In answer to them, we can say, first of all, that *there is a direct relation between how you behave and how you believe about man's origin*. Fr. George Calciu, in his public addresses to young people living under Communism in Romania, said: "You have been told that you descend from the apes, that you are a beast which must be trained."<sup>1\*\*</sup> That can be a very powerful thing: "Science

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\* In a letter of 1981, Fr. Seraphim remarked on Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* television series and book: "One of our subscribers just sent us a clipping about this, which seems to be much in the air now, and it seems typical of the way evolution is preached to-day as dogma and almost religion."—ED.

\*\* At the time Fr. Seraphim gave this lecture, Fr. George Calciu was in prison in Communist Romania for delivering his homilies to the youth. Inspired by Fr. George's heroism and moved by his words, Fr. Seraphim later published the homilies in *The Orthodox Word*. In 1984 Fr. George was released from prison, and in 2006 he reposed in America. Having endured a total of twenty-one years in Communist prisons for his faith, he is remembered as a modern-day Confessor of Orthodox Christianity, as well as a righteous pastor of Christ's flock. Other comments by Fr. George on the subject of evolution are quoted on pp. 818–21 below.—ED.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

proves we're just animals, and therefore, let's go out and blow up a church.”\*

Secondly, *the book of Genesis is a part of the Scriptures, and God gave us the Scriptures for our salvation.* We're supposed to know the meaning of the Scriptures through all the commentaries of the Holy Fathers. The Fathers talked about the book of Genesis in church; all their commentaries were actually sermons given in church, because the book of Genesis is read in church on all weekdays during Great Lent. The great Fathers who did this were St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, and St. Ambrose of Milan. Their sermons were taken down in short-hand by people who were in church listening to them, so that others could read them. Thus, the reading of these texts was considered a part of the everyday life of people who went to church. We have somewhat lost this idea nowadays. Therefore, the account of Genesis or the Apocalypse has become a very mysterious realm somehow. We are so scared of these subjects—but the Fathers were talking about them.

Finally (this is the big point): *our Christianity is a religion which tells us about what we are going to be doing in eternal life.* It is to prepare us for something eternal, *not of this world* (cf. John 18:36). If we think only about *this world*, our horizon is very limited, and we don't know what is after death, where we came from, where we're going, what is the purpose of life. When we talk about the *beginning* of things, or the *end* of things, we find out what our whole life is about.

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\* St. Barsanuphius of Optina (1845–1913) made a similar observation in one of his spiritual talks; see pp. 795–96 below.—ED.

# CHAPTER ONE

## *How to Read Genesis*

### *1. Approach*

IN A SENSE, none of us knows how to approach this book. Modern science and philosophy have filled our minds with so many theories and supposed facts about the beginnings of the universe and man that we inevitably come to this book with preconceived notions. Some want it to agree with their particular scientific theories; others look for it to disagree. Both of these look to it as having something scientific to say; but others look on it as sheer poetry, a product of religious imagination having nothing to do with science.

The central question that causes our difficulties in understanding this book is: how “literally” are we to read it?

Some Protestant fundamentalists tell us it is all (or virtually all) “literal.” But such a view places us in some impossible difficulties: quite apart from our literal or non-literal interpretation of various passages, the very nature of the reality which is described in the first chapters of Genesis (the very creation of all things) makes it quite impossible for *everything* to be understood “literally”; we don’t even have words, for example, to describe “literally” how something can come out of nothing. How does God “speak”?—does He make a noise which resounds in an atmosphere that doesn’t yet exist? This explanation is obviously a little too simple—the reality is more complex.\*

Then there is the opposite extreme. Some people would like to interpret this book (at least the earliest chapters which give the most

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\* On references to God “speaking” in the first chapter of Genesis, see the teaching of St. Basil the Great on pp. 145–46 below.—ED.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

difficulty) as being an allegory, a poetic way of describing something that is really much closer to our experience. Roman Catholic thinkers in recent years, for example, have come up with some ingenious ways of “explaining away” Paradise and the fall of man; but in reading these interpretations one has the impression that they have so little respect for the text of Genesis that they treat it as a primitive commentary on some recent scientific theories.\* This is also an extreme. St. John Damascene, the eighth-century Father whose views generally sum up the Patristic opinion of the first Christian centuries, specifically states that the allegorical interpretation of Paradise is part of an early heresy and does not belong to the Church.<sup>1 \*\*</sup>

One encounters often today a common way out between these two views. The statement of a Roman Catholic nun (who is also a teacher) was recently publicized widely under the title: “God helped create evolution.” She says: “The biblical story of creation has a religious purpose. It contains, but does not teach, errors. The evolutionary theory of creation, in contrast, has a scientific purpose, and the search for truth is the province of astronomers, geologists, biologists, and the like. Those two purposes are distinct, and both offer truth to the human mind and heart.” She states that Genesis comes from oral traditions which were limited by the scientific views of that time.

According to this view, Genesis belongs in one category, and scientific truth or reality in another; Genesis has little if anything to do with any kind of truth, whether literal or allegorical. Therefore, one doesn’t really need to think about the question: you read Genesis for spiritual uplift or poetry, and the scientists will tell you what you need to know about the facts of the world’s and man’s beginning.

In one form or another this is a very common view today—but what it actually amounts to is a failure to look at the question at all; it does not take Genesis seriously. But our very purpose in studying Genesis is to take it seriously, to see what it actually says. None of these

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\* There are other contemporary Roman Catholic thinkers, however, who hold to a more traditional reading of the Genesis narrative. See p. 571n below.—ED.

\*\* See the quotations of St. John Damascene and, before him, St. Epiphanius of Salamis on p. 446, 446n below.—ED.

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approaches we have mentioned can do this. We must look elsewhere for the “key” to understanding Genesis.

In approaching Genesis we must try to avoid pitfalls such as we have mentioned above by a certain degree of self-awareness: what kind of prejudices or predispositions might we have in approaching the text?

We have already mentioned that some of us may be too anxious to have the meaning of Genesis agree (or disagree) with some particular scientific theory. Let us state a more general principle as to how we, with our twentieth-century mentality, tend to do this. In reaction to the extreme literalness of our scientific outlook (a literalness which is required by the very nature of science), when we turn to non-scientific texts of literature or theology we are very much predisposed to find non-literal or “universal” meanings. And this is natural: we want to save these texts from appearing ridiculous in the eyes of scientifically trained men. But we must realize that with this predisposition we often leap to conclusions which we have not really thought over very seriously.

To take an obvious example: When we hear of the “Six Days” of Creation, most of us automatically adjust these “days” to accord with what contemporary science teaches of the gradual growth and development of creatures. “These must be some indefinitely long periods of time—millions or billions of years,” our twentieth-century mind tells us; “all those geological strata, all those fossils—they couldn’t have been formed in a literal ‘day.’”\* And if we hear that a fundamentalist in Texas or southern California is once more loudly insisting that these days are positively twenty-four hours long and no longer, we can even become indignant and wonder how people can be so dense and anti-scientific.

In this course I don’t intend to tell you how long those days were. But I think we should be aware that our natural, almost subconscious

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\* The identification of the Six Days of Creation with vast ages—now known as the Day-Age theory—is indeed a modern concept, first promoted in nineteenth-century Scotland (see pp. 546n, 663, 663–64n, 668–69, 668–69n below). Some Christians of our own times have attempted to find this idea in the writings of the early Fathers, but a careful examination of the Patristic writings they cite reveals that the Fathers taught no such doctrine (see p. 546n).—ED.

tendency to regard them as indefinitely long periods, thereby thinking that we have solved the “problem” they present, is not really a thought-out answer to this problem, but more of a predisposition or prejudice which we have picked up out of the intellectual air in which we live.\* When we look at these “days” more closely, however, we will see that the whole question is not so simple and that our natural predisposition in this as in many other cases tends more to cloud than to clarify the real question.

We will look at this specific question later. For now I would urge us to be not too certain of our accustomed ways of looking at Genesis, and to open ourselves to the wisdom of the God-bearing men of the past who have devoted so much intellectual effort to understanding the text of Genesis as it was meant to be understood. These Holy Fathers are our key to understanding Genesis.

## *2. The Holy Fathers: Our Key to the Understanding of Genesis*

In the Holy Fathers we find the “mind of the Church”—the living understanding of God’s revelation. They are our link between the ancient texts which contain God’s revelation and today’s reality. Without such a link it is every man for himself—and the result is a myriad of interpretations and sects.

There are many Patristic commentaries on Genesis. This already is an indication to us that this text is considered extremely important by the Fathers of the Church. Let us look now at which Fathers talked about this text and what books they wrote.

In this course I will make use primarily of four commentaries of the early Fathers:

1. St. John Chrysostom wrote a larger and smaller commentary on the whole book of Genesis. The larger, called *Homilies on Genesis*, was

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\* This common error was even made by a traditional Orthodox thinker whom Fr. Seraphim greatly respected: I. M. Andreyev (1894–1976), in his book *Orthodox Apologetic Theology* (1955). In a letter of July 3/16, 1977, Fr. Seraphim wrote: “I would say that his [Andreyev’s] simple equation of ‘days’ with ‘periods’ is too loose.”—ED.

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actually a course of lectures delivered during Great Lent, since during Lent the book of Genesis is read in church. This book contains sixty-seven homilies and is some seven hundred pages long. Another year, St. John delivered eight other homilies, comprising several hundred more pages.\* He also wrote a treatise called *On the Creation of the World*, over a hundred pages long. Thus, in St. John Chrysostom we have a thousand pages or more of interpretation of Genesis. He is one of the main interpreters of this book.

2. St. Ephraim the Syrian, from about the same time as St. John Chrysostom, also has a commentary on the whole book. In his work, called simply *Interpretation of the Books of the Bible*, several hundred pages are devoted to Genesis. St. Ephraim is valued as an Old Testament interpreter because he knew Hebrew, was an “Easterner” (i.e., of an Eastern mentality), and knew sciences.

3. St. Basil the Great gave homilies\*\* on the Six Days of Creation, called the *Hexaemeron*—meaning “Six Days.” There are other *Hexaemera* in the literature of the early Church, some going back to the second century. St. Basil’s, one might say, is the most authoritative.\*\*\* It does not cover the whole of Genesis, but only the first chapter. Another book by him which we will quote is called *On the Origin of Man*, which is like a continuation of the *Hexaemeron*.

4. In the West, St. Ambrose of Milan read St. Basil’s homilies and

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\* St. John Chrysostom’s *Eight Homilies on Genesis* were delivered during Great Lent in 386. His sixty-seven *Homilies on Genesis* were delivered in 388 or 389.—ED.

\*\* “Homilies” usually means they were delivered in church, where the people stood and listened.—AUTH.

\*\*\* St. Basil’s *Hexaemeron* was held in high esteem in the ancient Church. St. Gregory the Theologian wrote of it: “When I take his [Basil’s] *Hexaemeron* in my hand and read it aloud, I am with my Creator, I understand the reasons for creation, and I admire my Creator more than I formerly did when I used sight alone as my teacher” (*Oration 43: Panegyric on St. Basil* 67, SC 384.272, NPNF 2 7, pp. 417–18\*). St. Basil’s brother, St. Gregory of Nyssa, called the work “a divinely inspired study by our father [Basil], whose exposition everyone treasures as not being inferior to what Moses taught” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Apologia to His Brother Peter on the Hexaemeron*, GNO 4.1.6, trans. Richard McCambley).—ED.

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wrote homilies on the Six Days himself.\* His *Hexaemeron* is quite a bit longer, about three hundred pages.\*\* St. Ambrose also wrote a whole book on Paradise, a continuation of the *Hexaemeron*, as well as a book on Cain and Abel.

In addition to these basic commentaries, we will look at a number of books which do not go into the whole book of Genesis or into the whole of the Six Days. For example, the brother of St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nyssa, has a book *On the Making of Man*, which goes into detail about the end of the first chapter and the beginning of the second chapter of Genesis.

I have also made use of outlines of Orthodox dogma. The book of St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith*, contains many chapters on questions about the Six Days, the creation of man, the fall, Paradise, and so forth. The catechisms of the early Church—the *Great Catechism [Catechetical Oration]* of St. Gregory of Nyssa and the *Catechetical Lectures* of St. Cyril of Jerusalem—also have a few details on these questions.

On one specific question of the Patristic worldview I have used the treatises on the Resurrection by Sts. Athanasius the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Ambrose of Milan.

St. Symeon the New Theologian has written homilies on Adam, the fall and the early world, which we have in English in the book *The Sin of Adam and Our Redemption*.\*\*\*

Then there are various writings of St. Gregory the Theologian about the creation of man, about man's nature and his soul. St. Macarius the Great, St. Abba Dorotheus, St. Isaac the Syrian, and

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\* St. Ambrose's homilies were probably delivered in 387, about seventeen years after St. Basil's.—ED.

\*\* Here we can see how, when one Father speaks specifically on one passage, another Father will perhaps say something in detail about a different passage. If you keep it all together, you get a very good overview of how the mind of the Church, how the Fathers in general look at these passages. You might find a disagreement over some little interpretation, some small point, but concerning the big points you will see they all say the same thing in different ways, that they are quite in harmony over how to interpret the book of Genesis.—AUTH.

\*\*\* Later published under the title *The First-Created Man* (hereafter, FCM).—ED.

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other writers of the ascetic life often talk about Adam and the fall. Since the basic aim of the ascetic life is to return to the state of Adam before the fall, they write about what the fall means, what Paradise was, and what it is we are trying to get back to.

Blessed Augustine touches on the subject of Genesis in *The City of God*.\* St. Gregory Palamas writes on various aspects in his apologetic works; and St. Gregory the Sinaite writes on Paradise as well.

(There are also some later commentaries which I have not seen,

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\* Blessed Augustine also wrote a lengthy work on the subject, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, which contains some ideas that are at variance with the Patristic consensus. Fr. Seraphim was aware of the existence of this work, but said he had not seen it (see p. 283 below); in 1982, the year of his repose, it appeared in English in the Ancient Christian Writers series. In this work Blessed Augustine suggested (but did not insist) that the Six Days of Creation were a literary device to describe the totally instantaneous creation of everything in the cosmos. (On this, see pp. 140–41n below.)

Other of Blessed Augustine's teachings had deficiencies as well, due to his tendency to over-rationalize. Fr. Seraphim wrote that "some of his writings, such as his anti-Pelagian treatises *On the Trinity*, are read only with caution" (Fr. Seraphim Rose, *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church*, p. 76). It should be added, however, that Blessed Augustine's errors have never caused him to be regarded as a heretic by the Orthodox Church, which, as noted above, honors him primarily as a Father of piety and moral instruction (on the basis of his non-dogmatic works like *The Confessions* and *The Soliloquies*), while not accepting his theological exaggerations (see *ibid.*, pp. 79–81).

It should also be mentioned that, even where Blessed Augustine's interpretation of Genesis is questionable, it is not compatible with evolutionism or an "old-earth" view, as some modern-day scholars have claimed. Augustine maintained that the cosmos was created in about 5500 B.C. and he refuted those who said it was older (see p. 314n below). Further, he stressed that Adam and Eve were specially created rather than born, that the capacities of creatures are incapable of producing anything new, that the originally created kinds of beings are fixed, and that the transformation from one kind into another is impossible (see Blessed Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 3.12, 5.20, 5.23, 6.2, 6.15, 9.17, in ACW 41, pp. 87, 171, 176, 179, 196, and ACW 42, p. 92; Jonathan Wells, "Abusing Theology: Howard Van Till's 'Forgotten Doctrine of Creation's Functional Integrity,'" *Origins & Design*, vol. 19, no. 1 [1998], pp. 16–20; Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, pp. 207, 240, 365; Christopher J. O'Toole, *The Philosophy of Creation in the Writings of St. Augustine*, p. 81; Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian*, p. 218).—ED.

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unfortunately. One is by St. John of Kronstadt on the *Hexaemeron*, and another is by Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow on Genesis.)\*

These Fathers don't give us all the answers to questions we may have about Genesis; we read them rather to get our *attitude* toward Genesis. Sometimes Fathers may seem to contradict each other or to speak in a way we might not consider very useful for the questions we have today. Therefore we must have some basic principles which govern our understanding *both* of Genesis and the Holy Fathers.

### *3. Basic Principles of Our Approach to Understanding Genesis*

1. We are seeking *truth*. We must respect the text of Genesis enough to recognize that it contains truth, even though that truth may seem unusual or surprising to us. If it seems to conflict with what we think we know from science, let us remember that God is the Author of all truth, and anything genuinely true in Scripture cannot contradict anything that is genuinely true in science.

2. The Scripture is *Divine* in inspiration. We will look more closely below at what this means; but for a beginning, it means that we must look in it for truths of a high order, and if we find difficulty in understanding anything we should suspect first our own lack of knowledge rather than a deficiency in the inspired text.

3. We should not hasten to offer our own explanations of "difficult" passages, but should first try to familiarize ourselves with what the Holy Fathers have said about these passages, recognizing that they have spiritual wisdom that we lack.

4. We should also beware of the temptation to seize on isolated, out-of-context quotes from the Holy Fathers to "prove" a point one

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\* St. John of Kronstadt (1829–1908) was an outstanding pastor, miracle-worker, and spiritual writer of the Russian Orthodox Church. His work *Talks on the Days of Creation* (in Russian) was published in 1893 as part of his collected works. See pp. 183–84n, 502, 794–95, 951 below.

St. Philaret (Drozdov), Metropolitan of Moscow (1782–1867), was one of the greatest theological writers of the Russian Orthodox Church. His *Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (in Russian) was first published shortly before his repose. He was glorified as a saint in 1995. See pp. 141n, 157n, 704, 950 below.—ED.

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would like to make. For example, I have seen an Orthodox person, wishing to prove that there was nothing “special” about the creation of Adam, quote the following statement from St. Athanasius the Great: “The first-created man was made of dust like everyone, and the hand which created Adam then is creating also and always those who come after him.” This is a general statement about God’s continuous creative activity which no one would think of contradicting.\* But the point this person wanted to make was that there was no real distinction between the creation of every living man and the creation of the first man—and specifically, that the body of Adam could have been formed by natural generation in the womb of some not-quite-human creature.\*\* Can such a statement legitimately be used as a “proof” on this question?

It so happens that we can find a passage in the works of St. Athanasius that specifically refutes this idea. In another place he says: “Though Adam only was formed out of earth, yet in him was involved the succession of the whole race.”<sup>2</sup> Here he quite specifically

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\* Without God’s continuous creative effort, nothing would exist or come into being. We think it is “natural” that plants grow from a seed, that everything, in fact, comes from a small seed and grows into a full individual. But without God, this process cannot continue. So of course God is still creating today, “from the dust.”—AUTH.

\*\* The person who tried to make this point was Fr. Seraphim’s correspondent Dr. Alexander Kalomirov. Fr. Seraphim quoted the above statement of St. Athanasius from a letter he had received from Dr. Kalomirov, who had translated it from the Greek (PG 25b.429C; also in AW 2.1.8). Not knowing the work from which this statement came, Fr. Seraphim was not able to check the translation or the context of the passage. As it turns out, the passage—from St. Athanasius’ *Defense of the Nicene Definition (De decretis)* 8—had been paraphrased and condensed by Kalomirov from a longer passage. The actual passage, properly translated, reads as follows: “Adam alone came to be by God alone, through the Word. Yet, for all that, no one would say that Adam had any precedence over all other people or that he was different from those after him, even if he alone was made and fashioned by God alone while all of us came to be from Adam and were constituted through the succession of the race. This makes no difference, so long as he was fashioned from the earth, and at first did not exist but later came to be” (trans. Khaled Anatolios, p. 186\*; also in NPNF 2.4, p. 155). As can be seen, the actual passage contradicts the idea that Kalomirov tried to extrapolate from it, and confirms what Fr. Seraphim goes on to say about St. Athanasius’ intended meaning, in light of the Saint’s other writings.—ED.

states that Adam was created in a way different from all other men, which indeed, as we shall see, is the teaching of the Holy Fathers in general. Therefore, it is illegitimate to take one quote of his and think that it proves or opens the way to some favorite idea of our own. St. Athanasius' *general* statement about the nature of man says nothing whatever about the *specific* nature of Adam's creation.

Such a misuse of quotations from the Holy Fathers is a very common pitfall in our days when polemics on such subjects are often very passionate. In this course we will try our best to avoid such pitfalls by not forcing any of our own interpretations on the Holy Fathers, but simply trying to see what they say themselves.

5. We do not need to accept every word the Fathers wrote on Genesis; sometimes they made use of the science of their time for illustrative material, and this science was mistaken in some points. But we should carefully distinguish their science from their theological statements, and we should respect their whole approach and general conclusions and theological insights.

6. If we ourselves think we can add something to the understanding of the text for our days (perhaps based on the findings of modern science), let it be done cautiously and with full respect for the integrity of the text of Genesis and the opinions of the Holy Fathers. And we should always be *humble* in this attempt—the science of our own days also has its failings and mistakes, and if we rely too much on it we may find ourselves with wrong understandings.\*

7. Specifically in this course we will be trying first to understand the Fathers, and only *then* to offer our own answers to some questions, if we have them.

8. Finally, if it is true that modern science is capable of throwing some light on the understanding of at least a few passages of Gene-

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\* It is a very common view among people who do not go too deeply into the question that “ancient science is wrong, modern science is right, and therefore we can trust everything the modern scientists tell us.” But it so happens that one generation overthrows the so-called scientific facts of the preceding generation. We have to realize what is fact and what is theory. Contemporary science has many views which, fifty years from now (if they even last that long), will be overturned, and there will be new theories.—AUTH.

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sis—for we do not need to deny that in some areas the truths of these two spheres overlap—I think that it is no less true that the Patristic understanding of Genesis is also capable of throwing light on modern science and gives some hints on how to understand the facts of geology, paleontology, and other sciences concerned with the early history of the earth and of mankind. This study can therefore be a fruitful one in both directions.

9. The aim of this course, however, is not to answer *all* questions about Genesis and creation, but rather, first of all, to inspire Orthodox Christians to think about this subject in a broader way than it is usually approached, without being satisfied with the simplistic answers that are so often heard.

### *4. Literal vs. Symbolical Interpretations*

This question is a great stumbling block for us modern men, who have been brought up with a “scientific” education and worldview which has left us impoverished in our understanding of symbolical meanings in literature. Too often, as a result of this, we jump to conclusions: if there is a symbolical meaning to some image in Scripture (for example, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) we are very inclined to say “it’s *only* a symbol”; the slightest indication of a figurative or metaphorical meaning often leads us to dismiss the *literal* meaning. Sometimes this attitude can even lead to sweeping judgments of whole portions or books of Scripture: If there are symbolical or figurative elements, for example, in the Genesis narrative of the Garden of Eden, we easily jump to the conclusion that the whole narrative is a “symbol” or an “allegory.”

Our key to understanding Genesis is: how did the Holy Fathers understand this question, specifically with regard to separate passages, and generally with regard to the book as a whole?

Let us take some examples:

1. St. Macarius the Great of Egypt, a Saint of the most exalted mystical life and whom one certainly cannot suspect of overly literal views of Scripture, writes on Genesis 3:24: “That Paradise was closed and that a Cherubim was commanded to prevent man from entering it

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by a flaming sword: of this we believe that in visible fashion it was indeed just as it is written, and at the same time we find that this occurs mystically in every soul.”<sup>3</sup> This is a passage which many of us might have expected to have *only* a mystical meaning, but this great seer of Divine things assures us that it is also true “just as it is written”—for those capable of seeing it.

2. St. Gregory the Theologian, noted for his profound mystical interpretations of Scripture, says of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: “This tree was, according to my view, Contemplation, upon which it is only safe for those who have reached maturity of habit to enter.”<sup>4</sup> Does this mean that he regarded this tree as *only* a symbol, and not also a literal tree? In his own writings he apparently does not give an answer to this question, but another great Holy Father does (for when they are teaching Orthodox doctrine and not just giving private opinions, all the great Fathers agree with each other and even help to interpret each other). St. Gregory Palamas, the fourteenth-century hesychast Father,\* comments on this passage:

Gregory the Theologian has called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil “contemplation” ... but it does not follow that what is involved is an illusion or a symbol without existence of its own. For the divine Maximus [the Confessor] also makes Moses the symbol of judgment, and Elijah the symbol of foresight! Are they too then supposed not to have really existed, but to have been invented “symbolically”?<sup>5</sup>

3. These are specific interpretations. As for general approaches to the “literal” or “symbolical” nature of the text of Genesis, let us look at the words of several other Holy Fathers who have written commentaries on Genesis. St. Basil the Great in his *Hexaemeron* writes:

Those who do not admit the common meaning of the Scriptures say that water is not water, but some other nature, and they explain a

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\* Hesychasts are those living in stillness and continuous noetic prayer. See pp. 944–47 below.—ED.

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plant and a fish according to their opinion.... [But] when I hear “grass,” I think of grass, and in the same manner I understand everything as it is said, a plant, a fish, a wild animal, and an ox. Indeed, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel” (Rom. 1:16).... [Some] have attempted by false arguments and allegorical interpretations to bestow on the Scripture a dignity of their own imagining. But theirs is the attitude of one who considers himself wiser than the revelations of the Spirit and introduces his own ideas in pretense of an explanation. Therefore, let it be understood as it has been written.<sup>6\*</sup>

4. St. Ephraim the Syrian tells us similarly in the *Commentary on Genesis*:

No one should think that the Creation of Six Days is an allegory; it is likewise impermissible to say that what seems, according to the account, to have been created in the course of six days, was created in a single instant, and likewise that certain names presented in this account either signify nothing, or signify something else. On the contrary, one must know that just as the heaven and the earth which were created in the beginning are actually the heaven and the earth and not something else understood under the names of heaven and earth, so also everything else that is spoken of as being created and brought into order after the creation of heaven and earth is not empty names, but the very essence of the created natures corresponds to the force of these names.<sup>7</sup>

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\* In other places of his *Hexaemeron*, St. Basil again refutes attempts to reduce elements of the Genesis narrative to mere symbols. As against the notion that the “darkness” mentioned in Genesis 1:2–5 is not “a place deprived of light” but rather “an evil power, or evil itself,” he wrote: “Let us accept the concept of darkness simply and without curiosity, following the meaning of Scripture” (*Hexaemeron* 2.4–5, FC 46, pp. 26–29). Later, rejecting the idea that the “waters which were above the firmament” are the good angels while the “waters which were under the firmament” (Gen. 1:7) are the fallen angels, the Saint affirms: “Dismissing such explanations as dream interpretations and old women’s tales, let us consider water as water, and let us receive the separation that was made beneath the firmament according to the reason given us” (*ibid.* 3.9, p. 52).—ED.

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5. St. John Chrysostom, speaking specifically of the rivers of Paradise, writes:

Perhaps those who love to speak from their own wisdom here also will not allow that the rivers are actually rivers, nor that the waters are precisely waters, but will instill, in those who decide to listen to them, the idea that they (under the names of rivers and waters) represented something else. But I entreat you, let us not pay heed to these people, let us stop up our hearing against them, and let us believe the Divine Scripture, and following what is written in it, let us strive to preserve in our souls sound dogmas.<sup>8</sup>

This shows that the Holy Fathers were facing this question in their day, in the fourth century. There were many people who were interpreting the text of Genesis as an allegory, running wild with symbolical interpretations, and denying that it has any literal meaning at all—especially the first three chapters we will be studying. Therefore, the Holy Fathers made a specific point of saying it *has* a literal meaning, and we must understand exactly what that meaning is.

This should be enough to show us that the Holy Fathers who wrote on Genesis were in general quite “literal” in their interpretation of the text, even while, in many cases, allowing *also* a symbolic or mystical meaning.\* There are, of course, in Scripture, as in every kind of

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\* The approach that the Holy Fathers took to Genesis—regarding it as a Divinely inspired text that tells of actual, historical events and people, while at the same time drawing out spiritual meanings from it—was the same approach they took when interpreting other books of Scripture. Expressing the mind of the Church in his hermeneutics, St. John Chrysostom stated that events recorded in Scripture must be understood to have actually happened, although they might also be given a spiritual or typological meaning. Regarding Christ’s words “As Moses lifted up the serpent” (John 3:14, cf. Num. 21:9), for example, he wrote: “We must accept that this happened—it did happen, in fact—and what meaning comes from it, namely, a type of Christ” (St. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Psalms* 9, trans. Robert C. Hill, vol. 1, p. 185).

Likewise, Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus, commenting on the Apostle Paul’s words that Hagar and Sarah were “allegorized” (*ἀληγορούμενα*) types of the Old and New

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literature, obvious metaphors which no one in his right mind would think of taking “literally.” For example, in Psalm 103 it says, “The sun knoweth his going down.” With full respect for the text, we do not need to believe that the sun has a consciousness and literally “knows” when it is to set; this is simply a normal device of poetic language and should cause trouble to no one.

There is, further, one important kind of statement in Scripture—and there are many examples of it in Genesis—which the Holy Fathers tell us specifically *not* to understand in a literal way. These are anthropomorphic statements made of God *as though* He were a man who walks, talks, gets angry, etc. All such statements we are to understand in a “God-befitting” manner—that is, based on our knowledge from Orthodox teaching that God is purely spiritual, has no physical organs, and that His acts are described in Scripture *as they seem to us*.

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Covenants (Gal. 4:24), explained that the Apostle “wrote this, not to reject the historical facts, but to relate the type to the reality” (*Questions on Joshua* 1, LEC 2, p. 261).

St. Cyril of Alexandria wrote that one cannot “apprehend rightly” the Scriptures if one attempts to contemplate their spiritual meaning without respecting the historical meaning: “Those who reject the historical meaning [*iστορία*] in the God-inspired Scriptures as something obsolete are avoiding the ability to apprehend rightly, according to the proper manner, the things written in them. For indeed spiritual contemplation is both good and profitable; and, in enlightening the eye of reason especially well, it reveals the wisest things. But whenever some historical events are presented to us by the Holy Scriptures, then in that instance, a useful search into the historical meaning [*iστορία*] is appropriate, in order that the God-inspired Scripture be revealed as salvific and beneficial to us in every way” (St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah* 1.4, PG 70.192AB).

St. Nilus of Sinai, a disciple of St. John Chrysostom, also stated emphatically that the historical meaning of Scripture must be maintained whenever a spiritual interpretation is given: “If something has been recorded in the Old or New Testament to have happened historically, and this or that deed was manifestly accomplished, and we interpret it for our own purposes, using ideas and thoughts for our own spiritual edification, do not suppose that we have disregarded the letter, or rejected the history. By no means! We neither condemn nor reject the perceptible event that has been committed to history. Since, however, we are [in] the world, we benefit today by interpreting everything that happened yesterday for our own purposes” (St. Nilus of Sinai, *Letter* 2.223, PG 79.316BC, quoted in Paul M. Blowers, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy in Maximus the Confessor: An Investigation of the Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, p. 115).—ED.

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The Fathers are very careful over the text of Genesis in this regard. Thus, St. John Chrysostom states:

When you hear, beloved, that “God planted Paradise in Eden in the east,” understand the word “planted” befittingly of God: that is, that He commanded; but concerning the words that follow, believe precisely that Paradise was created and in that very place where the Scripture has assigned it.<sup>9</sup>

As for the “scientific” information given in the book of Genesis—and since it talks about the formation of the world we know, there cannot but be some scientific information there—contrary to popular belief, there is nothing “out-of-date” about it. Its observations, it is true, are all made *as seen from earth and as affecting mankind*; but they do not put forth any particular teaching, for example, on the nature of the heavenly bodies or their relative motions, and so the book can be read by each generation and understood in the light of its own scientific knowledge. The discovery in recent centuries of the vastness of space and the immensity of many of its heavenly bodies does nothing but add grandeur in our minds to the simple account of Genesis.

When the Holy Fathers talk about Genesis, of course, they try to illustrate it with examples taken from the natural science of their time; we do the same thing today. All this illustrative material is open to scientific criticism, and some of it, in fact, has become out-of-date. But the text of Genesis itself is unaffected by such criticism, and we can only wonder at how fresh and timely it is to each new generation. And the *theological* commentary of the Holy Fathers on the text partakes of this same quality.

### 5. *The Nature of the Text*

A final important point to consider before approaching the text of Genesis itself: *what kind of text is it?*

We all know of the anti-religious arguments about the Scripture,

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and in particular about Genesis: that it is a creation of backward people who knew little of science or the world, that it is full of primitive mythology about “creator-gods” and supernatural beings, that it has all been taken from Babylonian mythology, etc. But no one can seriously compare Genesis with any of the creation myths of other peoples without being struck by the sobriety and simplicity of the Genesis account. Creation myths are indeed full of fabulous events and fairy-tale beings which are not even intended to be taken as the text is written. There is no competition between these texts and Genesis; they are not in the least comparable.

Nonetheless, there is a widespread popular view—without foundation either in Scripture or in Church tradition—that Moses wrote Genesis after consulting other early accounts of the creation, or that he simply recorded the oral traditions that came down to him; that he compiled and simplified the tales that had come down to his time. This, of course, would make Genesis a work of human wisdom and speculation, and it would be pointless to study such a work as a statement of truth about the beginning of the world.

There are different kinds of knowledge, and the knowledge that comes directly from God is quite distinct from that which proceeds from man’s natural powers. St. Isaac the Syrian distinguishes these kinds of knowledge in the following way:

Knowledge which is concerned with the visible, or which receives through the senses what comes from the visible, is called natural. Knowledge which is concerned with the power of the immaterial and the nature of incorporeal entities within a man is called spiritual, because perceptions are received by the spirit and not by the senses. Because of these two origins (perceptions of the visible and of the spiritual) each kind of knowledge alike comes to the soul from without. But the knowledge bestowed by Divine power is called supranatural; it is more unfathomable and is higher than knowledge. Contemplation of this knowledge comes to the soul not from matter, which is outside it.... It manifests and reveals itself in the innermost depths of the soul itself, immaterially, suddenly, spontaneously,



The Holy Prophet and God-seer Moses  
(†1531 B.C.).

*Fresco by Monk Theophanes the Cretan,  
Stavronikita Monastery, Mount Athos, Greece,  
1545–1546.*

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and unexpectedly, since, according to the words of Christ, “the Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21).<sup>10</sup>

St. Isaac in another place describes how, in men of the highest spiritual life, the soul can rise to a vision of the beginning of things. Describing how such a soul is enraptured at the thought of the future age of incorruption, St. Isaac writes:

And from this one is already exalted in his mind to that which preceded the composition (making) of the world, when there was no creature, nor heaven, nor earth, nor angels, nothing of that which was brought into being, and to how God, solely by His good will, suddenly brought everything from non-being into being, and everything stood before Him in perfection.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, one can believe that Moses and later chroniclers made use of written records and oral tradition when it came to recording the acts and chronology of historical Patriarchs and kings; but an account of the beginning of the world’s existence, when there were no witnesses to God’s mighty acts, can come only from God’s revelation; it is a supranatural knowledge revealed in direct contact with God.\* And this is exactly what the Fathers and Church tradition tell us the book of Genesis is.

St. Ambrose writes:

Moses spoke to God the Most High, not in a vision nor in dreams, but “mouth to mouth” (Num. 12:8). Plainly and clearly, not by figures nor by riddles (cf. ibid.), there was bestowed on him the gift of the Divine presence. And so Moses opened his mouth and uttered what the Lord spoke within him, according to the promise He made to him when He directed him to go to King Pharaoh: “Go therefore and I will open thy mouth and instruct thee what thou shouldest speak” (Ex. 4:12). For, if he had already accepted from God what he

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\* The book of Exodus recounts two occasions on which God Himself said to Moses: “In six days the Lord made heaven and earth” (Ex. 20:11, 31:17).—ED.



The Prophet Moses receiving his first revelation of God, at Mount Horeb  
(Ex. 3:1-5). At top, the vision of Paradise.

*Russian fresco of the sixteenth century.*

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The Prophet Moses on Mount Sinai, receiving from God the Tables of the Law  
(Ex. 31:18). *Icon from Tours, Gaul (France), A.D. 840.*

should say concerning the liberation of the people, how much more should you accept what He should say concerning heaven? Therefore, “not in the persuasive words of wisdom,” not in philosophical fallacies, “but in the demonstration of the Spirit and power” (1 Cor. 2:4), he has ventured to say as if he were a witness of the Divine work: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”<sup>12</sup>

In a similar vein, St. Basil writes at the very beginning of his *Hexameron*:

This man, who is made equal to the angels, being considered worthy of the sight of God face to face, reports to us those things which he heard from God.<sup>13</sup>

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The Prophet Moses writing in Eden.  
*Frontispiece to the book of Genesis in the Bible of Leo Sakellarios,  
Constantinople, A.D. 940.*

St. John Chrysostom in his *Homilies on Genesis* comes back again and again to the statement that every word of the Scripture is Divinely inspired and has a profound meaning—that it is not Moses' words, but God's:

Let us see now what we are taught by the blessed Moses, who speaks not of himself but by the inspiration of the grace of the Spirit.<sup>14</sup>

He then has a fascinating description of how Moses does this. We know that the Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah. In the book of the Apocalypse (Revelation), St. John the Theologian prophesied about the events of the end of the world and the future of the Church. How did they know what was going to happen? Obviously, God revealed it to them. St. John Chrysostom says that, just as St. John the Theologian was a prophet of things of the future, Moses was *a prophet of things of the past*. He says the following:

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All the other prophets spoke either of what was to occur after a long time or of what was about to happen then; but he, the blessed [Moses], who lived many generations after (the creation of the world), was vouchsafed by the guidance of the right hand of the Most High to utter what had been done by the Lord before his own birth. It is for this reason that he begins to speak thus: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,” as if calling out to us all with a loud voice: it is not by the instruction of men that I say this; He Who called them (heaven and earth) out of non-being into being—it is He Who has roused my tongue to relate of them. And therefore I entreat you, let us pay heed to these words as if we heard not Moses but the very Lord of the universe Who speaks through the tongue of Moses, and let us take leave for good of our own opinions.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, we should approach the early chapters of Genesis as we would a book of prophecy, knowing that it is actual events being described, but knowing also that—because of their remoteness to us and because of their very nature as the very first events in the history of the world—we will be able to understand them only imperfectly, even as we have a very imperfect understanding of the events at the very end of the world as set forth in the Apocalypse and other New Testament Scriptures. St. John Chrysostom himself warns us not to think we understand too much about the creation:

With great gratitude let us accept what is related (by Moses), not stepping out of our own limitations, and not testing what is above us as the enemies of the truth did when, wishing to comprehend everything with their minds, they did not realize that human nature cannot comprehend the creation of God.<sup>16</sup>

Let us then try to enter the world of the Holy Fathers and their understanding of the Divinely inspired text of Genesis. Let us love and respect their writings, which in our confused times are a beacon of clarity which shines most clearly on the inspired text itself. Let us not be quick to think we “know better” than they, and if we think we have

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some understanding they did not see, let us be humble and hesitant about offering it, knowing the poverty and fallibility of our own minds. Let them open our minds to understand God's revelation.

We should add here a final note about the study of Genesis in our own times. The Holy Fathers of the early Christians who wrote about the Six Days of Creation found it necessary at various points to take note of the non-Christian scientific or philosophical speculations of their days—such views, for example, as that the world is eternal, that it produced itself, that it was created out of preexisting matter by a limited fashioner-god (demiurge), and the like.\*

In our own times, too, there are non-Christian speculations about the beginnings of the universe, of life on earth, and the like, and we cannot help but touch on them at various points of our commentary. The most widespread such ideas today are those bound up with the so-called theory of evolution. We will have to discuss some of these ideas briefly, but in order to avoid misunderstandings let us state what we mean by this word.

The concept of “evolution” has many levels of application in both scientific and popular language: sometimes it is no more than a synonym for “development”; at other times it is used to describe the “variations” that occur within a species; and again, it describes real or hypothesized

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\* In chapter 2 of his fourth-century work *On the Incarnation of the Word*, St. Athanasius the Great refuted all these non-Christian views. “Of the making of the universe and the creation of all things,” he writes, “many have taken different views, and each man has laid down the law he pleased.” The first such notion he rejects is that of the chance self-organization of matter: an idea that anticipates modern evolutionary naturalism. “Some say,” he writes, “that all things have come into being of themselves [*αὐτομάτως*—automatically, spontaneously], and in chance fashion; as, for example, the Epicureans, who tell us in their self-contempt that universal Providence does not exist, speaking right in the face of obvious fact and experience. For if, as they say, everything had its beginning of itself, and independently of purpose, it would follow that everything would have come into mere being, so as to be alike and not distinct” (SC 199.262, NPNF 2 4, pp. 36–37). The Saint then goes on to argue against the idea of the Platonists that all things were created out of eternal matter, and the teaching of the heretics that they were created by a limited fashioner-god. On refutations of such false teachings by other Holy Fathers, see pp. 156–57n, 503–4n, 557n below.—ED.

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changes in nature of a somewhat larger kind. In this course we will not have to be concerned with these kinds of “evolution,” which belong pretty much to the realm of scientific fact and its interpretation.

The only kind of “evolution” we will have to deal with is evolution as a “cosmogony”—that is, a theory about the origin of the world. This kind of theory of evolution occupies the same place for contemporary students of the book of Genesis as the ancient speculations on the origins of the world did for the early Church Fathers. There are those, of course, who will insist that even this kind of evolution is perfectly scientific; in fact, some of them are quite “dogmatic” about it. But any reasonably objective view will have to admit that the evolutionary cosmogony, unless it claims to be Divinely revealed, is just as speculative as any other theory of origins and can be discussed on the same level with them. Although it may claim to have its foundation in scientific facts, it itself belongs to the realm of philosophy and even touches on theology, inasmuch as it cannot avoid the question of God as Creator of the world, whether it accepts or denies Him.

In this course, therefore, we will touch on “evolution” only as a universal theory that attempts to explain the origin of the world and of life.

## CHAPTER TWO

# *The Six Days of Creation*

(GENERAL OBSERVATIONS)

### *1. Introduction*

**N**OW LET US study the Patristic model of the Six Days of Creation. We will not occupy ourselves with trying to guess “how long” these “days” were, although by the time we come to the end we will have a pretty good idea of how the Fathers viewed their length. Many fundamentalists think their literal interpretation of Genesis is lost if these “days” are not accepted as precisely twenty-four hours long; and many others who want to reconcile Genesis with the modern theory of evolution think their hopes rest upon accepting these “days” as millions or billions of years long so they will accord with the supposed findings of geology. I think we can safely say that both of these views miss the mark.

It is not that these days could *not* have been twenty-four hours long, if God so willed; one or two Fathers (St. Ephraim the Syrian, for example) even state precisely that they were twenty-four hours long. But most Fathers do not say anything at all on the subject: it was not a subject of debate in their times, and it seems not to have occurred to them to insist on projecting the time scale of our fallen world back to the stupendous and miraculous events of those Six Days. Blessed Augustine, I think, sums up well the Patristic attitude when he says: “What kind of days these were is very difficult for us to conceive, or even completely impossible; and all the more impossible is it for us to speak of this.”<sup>1\*</sup>

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\* In quoting here from Blessed Augustine’s *City of God*—a work in which the author’s view of the Six Days is not entirely clear—Fr. Seraphim was not aware that in another, then-untranslated work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Augustine offered an interpretation of the Six Days that was at variance with the common Patristic teaching; see p. 115n above and pp. 140–41n below.—ED.

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But if we do not need to define the Six Days of Creation as twenty-four hours long, it is quite impossible for us to regard them as millions or billions of years long—that is, to force them into an evolutionary time scale. The events of the Six Days simply do not fit into the evolutionary picture at all. In Genesis the first living things are grasses and trees upon the dry land; life did not first appear in the sea, as the evolutionary theory would have it; these land plants exist for a whole day (billions of years?) before the sun was created, while in any evolutionary conception the sun precedes the earth itself.\* Any reasonably objective observer would have to conclude that the Six Days of Creation, if they are a true account and not a product of arbitrary fancy or speculation, simply do not fit into the evolutionary framework, and therefore there is no need to make them billions of years long. We will see below also how the description of these Days by the Holy Fathers makes this interpretation quite impossible. Evolutionary theory is obviously talking about something other than the Six Days of Creation.

And in actual fact, *no* scientific theory can tell us about those Six Days. Science tries to explain (sometimes with more and sometimes with less success) the changes of this world, based on projections of natural processes which can be observed today. But the Six Days of Creation are *not* a natural process; they are what came *before* all the world's natural processes began to work. They are God's work; by very definition they are miraculous and do not fit into the natural laws which govern the world we see now.\*\* If we can know what happened

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\* Not only “Christian evolutionists” but also “old-earth/progressive creationists” attempt to place the Six Days into the evolutionary/uniformitarian time scale of billions of years, and thus they too must distort the Genesis account in order to deal with the contradictions outlined above.—ED.

\*\* In his notes, Fr. Seraphim says further: “The fossil record is *not* a record of the ‘Six Days,’ but of the history of the corrupt world *after* its creation. The Six Days are *beyond scientific observation and measurement*, and are different in kind from what science measures. (Cf. St. Symeon the New Theologian on the new law of nature after the fall of Adam.) *Their time lapse is not measurable by science* and does not fit in with any scientific theories.”

Since the fossil record is, as Fr. Seraphim says, a record of a “corrupt world” (suffering, disease, violence, carnivory, death, and decay), it must be placed not only

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in those Six Days at all, it is not by scientific projections or speculations, but only by God's revelation. In this respect, modern scientists are no better off than the ancient creators of cosmic speculations and myths. The writers of commentaries on Genesis emphasize this point. St. John Chrysostom writes:

What does it mean that first there is heaven, and then earth, first the roof and then the foundation? God is not subject to natural necessity; He is not subject to the laws of art. The will of God is the creator and artificer of nature and of art and of everything existing.<sup>2</sup>

Speaking of the Fifth Day of Creation, the same Father says:

Today God goes over to the waters and shows us that from them, by His word and command, there proceeded animate creatures.... What mind, tell me, can understand this miracle?<sup>3</sup>

St. Basil teaches in the *Hexaemeron* that in the Third Day there was no natural necessity for waters to flow downward; this is a law of our own world, but then there was as yet no law, until God's command came:

Someone may, perhaps, ask this: Why does the Scripture reduce to a command of the Creator that tendency to flow downward which belongs naturally to water?... If water has this tendency by nature, the command ordering the waters to be gathered together into one place would be superfluous.... To this inquiry we say this, that you recognized very well the movements of the water after the command of the Lord, both that it is unsteady and unstable and that it is borne naturally down slopes and into hollows; but how it had any power previous to that, before the motion was engendered in it from this command, you yourself neither know nor have you heard it from one who knew. Reflect that the voice of God makes nature, and the

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after the Six Days of Creation, but also after the fall of man, which brought corruption into the world. See pp. 449, 457–58, 460–61, 649–53, 651–52n, 669, 708–10 below.—ED.

## THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION (GENERAL OBSERVATIONS)

command given at that time to creation provided the future course of action for the creatures.<sup>4</sup>

Undoubtedly, here is one of the chief sources of the conflict between scientific theory and religious revelation. During the Six Days *nature itself was being made*; our present knowledge of natural laws cannot possibly tell us how these laws themselves were made. The very subject of ultimate origins, of beginnings, of the Genesis of all things—is outside the sphere of science. When a scientist enters this realm, he guesses and speculates like any ancient cosmologist; and this not only distracts him from his serious work of studying the natural processes of this world—it also makes him a competitor of religious revelation, which is the only possible source of our real knowledge of the beginning of things, just as it is our only source of knowledge of the final end of all things. St. Basil writes:

We are proposing to examine the structure of the world and to contemplate the whole universe, beginning, not from the wisdom of the world, but from what God taught His servant when He spoke to him in person and without riddles.<sup>5</sup>

If we can humble ourselves enough to know that we can actually know rather little about the details of the Creation of the Six Days, we will have a better chance of understanding what we can about Genesis. The Holy Fathers, and not scientific or cosmological speculations, are our key to understanding the text.

### *2. General Remarks about the Six Days*

What, then, can we say of these Six Days?

First: One Orthodox person reflecting on the Six Days very nicely expressed our aim in studying them: we should measure them, not quantitatively, but theologically. The important thing about them is not how long they were, but what happened in them. They are the statement of *six immense creative acts of God* which produced the universe as we know it. In a moment we will look at these six acts in detail.

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Second: As we have seen, by their very nature the events of these days are miraculous, are not subject to the laws of nature that now govern the world, and we cannot understand them by projections from our present experience.

Third: a point very much emphasized by the Holy Fathers who have written on Genesis: The creative acts of God in the Six Days are sudden, instantaneous.

St. Ephraim the Syrian, who understands the days of Creation to be twenty-four hours long, emphasizes that the creative acts of God in these days do *not* require twenty-four hours, but only an instant. Thus, concerning the First Day he writes:

Although both the light and the clouds were created in the twinkling of an eye, still both the day and the night of the First Day continued for twelve hours each.<sup>6</sup>\*

St. Basil the Great likewise emphasizes at various points of his commentary on the Six Days the instantaneous nature of God's creation. On the Third Day of Creation, he writes,

At this saying all the dense woods appeared; all the trees shot up.... Likewise, all the shrubs were immediately thick with leaf and bushy; and the so-called garland plants ... all came into existence in a moment of time, although they were not previously upon the earth.<sup>7</sup> "Let the earth bring forth." This brief command was immediately a mighty nature and an elaborate system which brought to perfection more swiftly than our thought the countless properties of plants.<sup>8</sup>

St. Ambrose writes that when Moses says so abruptly, "In the beginning God created," he intends to "express the incomprehensible speed of the work." And, having the cosmological speculations of the

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\* Concerning the specific length of the Six Days, see also the teaching of Sts. Basil the Great, Ambrose of Milan, and John Damascene on pp. 442, 442n, 545, 546n below.—ED.

## THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION (GENERAL OBSERVATIONS)

Greeks in mind, he writes words that apply equally well to the speculations of our own times:

He [Moses] did not look forward to a late and leisurely creation of the world out of a concourse of atoms.<sup>9</sup>

St. Ambrose says further:

And fittingly [Moses] added: “He created,” lest it be thought there was a delay in creation. Furthermore, men would see also how incomparable the Creator was Who completed such a great work in the briefest moment of His creative act, so much so that the effect of His will anticipated the perception of time.<sup>10</sup>

St. Athanasius the Great—in arguing against the Arian teaching that Christ is the “beginning” of all things and thus like the creation—sets forth as his understanding of the Six Days of Creation that all things in each of these days were created *simultaneously*:

As to the separate stars or the great lights, not this appeared first, and that second, but in one day and by the same command, they were all called into being. And such was the original formation of the quadrupeds, and of birds, and fishes, and cattle, and plants.... No one creature was made before another, but all things originate subsisted at once together upon one and the same command.<sup>11\*</sup>

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\* From the passage quoted above, which refers to the fact that *each* of God’s creative acts was instantaneous, some modern commentators have wrongly ascribed to St. Athanasius the idea that *all* things were created in a single instant—an idea that Fr. Seraphim discusses below. In the same work, St. Athanasius makes clear his belief that the universe came into being through separate creative acts over the course of the Six Days: “All the visible creation was made in six days: in the first, the light which He called day; in the second the firmament; in the third, gathering together the waters, He bared the dry land, and brought out the various fruits that are in it; and in the fourth, He made the sun and the moon and all the host of the stars; and on the fifth, He created the race of living things in the sea, and of birds in the air; and on the sixth, He made the quadrupeds on the earth, and at length man” (*Four Discourses against the Arians* 2.19, NPNF 2 4, p. 358).—ED.

### 3. *Why Six Days?*

We have already quoted St. Ephraim the Syrian, who states that “it is likewise impermissible to say that what seems, according to the account [of Genesis], to have been created in the course of six days, was created in a single instant.” The Holy Fathers are quite insistent in their faithfulness to the text of Genesis: when the text says “day,” they find it impermissible to understand some indefinitely long epoch, since God’s creative acts are instantaneous; but they also find it impermissible to interpret these Six Days as merely some literary device to express a totally instantaneous creation.\* Although each creative act is

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\* Although stated somewhat ambiguously, the idea of a totally instantaneous creation can be found in the works of three Alexandrian thinkers: the first-century Jewish writer Philo (*On the Creation* 3.13) and the second- and third-century Christian writers Clement (*Stromateis* 6.16) and Origen (*Against Celsus* 6.50–51, 60–61). The only saint of the Orthodox Church to develop a teaching along these lines was the fourth-century Father Blessed Augustine. In his elaborate formulation, all things were created at the same moment as *causales rationes* or causal reasons (as distinct from what he called *aeternae rationes* or eternal reasons—which, although they preexist in God, do not exactly correspond to the Uncreated *logoi* of created beings in Greek Patristic thought; see Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 95–96). The days of creation, Blessed Augustine suggested, were but a literary device to describe six simultaneous moments of angelic consciousness, through which God’s creative activity was understood by the angels (cf. Bl. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 4.22–35, ACW 41, pp. 127–45).

Blessed Augustine devised this novel interpretation due to two errors in his exegesis of Scripture. First of all, whereas other Fathers understood the second creation account in Genesis (2:4–25) to be a retelling of the events in the first account (1:1–2:3) (see pp. 209–10, 410, 410n below), Augustine saw the second account as being chronologically posterior to the first. Therefore, he felt he had to account for how God could have made Adam *after* He rested from His creative work on the Seventh Day. Augustine’s second error lay in his attempt to reconcile the Genesis account with a verse in Sirach (18:1) that he read in faulty Latin translations (Old Latin and Vulgate). An accurate translation of the verse reads, “He Who lives forever created the whole universe,” but the misleading Latin translation of τὰ πάντα κονγῇ as *omnia simul* caused Augustine to think it meant God created “all things at the same time.” Citing this verse numerous times in his commentary on Genesis, he

## THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION (GENERAL OBSERVATIONS)

instantaneous, the whole creation consists of an orderly sequence of these creative acts.

St. Gregory the Theologian writes:

To the days [of creation] is added a certain firstness, secondness, thirdness, and so on to the seventh day of rest from works, and by these days is divided all that is created, being brought into order by unutterable laws, but not produced in an instant, by the Almighty Word, for Whom to think or to speak means already to perform the deed. If man appeared in the world last, honored by the handiwork and image of God, this is not in the least surprising; since for him, as for a king, the royal dwelling had to be prepared and only then was the king to be led in, accompanied by all creatures.<sup>12</sup>

In the same vein St. John Chrysostom writes:

The Almighty right hand of God and His limitless wisdom would have had no difficulty in creating everything in a single day. And what do I say, in a single day?—in an instant. But since He created

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wrote: “We tried to show at some length that the two statements about the creation of the world can be reconciled, namely, that it was finished in Six Days with all the creatures that are in it, and that it also was made when day was made, so that the account of creation agrees with the statement that ‘God made all things at the same time’” (*Literal Meaning* 5.17, ACW 41, p. 168). (See an explanation of the reasons behind Augustine’s interpretation in *ibid.*, pp. 252–54, and in Allan D. Fitzgerald, ed., *Augustine through the Ages*, p. 380.)

As will be seen, the idea of a totally instantaneous creation was rejected either explicitly or implicitly by other Fathers, although some of them spoke of God making the material elements on the First Day and then bringing forth His individual creations out of these elements during the Six Days (see pp. 154–57, 155n, 157n below). Blessed Augustine’s interpretation of the Six Days was specifically rejected by the nineteenth-century Russian Father St. Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow, who wrote: “The Six Days of Creation do not signify ... the number of degrees of understanding by which the angels ascend in the knowledge of the nature of things, as Augustine guessed, for creation cannot be mixed together with knowledge” (St. Philaret, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis* [in Russian], p. 27).

On the Orthodox Church’s general approach to Blessed Augustine’s teachings, see pp. 32n, 115n above and pp. 926–27 below.—ED.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

everything that exists not for His own benefit, because He needs nothing, being All-sufficient unto Himself, on the contrary He created everything in His love of mankind and goodness,\* and so He creates in parts and offers us by the mouth of the blessed Prophet a clear teaching of what is created so that we, having found out about this in detail, would not fall under the influence of those who are drawn away by human reasonings.... And why, you will say, was man created afterwards, if he surpassed all these creatures? For a good reason. When a king intends to enter a city, his armsbearers and others must go ahead, so that the king might enter chambers already prepared for him. Precisely thus did God now, intending to place as it were a king and master over everything earthly, at first arrange all this adornment, and only then did He create the master [man].<sup>13</sup>

St. Gregory of Nyssa repeats this same teaching that man, as king, appeared only after his dominion had been prepared for him; but he also has another, more mystical interpretation of the sequence of the Six Days which some have tried to interpret as an expression of the theory of evolution. Let us therefore look closely at this teaching. He writes:

Scripture informs us that the Deity proceeded by a sort of graduated and ordered advance to the creation of man. After the foundations of the universe were laid, as the history records, man did not appear on the earth at once; but the creation of the brutes preceded him, and the plants preceded them. Thereby Scripture shows that the vital forces blended with the world of matter according to a gradation; first, it infused itself into insensate nature; and in continuation of this advanced into the sentient world; and then ascended to intelli-

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\* Cf. St. Irenaeus of Lyons: "The creation is suited for the benefit of man; for man was not made for its sake, but creation for the sake of man" (*Against Heresies* 5.29.1, SC 153.363, ANF 1, p. 558\*). On creation having been made for man, see also the quotations of Sts. Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, and Symeon the New Theologian on pp. 323n, 728–31 below.—ED.

## THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION (GENERAL OBSERVATIONS)

gent and rational beings.... The creation of man is related as coming last, as of one who took up into himself every single form of life, both that of plants and that which is seen in brutes. His nourishment and growth he derives from vegetable life; for even in vegetables such processes are to be seen when aliment is being drawn in by their roots and given off in fruit and leaves. His sentient organization he derives from the brute creation. But his faculty of thought and reason is incommunicable, and is a peculiar gift in our nature.... It is not possible for this reasoning faculty to exist in the life of the body without existing by means of sensations, and since sensation is already found subsisting in the brute creation, necessarily, as it were, by reason of this one condition, our soul has touch with the other things which are knit up with it; and these are all those phenomena within us that we call "passions."<sup>14</sup>

At the end of another description in a different book, St. Gregory concludes:

If, therefore, Scripture tells us that man was made last, after every animate thing, the lawgiver [Moses] is doing nothing else than declaring to us the doctrine of the soul, considering that what is perfect comes last, according to a certain necessary sequence in the order of things.... Thus we may suppose that nature makes an ascent as it were by steps—I mean the various properties of life—from the lower to the perfect form.<sup>15</sup>

This is one of the very few passages in the writings of the Holy Fathers which believers in the evolutionary cosmogony find sympathetic to their views. It speaks of an "ascent by steps ... from the lower to the perfect form," and states that man somehow "partakes" in the life of the lower creation. But the evolutionary theory of origins requires much more than these general views, which no one will dispute. The theory of evolution requires that man be shown to be a *descendant* of the lower creation, to have "evolved" out of it. In a later lecture we will look closely at what the Fathers say of man's origin. Here we will only say that St. Gregory not only says nothing whatever

that indicates he believed such a view, but other of his own views contradict it. Thus, he agrees with the rest of the Fathers who have written on Genesis that God's creation is instantaneous; in this same treatise he says that "every hillside and slope and hollow were crowned with young grass, and with the varied produce of the trees, just risen from the ground, yet shot up at once into their perfect beauty,"<sup>16</sup> and that "the creation is, so to say, made offhand by the Divine power, existing at once on His command."<sup>17\*</sup>

Further, St. Gregory states specifically that the one reason human nature has contact with the lower creation is because it shares the same sentient nature; it comes, indeed, from the same earth the lower creatures also sprang from. It is a totally arbitrary addition to the Saint's meaning to insist that this means man "descended" from the brute creation; in this case, indeed, it would be required also that he (and the brutes) descended from the vegetable creation, since he has something of their nature also within himself. But evolutionary theory teaches, not that animals "evolved" from plants, but that the two kingdoms are separate and parallel branches from a common primitive ancestor.

St. Gregory's "ascent by steps," therefore, does not at all show the chronological descent of man from plants and animals, but only shows his kinship with the lower creation through sharing the nutritive and sentient nature which all earthborn creatures have, to the degree God has given it to them. He is describing, not the *history* of man, but his *nature*.

We will see more specifically below what St. Gregory actually thought about the "mixing of natures" which is implied in the evolutionary theory.

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\* Moreover, St. Gregory of Nyssa made it clear that Adam was specially created, not born of another human being or any other creature: "Now while Abel came into existence by way of generation, what reasonable man would deny that, in the actual sense of human generation, Adam existed ungenerately?" (*Against Eunomius* 3.3, NPNF 2 5, p. 143). "Adam himself was not begotten according to the natural generation of men; but Abel was begotten of Adam" (*On the Faith: To Simplicius*, ibid., p. 338). (See also the quotations of St. Gregory on pp. 430, 432n below.)—ED.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *The Six Days*

(DAY BY DAY)  
(Genesis 1:1–25, 2:1–3)

**L**ET US turn now to the text of Genesis and see briefly what God brought into being during the Six Days of Creation:

#### *1. The First Day (Genesis 1:1–5)*

**1:1** *In the beginning ...*

This book is about the very first things in the world. But there can also be a mystical significance to the words, as St. Ambrose teaches:

A beginning in a mystical sense is denoted by the statement: “I am the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Apoc. 1:8).... In truth, He Who is the beginning of all things by virtue of His Divinity is also the end.... Therefore, in this beginning, that is, in Christ, God created heaven and earth, because “all things were made through Him and without Him was made nothing that was made” (John 1:3).<sup>1</sup>

The succeeding acts of creation begin with the words: “And God said.” St. Basil asks the meaning of this, and answers it for us:

Let us inquire how God speaks. Is it in our manner?... Does He manifest His hidden thought by striking the air with the articulate movement of the voice? Surely, it is fantastic to say that God needs such a roundabout way for the manifestation of His thoughts. Or, is

it not more in conformity with true religion to say that the Divine will joined with the first impulse of His intelligence is the Word of God [i.e., Christ]? The Scripture delineates Him in detail in order that it may show that God wished the creation not only to be accomplished, but also to be brought to this birth through some co-worker. It could have related everything fully as it began, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," then "He created light," next, "He created the firmament." But now, introducing God as commanding and speaking, it indicates silently Him to Whom He gives the command and to Whom He speaks.... This way of speaking has been wisely and skillfully employed so as to rouse our mind to an inquiry of the Person to Whom the words are directed.<sup>2</sup>

And so we see *Christ* is the Creator, as is also stated by St. John the Evangelist: "In the beginning was the Word ... all things were made through Him and without Him was made nothing that was made" (John 1:1, 3). St. Paul teaches the same thing: "God ... created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:9); "by Him [Christ] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him" (Col. 1:16).\*

Thus, in traditional Orthodox iconography of the creation we see not Michelangelo's old man (the Father) creating Adam (as in the fresco in the Sistine Chapel), but Christ. Of course, it is the Trinity as a whole that creates: the Father commands, the Son creates, and in a moment

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\* In demonstrating that the Word of God is the Creator of all, St. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 1.22.1, 2.2.5) cites Psalm 32:6, 9 as well: "By the Word of the Lord the heavens were established, and all the power of them by the Spirit of His mouth.... For He spoke, and they were made; He commanded, and they were created." (Later we will see how this verse was cited by the Fathers to demonstrate the activity of the Holy Spirit in the events of creation, as well.) In the same work, St. Irenaeus writes: "The Creator of the world is truly the Word of God, and this is our Lord, Who in the last times was made man, existing in this world, Who invisibly contains all created things, Who is inherent in the entire creation, since the Word of God governs and arranges all things" (*Against Heresies* 5.18.3, SC 153.244–45, ANF 1, pp. 546–47\*).—ED.

## THE SIX DAYS (DAY BY DAY)

we will see the Spirit participating in this work, as He “moves” or “hovers” over the waters. Of this St. Ephraim the Syrian writes:

It was fitting for the Holy Spirit to hover as a proof that in creative power He is equal to the Father and the Son. For the Father uttered, the Son created, and it was fitting for the Spirit also to offer His work. And this He did by *hovering*, thereby clearly showing that all was brought into being and accomplished by the Trinity.<sup>3\*</sup>

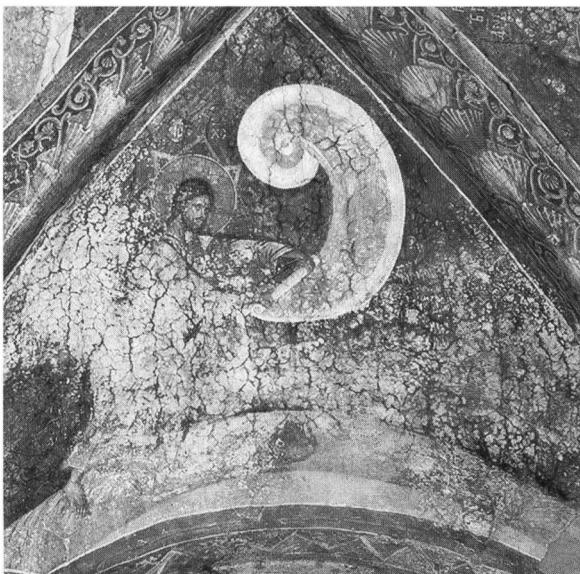
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\* St. Irenaeus quotes Ephesians 4:6—“One God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all”—as proof that the creation is the common work of the Holy Trinity, “because ‘above all’ is the Father, and ‘through all’ is the Word—since through Him everything was made by the Father—while ‘in us all’ is the Spirit, Who cries ‘Abba, Father’ (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15) and forms man to the likeness of God” (*Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 5, PPS 17, p. 43).

St. Basil the Great writes as follows on the Holy Trinity as Creator: “The Father is the original cause [*προκαταρκτικὴ αἰτία*] of all things that exist, the Son is the creative [*δημιουργικὴ*] cause, and the Spirit is the perfecting [*τελειωτικὴ*] cause—such that [everything] subsists by the will of the Father, is brought into being by the Energy of the Son, and is perfected by the presence of the Spirit.... For the Origin of all beings is one, creating through the Son and perfecting by the Spirit. Neither does the Father, ‘Who worketh all in all’ (1 Cor. 12:6), have imperfect energy, nor does the Son have deficient creativity, if not perfected by the Spirit. The Father, Who creates by His will alone, could not stand in any need of the Son, but nevertheless He wills through the Son; likewise neither could the Son, Who works according to the likeness of the Father, stand in any need of cooperation, yet the Son too wills to make perfect through the Spirit” (*On the Holy Spirit* 16.38, SC 17.376–78, NPNF 2 8, p. 23).

St. Gregory of Nyssa offers further elucidation: “For neither did the Universal God make the universe ‘through the Son,’ as needing any help, nor does the Only Begotten God work all things ‘by the Holy Spirit,’ as having a power that comes short of His design; but the fountain of power is the Father, and the power of the Father is the Son, and the spirit of that power is the Holy Spirit; and creation entirely, in all its visible and spiritual extent, is the finished work of that Divine power. And seeing that no toil can be thought of in the composition of anything connected with the Divine Being (for performance being bound to the moment of willing, the plan at once becomes a reality), we should be justified in calling all that nature which came into existence by creation a movement of Will, an impulse of Design, a transmission of Power, beginning from the Father, advancing through the Son, and completed in the Holy Spirit” (*On the Holy Spirit [Against the Macedonians]* 13, NPNF 2.5, p. 320).—ED.

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The creation of the  
heavens and the earth  
on the First Day of  
Creation.

*Fresco from Decani  
Monastery, Kosovo,  
Serbia, 1338–1347.*

**1:1–2 God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void (LXX: invisible and unfinished).**

St. Basil asks:

How is it, if both the heavens and the earth were of equal honor, that the heavens were brought to perfection and the earth is still imperfect and unfinished? Or, in short, what was the lack of preparation of the earth? And for what reason was it invisible? Surely, the perfect condition of the earth consists in its state of abundance: the budding of all sorts of plants, the putting forth of the lofty trees both fruitful and barren, the freshness and fragrance of flowers, and whatever things appeared on earth a little later by the command of God to adorn their mother. Since as yet there was nothing of this, the Scripture reasonably spoke of it as incomplete. We might say the same also about the heavens; that they were not yet brought to perfection themselves, nor had they received their proper adornment, since they were not yet lighted around by the moon nor the sun, nor crowned by the choirs of the stars. For, these things had not yet been

## THE SIX DAYS (DAY BY DAY)

made. Therefore, you will not err from the truth if you say that the heavens also were incomplete.<sup>4</sup>

St. Ambrose speaks of this work of the First Day as the “foundation” of the world:

The good architect lays the foundation first, and afterwards, when the foundation has been laid, plots the various parts of the building, one after the other, and then adds thereto the ornamentation.... Why did not God ... grant to the elements at the same time as they arose their appropriate adornments, as if He, at the moment of creation, were unable to cause the heavens immediately to gleam with studded stars and the earth to be clothed with flowers and fruit? That could very well have happened. Yet Scripture points out that things were first created and afterwards put in order, lest it be supposed that they were not actually created and that they had no beginning, just as if the nature of things had been, as it were, generated from the beginning and did not appear to be something added afterwards.<sup>5</sup>

St. Ephraim says:

He said this desiring to show that emptiness preceded the natures [of things].... There was then only the earth, and there was nothing beside it.<sup>6</sup>

### *1:2 And darkness was upon the face of the deep.*

The waters of the “deep” were created together with the earth and completely submerged the earth. This is the cause of its unfinished appearance. The Fathers assume there was a certain light created with the heavens, since the heavens are the region of light; but if so the clouds covering the earth prevented its reaching the earth. St. Ephraim writes:

If everything created (whether its creation is mentioned or not) was created in six days, then the clouds were created on the first day.... For everything had to be created in six days.<sup>7</sup>

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

(This is another indication, incidentally, that the work of the Six Days is distinct from the continuous creative work of God after that, and that we cannot understand it by projecting back from our present experience.)

St. Ambrose specifically rejects the opinion that the “darkness” here refers allegorically to powers of evil.<sup>8\*</sup>

*1:2 And the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.*

Here we see the activity of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity in the creation. St. Ambrose writes:

There was still to come the plenitude of the operation in the Spirit, as it is written: “By the Word of the Lord the heavens were established, and all the power of them by the Spirit of His mouth” (Ps. 32:6).... The Spirit fittingly moved over the earth, destined to bear fruit, because by the aid of the Spirit it held the seeds of new birth which were to germinate according to the words of the Prophet: “Send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth” (Ps. 103:32).<sup>9</sup>

St. Ephraim gives us a homey image of the activity of the Spirit on the First Day:

[The Holy Spirit] warmed the waters and made them fertile and capable of birth, like a bird when it sits with its outstretched wings on its eggs and by its warmth gives them warmth and produces fertility in them. This same Holy Spirit represented for us then an image of Holy Baptism, in which by His moving over the waters He gives birth to the children of God.<sup>10\*\*</sup>

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\* As does St. Basil; see p. 121n above.—ED.

\*\* The same interpretation of Genesis 1:2 is given in St. Ephraim the Syrian, *Hymns on the Epiphany* 8.16, and St. Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron* 2.6.—ED.

## THE SIX DAYS (DAY BY DAY)



The creation of light on the First Day of Creation (detail).  
*Fresco from Decani Monastery, Kosovo, Serbia, 1338–1347.*

The Holy Spirit also participated in the other days of Creation, for the book of Job speaks of “the Divine Spirit [Who] hath made me” (Job 33:4).

*1:3 And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.*  
St. Ambrose writes:

God is the Author of light, and the place and cause of darkness is the world. But the good Author uttered the word “light” so that He might reveal the world by infusing brightness therein and thus make its aspect beautiful. Suddenly, then, the air became bright and darkness shrank in terror from the brilliance of the novel brightness. The brilliance of the light which suddenly permeated the whole universe overwhelmed the darkness and, as it were, plunged it into the abyss.<sup>11</sup>

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

St. Ephraim, in harmony with the other Fathers, tells us clearly that this light had nothing to do with the sun, which was created only on the Fourth Day:

The light which appeared on earth was like either a bright cloud, or a rising sun, or the pillar that illumined the Hebrew people in the desert. In any case, the light could not disperse the darkness that embraced everything if it had not extended everywhere either its substance or its rays, like the rising sun. The original light was shed everywhere and was not enclosed in a single definite place; it dispersed the darkness without having any movement; its whole movement consisted in its appearance and disappearance; after its sudden disappearance there came the dominion of night, and with its appearance this dominion ended. Thus the light produced also the three following days.... It aided the conception and bringing forth of everything that the earth was to produce on the third day; as for the sun, when it was established in the firmament, it was to bring to maturity what had already been produced with the aid of the original light.<sup>12</sup>

### *1:4 And God saw that the light was good.*

God calls each stage of His work “good,” seeing its perfect and unspoiled nature and, as St. Ambrose teaches, looking forward to the perfection of the whole work:

God, as judge of the whole work, foreseeing what is going to happen as something completed, commends that part of His work which is still in its initial stages, being already cognizant of its termination.... He praises each individual part as befitting what is to come.<sup>13</sup>

### *1:4–5 And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.*

St. Basil comments on this passage:

“God separated the light from the darkness.” That is, God made their natures incapable of mixing and in opposition, one to the

## THE SIX DAYS (DAY BY DAY)

other. For, He divided and separated them with a very great distinction between them. “And God called the light Day and the darkness He called Night.” Now, henceforth, after the creation of the sun, it is day when the air is illuminated by the sun shining on the hemisphere above the earth, and night is the darkness of the earth when the sun is hidden. Yet, it was not at that time according to solar motion, but it was when that first created light was diffused and again drawn in according to the measure ordained by God, that day came and night succeeded.<sup>14</sup>

*1:5 And there was evening and there was morning, one day.*

St. Basil continues:

Evening, then, is a common boundary line of day and night; and similarly, morning is the part of night bordering on day. In order, therefore, to give the prerogative of prior generation to the day, Moses mentioned first the limit of the day and then that of the night, as night followed the day. The condition in the world before the creation of light was not night, but darkness; that which was opposed to the day was named night; wherefore it received its name later than the day did....

Why did he say “one” and not “first”? It is more consistent for him who intends to introduce a second and a third and a fourth day, to call the one which begins the series “first.” But he said “one” because he was defining the measure of day and night.<sup>15</sup>

This First “Day” of creation (no matter how “long” one may guess it to be) is the beginning of the cycle of seven days (each with its “day” and “night”) which continues up to our own days. Those rationalist commentators who see in the “seven days” and the fact that “evening” precedes “morning” merely a projection backwards of later Jewish customs show themselves totally out of harmony with the Patristic way of viewing these things, and they are therefore unable to answer the question: where and why did the Jews derive these customs? In the Patristic view, the revealed text can and does give the literal *origins* of the world and the reasons for the Jewish customs

(which are now Christian—for our church day also begins with Vespers, the evening service).

Thus we have come to the end of “Day One,” the First Day of Creation. It has established the measure of time for all succeeding ages (because “before” it there was no time; time begins with it). And in another sense also it is a day unlike those that follow it, as St. Ephraim explains:

Thus, according to the testimony of Scripture, heaven, earth, fire, air, and the waters were created out of nothing; while the light which was created on the First Day and everything else that was created after it were created out of what existed before. For when Moses speaks of what was created out of nothing he uses the word “created” [Hebrew: *bara*]: “God created the heaven and the earth.” And although it is not written that fire, the waters and the air were created, it is likewise not said that they were produced from what existed earlier. And therefore they also are out of nothing, just as heaven and earth are out of nothing. But when God begins to create out of what already existed, the Scripture uses an expression like this: “God said, let there be light,” and the rest. And if it is said: “God created the great sea monsters,” before this the following is said: “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures.” Therefore, only the above-named five kinds of creations were created out of nothing, while everything else was created out of what had already been created out of nothing.<sup>16</sup>

The “five creations” that St. Ephraim mentions are the “four elements” out of which, according to the definition of ancient science, everything on earth consists, in addition to “heaven.” One does not have to accept this particular way of analyzing the creation to see that there is indeed something “fundamental” about the First Day of Creation: it contains the beginnings of everything that is to come after. One might speculate as to where the actual *matter* came from for the living creatures, the heavenly bodies, and other creations of the next five days: was it newly created out of nothing, or was it really only a transformation of preexisting [created] matter? But this would be a profitless exercise that would not, in any case, contradict the truth that the basic

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structure and matter of creation was made on the First Day; the work of the next five days is less “radical” than that of the First Day—it is rather a “shaping” than a “creation” in the strict sense.\*

The very idea of “creation out of nothing” or “from non-being”

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\* Together with St. Ephraim, St. Basil the Great says that the elements (heaven, earth, water, air, fire) were created on the First Day of Creation. He then goes on to say that, when “the earth was invisible and unfinished” (Gen. 1:2) on the First Day, it was “in travail with the birth of all things through the power stored up in it by the Creator, and waiting for the proper times that it might bring forth its offspring into the open at the Divine command” (St. Basil, *Hexaemeron* 2.3, FC 46, pp. 25–26). St. Basil’s brother, St. Gregory of Nyssa, comments in like manner on the same verse of Scripture: “‘And the earth was invisible and unfinished.’ Clearly this means that God’s power over all things in the beginning came into existence by one impulse of creation, for His power seminally contained every created being and came into existence through one initiative” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Apologia to His Brother Peter on the Hexaemeron*, GNO 4.1.27). St. Gregory then goes on to speak of how God, on the subsequent Days, brought forth His creations out of the previously created material elements.

Some modern writers (including Fr. Seraphim’s interlocutor, Alexander Kalomirov, in *The Six Dawns*, chap. 4) have cited these passages as proof that Sts. Basil and Gregory believed in molecules-to-man evolution. However, like St. Gregory of Nyssa’s statement about creation’s “ascent by steps” (pp. 143–44 above), such general Patristic affirmations of God’s power to bring forth creatures out of already-created elements—a power as-yet-unrealized in the “unfinished” creation of the First Day—cannot in themselves be seen as supporting modern evolutionary theory. As Fr. Seraphim has stated above, to show that the Holy Fathers believed in evolution, one must also demonstrate that they believed in the common descent of all living things from a primordial life-form. Sts. Basil and Gregory clearly believed otherwise, for they both taught that living things were created by God directly, instantly and effortlessly, fully formed, in their perfect beauty, each with its seed in itself; and both Fathers rejected the idea that the natures of created things can be mixed (see especially pp. 143–44 above and pp. 166–67, 181–83, 187–88 below). Likewise, Sts. Ephraim and Ambrose, who also spoke of God’s power making the earth fertile on the First Day (see p. 150 above), were no less emphatic about the immediate, absolute and radical character of each act of creation on the next five days.

On God’s fashioning of the world out of material elements created on the First Day, see also St. Hippolytus, *Fragments on Genesis*; idem, *The Refutation of All Heresies* 10.28–29; St. Ambrose, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 2.85; idem, *Hexaemeron* 1.7, quoted on p. 149 above; St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* 2.5, 2.7, 2.9–10, 2.12; and St. Gregory Palamas, *Topics on Natural and Theological Science* 21–22, quoted on p. 157n below.—ED.

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sharply distinguishes the Genesis account from that of all pagan myths and speculations about creation.\* In the latter it is some kind of “demiurge” or “fashioner-god” who forms the world out of already existing matter—which, as the Holy Fathers say, thus is a kind of “god” also.\*\* Genesis describes the *absolute* beginning of the whole world, not its development from something already existing; even the cre-

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\* Cf. 2 Maccabees 7:28: “I beseech you, my child, to look to heaven and earth and see everything in them, and know that God made them out of nothing”; and Hebrews 11:3: “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” St. Athanasius (*On the Incarnation of the Word* 3), St. Gregory of Nyssa (*Against Eunomius* 1.26), St. John Chrysostom (*Homilies on Hebrews* 22.1–2), and Blessed Augustine (*Concerning the Nature of Good: Against the Manichaeans* 26) cited one or both of these passages as Scriptural testimony of God’s creation out of nothing. St. Athanasius also quoted from the early Christian work *The Shepherd of Hermas*: “First of all believe that God is one, Who created and framed all things, and made them to exist out of nothing” (*Shepherd* 1.2).

Statements concerning God’s creation of all things out of nothing or non-being can be found throughout the Patristic corpus. For an overview, see Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, pp. 91–95; and [Fr.] Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption*, pp. 43–48.—Ed.

\*\* In his second-century work *Against Heresies*, St. Irenaeus of Lyons set forth an extensive refutation of the pagan idea of creation by a demiurge, particularly as it was conceived by the Valentinian Gnostics. In the same work, he rejected the pagan-Gnostic notion that “the creator formed the world out of previously existing matter” (*Against Heresies* 2.14.4, ANF 1, p. 377; see also 2.10.4, p. 370). Other Holy Fathers also spoke out against this conception, including St. Theophilus of Antioch (*To Autolycus* 2.4, 3.26) in the second century; Sts. Hilary of Poitiers (*On the Trinity* 4.16), Athanasius the Great (*On the Incarnation of the Word* 2–3), Basil the Great (*Hexaemeron* 2.2–3; see p. 504n below), and John Chrysostom (*Homilies on Genesis* 2.2 [2.6]; *Eight Homilies on Genesis* 1; *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles* 2) in the fourth century; and Blessed Augustine (*Confessions* 11.5, 13.33; *Concerning the Nature of Good: Against the Manichaeans* 27) in the early fifth century. (Sts. Theophilus and Athanasius ascribed the notion to the Platonists, while St. Chrysostom and Blessed Augustine attributed it to the Manichaeans.) St. Chrysostom wrote: “To say that existing things came to be from underlying matter, and not to confess that the Creator of all produced them from non-existence, would be a mark of extreme derangement. Accordingly, this blessed Prophet [Moses], when he was on the point of beginning the book [of Genesis], stopped the mouths of such ingrates, by beginning like this: ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth’ (Gen. 1:1). When

## THE SIX DAYS (DAY BY DAY)

ations of the following five days, as we shall see, although they come out of the matter which has already been created, are something radically new which cannot be understood as a mere development of the first-created matter. The speculations of modern thinkers who try to trace the world back to some ultimately simple matter which develops by itself can be seen to be akin to the ancient pagan speculations; the radicalness of the Genesis explanation is beyond them both—precisely because it comes from God's revelation and not the guesses and projections of men.\*

The Christian who understands the absoluteness of God's creative work in the Six Days views the present creation with different eyes than does someone who views it as a gradual development or "evolu-

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you hear 'He created,' concern yourself no further, but with head bowed believe what is said" (*Homilies on Genesis* 2.2, PG 53.28, FC 74, p. 32 [2.6\*]).

In teaching the doctrine of creation from non-being, the Fathers also made plain God did not create from His own Essence; see pp. 216–17, 216–17n below.—ED.

\* In the fourteenth century, St. Gregory Palamas elucidated the above-mentioned teaching on how God brought forth His individual creations out of the material elements that He created on the First Day: "First of all, God created the heavens and the earth (cf. Gen. 1:1) as a kind of all-embracing material substance with the potentiality of giving birth to all things.... After this initial creation, He Who brings forth all things from non-being proceeds as it were to embellish and adorn the world. In Six Days He allotted its own proper and appropriate rank to each of His creatures that together constitute His world. He differentiates each by command alone, as though bringing forth from hidden treasures the things stored within, giving them form, and disposing and composing them harmoniously, with perfection and aptness, one to the other, each to all and all to each" (*Topics of Natural and Theological Science* 21–22, *Philokalia* 4, pp. 354–55). Elsewhere St. Gregory expanded on this teaching by delineating the creative acts that God performed on the Six Days (*Homilies* 6.7–10, 17.2, trans. Christopher Veniamin, pp. 44–45, 135).

Here again it can be seen that the Orthodox Patristic teaching on the Six Days, far from accommodating evolutionary ideas of the self-development of matter, holds that each of God's creations was brought forth by Him specially and directly, in perfect form, out of the material elements He had previously created. In the words of St. Philaret of Moscow in the nineteenth century: "The Six Days of Creation do not signify ... such a period of time during which things would form and develop only according to natural laws from the heaven and earth that were created in the beginning" (*Commentary on the Book of Genesis* [in Russian], p. 27).—ED.

tion” from primordial matter (whether the latter is understood as created by God or as self-existing). In the latter view, the world is seen to be “naturally” what it is, and one can trace it back to ever simpler forms, each of which can be understood “naturally”; but in the former view, the view of Genesis, one is placed before the two radical poles of existence: that which now is, and the absolute nothingness from which it came, suddenly and by God’s will alone.

There is only one more question for us to ask concerning the First Day: where does the creation of the world of angels fit into it? Moses describes the creation only of the visible world; when was the invisible world of spiritual beings created? Some Fathers think they are included in the creation of “heaven”;<sup>\*</sup> others are not so specific, but know that they were also created “in the beginning.” St. Basil teaches:

In fact there did exist something, as it seems, even before this world, which our mind can attain by contemplation, but which has been left uninvestigated because it is not adapted to those who are beginners and as yet infants in understanding. This was a certain condition older than the birth of the world and proper to the supramundane powers, one beyond time, everlasting, without beginning or end. In it the Creator and Producer of all things perfected the works of His art, a spiritual light befitting the blessedness of those who love the Lord, rational and invisible natures, and the whole orderly arrangement of spiritual creatures which surpass our understanding and of which it is impossible even to discover the names. These fill completely the essence of the invisible world.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, St. Ambrose writes:

The Angels, Dominions, and Powers, although they began to exist at some time, were already in existence when the world was created. For all things “were created, things visible and things invisible, whether Thrones or Dominions or Principalities or Powers. All

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\* For example, Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus (*Questions on Genesis* 3–4) and St. Epiphanius of Salamis (*Panarion* 65.4.9–65.5.4).—ED.

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things,” we are told, “have been created through and unto Him” (Col. 1:16).<sup>18\*</sup>

Indeed, God said to Job: “When the stars were made, all My angels praised Me with a loud voice” (Job 38:7, LXX). We will see on the Sixth Day how Adam was tempted by Satan, and therefore we know that the battle of the proud angels in heaven, as described in the Apocalypse (12:7–8) has already been fought before then, and Satan has already “fallen like lightning” (Luke 10:18).

### 2. *The Second Day (Genesis 1:6–8)*

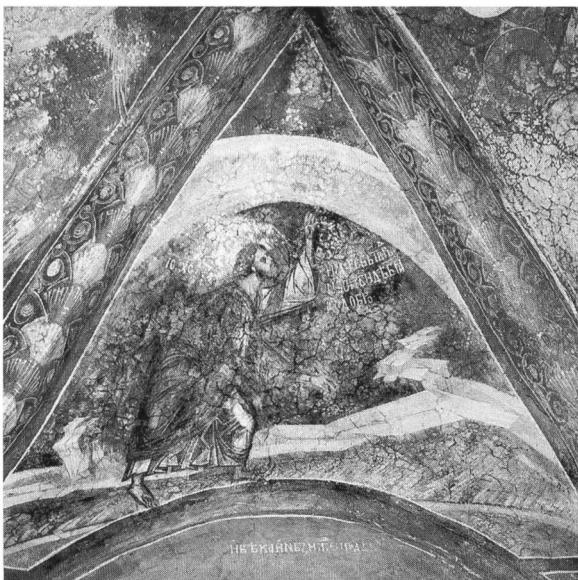
*1:6–8 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.*

Some have tried to find in this passage an “unscientific” view of the heavens, as though Moses believed in a kind of hard crystal dome in which the stars are embedded and above which there is a fictitious store of water. But there is nothing so fantastic to be found in this text.

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\* Compare St. Gregory the Theologian: “He [God] first conceived the heavenly and angelic powers. And this conception was a work fulfilled by His Word, and perfected by His Spirit. And so the secondary splendors came into being, as ministers of the Primary Splendor; whether we conceive of them as intelligent spirits, or as fire of an immaterial and incorruptible kind, or as some other nature approaching this as near as may be.... Then when His first Creation was in good order, He conceives a second world, material and visible; and this a system and compound of earth and sky, and all that is in the midst of them” (*Oration* 38.9–10, NPNF 2 7, p. 347; see pp. 197–98 below). St. John Damascene concurs with St. Gregory: “Now, some say that the angels were made before all creation, as Gregory the Theologian says.... But there are others who say that they were made after the creation of the first heaven. However, they all agree that it was before the formation of man. For my part, I agree with the Theologian, because it was fitting for the spiritual substance to be created first and then the sensible and then finally man himself from both” (*On the Orthodox Faith* 2.3, FC 37, p. 208). St. John Cassian, recounting the teaching of Abba Serenus of Egypt, says the same (*Conferences* 8.7.1–4, ACW 57, p. 295).—ED.

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The creation of the firmament, called Heaven, on the Second Day of Creation.  
*Fresco from Decani Monastery, Kosovo, Serbia, 1338–1347.*

The word “firmament” seems to have two shades of meaning in Genesis, one quite specific and “scientific,” the other general.\* In its general meaning the firmament is more or less synonymous with “heaven” or “sky”: the stars are called “lights in the firmament of the heavens” (Gen. 1:14), and the birds fly “across the firmament of the heavens” (Gen. 1:20). We who have lost the specific meaning of “firmament” would omit it in such descriptions and say that stars and birds are both to be seen in the “heavens.” The idea that the stars are embedded in crystal spheres is a speculation of ancient pagan thought and does not have to be projected into the inspired text of Genesis.

What, then, is the specific “scientific” meaning of the “firmament” in this text? St. Basil teaches that, even though it is also called “heaven,” it is not synonymous with the “heaven” mentioned at the beginning of Genesis.

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\* In the Septuagint, the Greek word for “firmament” in Genesis chapter 1 is στερέωμα, which denotes something of solidity and firmness. In the Masoretic Text, the Hebrew word is *raqiya* (also translated as “expanse”): a noun that comes from the verb *raqa*, meaning to “beat out” and “make broad,” as one might hammer metal in order to make it thin and spread it out.—ED.

## THE SIX DAYS (DAY BY DAY)

Since both a second name and a function peculiar to the second heaven was recorded, this is a different one from that recorded in the beginning, one of a more solid nature and furnishing a special service for the universe.... We believe that this word has been assigned for a certain firm nature which is capable of supporting the fluid and unstable water. And, surely, we need not believe, because it seems to have had its origin, according to the general understanding, from water, that it is like either frozen water or some ... translucent stone ... almost like the air in transparency. Now, we compare the firmament to none of these things. Truly, it is peculiar to a childish and simple intellect to hold such notions about the heavens.... We have been taught by the Scripture to permit our mind to invent no fantasy beyond the knowledge that has been granted it....

Not a firm and solid nature, which has weight and resistance, it is not this that the word “firmament” means. In that case the earth would more legitimately be considered deserving of such a name. But, because the nature of the substances lying above is light and rare and imperceptible, He called this [a] *firmament*, in comparison with those very light substances which are incapable of perception by the senses. Now, imagine some place which tends to separate the moisture, and lets the rare and filtered part pass through into the higher regions, but lets the coarse and earthly part drop below, so that, by the gradual reduction of the liquids, from the beginning to the end the same mild temperature may be preserved.<sup>19\*</sup>

The “firmament” in Genesis, therefore, is some kind of natural barrier or filter that separates two levels of atmospheric moisture. We do not observe today such a definite phenomenon that we could call a “firmament.” Was it perhaps different in the first-formed earth?

St. Basil believes that the function of the “firmament” was to preserve a mild temperature over the whole earth. Now, it so happens that

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\* In commenting on the “firmament” mentioned in Genesis 1:6–8, St. Ambrose of Milan (*Hexaemeron* 2.4, FC 42, pp. 60–62), Blessed Theodore of Cyrus (*Questions on Genesis* 11.1, LEC 1, pp. 29–30) and St. John Chrysostom (*Homilies on Genesis* 4.3, FC 74, pp. 55–56 [4.7–8]) offered an interpretation similar to that of St. Basil.—ED.

we know of a certain “greenhouse” effect on the earth in prehistoric times: tropical plants and animals have been found in the ice of the far north, indicating that the northern regions were indeed once temperate. Further, in the second chapter of Genesis we are told that before the creation of man, “the Lord had not caused it to rain upon the earth ... but there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground” (Gen. 2:5–6).

The early earth, then, seems to have been a place rather different from the one we know: a place universally temperate, plentiful in moisture which constantly watered an abundant vegetation, which, as we shall see, was all that God intended not only for the food of man, but even of the beasts (Gen. 1:30).\*

When did this happy situation come to an end? We will soon look at the consequences of the fall of man; but there are indications that the earth even after the fall of man preserved some of the characteristics of the earliest earth. Let us look briefly at what the Scripture says in the light of our scientific knowledge of the atmosphere. The Holy Fathers themselves often applied the scientific knowledge of their times in understanding the Scripture, and we are also permitted to do so—provided only that we do no violence to the text of Scripture and are humble and moderate in our own supposed understanding. The following explanation, therefore, is offered not as dogma but as speculation.

The very phenomenon of rain is not mentioned in the text of Genesis until the time of Noah; and then it is not an ordinary rain but a kind of cosmic catastrophe: “All the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights” (Gen. 7:11–12). Immense—to us, nearly unimaginable—amounts of water were loosed on the earth, reducing it virtually to its state on the First Day of Creation, when the “deep” covered the earth. The rains we know today could not cause this to happen; but the text describes something even worse: an immense underground supply of water was loosed, and the

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\* On the climate of the first-created world, see also the quotations of St. Theophilus of Antioch, St. Epiphanius of Salamis, St. John Damascene, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, and Archimandrite Sebastian Dabovich on pp. 704–5 below.—ED.

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“firmament”—the atmospheric condition that preserved a permanent reservoir of water in the air, evidently in the form of clouds such as the planet Venus has even now—was literally “broken” and emptied its contents upon the earth.

In this light we can also understand why God gave the *rainbow* as the sign of His covenant with Noah and all creatures that there would never again be such a flood upon earth. How could the rainbow have been a sign, when supposedly it had existed throughout the centuries before that? Evidently the rainbow then appeared for the first time. The rainbow is formed by the direct rays of the sun upon moisture in the air. If the permanent cloud cover of the earth was dissipated by the breaking of the “firmament,” then literally the direct rays of the sun struck the earth for the first time after the Flood. The rainbow had been unknown to man before that—which is why it can now be a sign to man that literally the supply of moisture in the air is limited and cannot cause a universal flood any more.\*

In view of all this, it would seem that the time after the Flood is a whole new epoch in human history. The comparatively “paradisal” conditions of the earth up to the time of Noah, when a universal temperateness prevailed over the earth and abundant vegetation supplied the needs of man without the need to eat meat (Noah is the first to receive God’s permission to eat flesh; Gen. 9:3), gives way to the harsher post-Flood earth we know, when there is “seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter” (Gen. 8:22), and men no longer live nine hundred years as did Adam and the early Patriarchs, but very quickly are reduced to the seventy or eighty years which is the general limit of our life even up to now.\*\*

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\* On the “firmament,” see also pp. 404–5, 404–5n, 411–12 below.—ED.

\*\* During his oral delivery of this section, Fr. Seraphim explained this last point more fully: “We know that, with the race of mankind up until the time of Noah, a very extraordinary thing happened. All the Patriarchs of the Old Testament up to then are said to have lived tremendous numbers of years: Adam lived 930 years, Methusalah lived 969 years, others lived 900, 800 years.

“Nowadays people might say: ‘That’s an exaggeration, that’s a mistake, that’s silly.’ But almost every single Patriarch lived that long.... Only after Noah (who lived

*3. The Third Day (Genesis 1:9–13)*

**1:9–10** *And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear. And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together He called Seas. And God saw that it was good.*

On each Day of creation a command is given that becomes the law of nature for all time thereafter. From the First Day, the succession of day and night begins; and from the Third Day, the waters begin their ceaseless movement. Thus, “the element of water was ordered to flow, and it never grows weary when urged on unceasingly by this command.”<sup>20</sup>

It is tempting for us, in the pride of our scientific knowledge, to speculate about the *how* of this event: Did the waters flow into underground reservoirs? Did the land rise up? The Scripture does not say, and for this reason the Holy Fathers say little on this subject. St. Ambrose writes:

What He actually has done, which I have not learned from the clear testimony of Scripture, I pass over as a mystery, lest, perchance, that stir up other questions starting even from this point. Nevertheless, I maintain in accordance with the Scriptures, that God can extend the low-lying regions and the open plains, as He has said: “I will go before thee and make level the mountains” (Is. 45:2).<sup>21</sup>

On this same question of the “how” of creation St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches:

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950 years, 600 of which were before the Flood), the age of man begins to decrease.... Why? The world even before Noah was quite a different place; the world before Adam's fall, even more so. Before the time of Noah, man was not allowed to eat meat; man was living on vegetables.... Of course, today it's inconceivable that man could live 900 years, but under those totally different conditions, who knows what might have happened? God created the world in the beginning totally new and fresh, and according to a totally different way of life than what we know now.”—ED.

## THE SIX DAYS (DAY BY DAY)

As for the question, how any single thing came into existence, we must banish it altogether from our discussion. Even in the case of things which are quite within the grasp of our understanding and of which we have sensible perception, it would be impossible for the speculative reason to grasp the “how” of the production of the phenomenon; so much so, that even inspired and saintly men have deemed such questions insoluble. For instance, the Apostle says, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb. 11:3).... While the Apostle affirms that it is an object of his faith that it was by the will of God that the world itself and all which is therein was framed,... he has on the other hand left out of the investigation the “how” of this framing.... Let us, following the example of the Apostle, leave the question of the “how” in each created thing, without meddling with it at all, but merely observing incidentally that the movement of God’s will becomes at any moment that He pleases a fact, and the intention becomes at once realized in nature.<sup>22</sup>

In all that has to do with the Six Days of Creation, therefore, the Holy Fathers offer few guesses (and they are always tentative) regarding *how* God created; and we likewise should refrain from projecting our knowledge of the “how” of the present creation (to the small extent that we know it) back to the first-created world.

The dry land appeared at the command of God, and not by some natural process. St. Ambrose writes:

It was provided that the earth would, to all appearance, have been dry by the hand of God rather than by the sun, for the earth actually became dry before the sun was created. Wherefore, David, too, distinguished the sea from the land, referring to the Lord God: “For the sea is His and He made it, and His hands made the dry land” (Ps. 94:5).<sup>23</sup>

**1:11–13** *And God said, Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each*



The creation of the grass, plants, and trees on the Third Day of Creation (detail).

*Fresco from Decani Monastery, Kosovo, Serbia, 1338–1347.*

*according to its kind, upon the earth. And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.*

The Holy Fathers are unanimous in emphasizing the miraculous nature of the creation of the Third Day. St. Basil teaches:

“Let the earth bring forth herbs.” And in the briefest moment of time the earth, beginning with germination in order that it might keep the laws of the Creator, passing through every form of increase, immediately brought the shoots to perfection. The meadows were deep with the abundant grass; the fertile plains, rippling with standing crops, presented the picture of a swelling sea with its moving heads of grain. And every herb and every kind of vegetable and

## THE SIX DAYS (DAY BY DAY)

whatever shrubs and legumes there were, rose from the earth at that time in all profusion.... "And the fruit tree," He said, "that bears fruit containing seed of its own kind and of its own likeness on the earth." At this saying all the dense woods appeared; all the trees shot up, those which are wont to rise to the greatest height, the firs, cedars, cypresses, and pines; likewise, all the shrubs were immediately thick with leaf and bushy; and the so-called garland plants—the rose bushes, myrtles, and laurels—all came into existence in a moment of time, although they were not previously upon the earth, each one with its own peculiar nature.<sup>24</sup>

St. Ephraim the Syrian states precisely:

The herbs, at the time of their creation, were the productions of a single instant, but in appearance they appeared the productions of months. Likewise the trees, at the time of their creation, were the productions of a single day, but in their perfection and fruits, which weighed down the branches, they appeared the productions of years.<sup>25</sup>

St. Gregory of Nyssa also emphasizes that what was created by God was not merely seeds or a potentiality for growth, but the actual creations we know; seeds come from those first-created plants:

We learn from Scripture in the account of the first creation, that first the earth brought forth "the green herb," and that then from this plant seed was yielded, from which, when it was shed on the ground, the same form of the original plant again sprang up.... In the beginning, we see, it was not an ear rising from a grain, but a grain coming from an ear, and, after that, the ear grows round the grain.<sup>26\*</sup>

Plants and trees appeared on earth, as the Fathers repeat again and again, before the very existence of the sun. St. John Chrysostom writes:

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\* See also p. 144 above, where St. Gregory of Nyssa again affirms that the plants were instantly created in a condition of full growth.—ED.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

(Moses) shows you that everything was accomplished before the creation of the sun, so that you might ascribe the ripening of the fruits not to it, but to the Creator of the universe.<sup>27</sup>

St. Basil states:

The adornment of the earth is older than the sun, that those who have been misled may cease worshipping the sun as the origin of life.<sup>28</sup>

St. Ambrose waxes eloquent on this subject:

Before the light of the sun shall appear, let the green herb be born, let its light be prior to that of the sun. Let the earth germinate before it receives the fostering care of the sun, lest there be an occasion for human error to grow. Let everyone be informed that the sun is not the author of vegetation.... How can the sun give the faculty of life to growing plants, when these have already been brought forth by the life-giving creative power of God before the sun entered into such a life as this? The sun is younger than the green shoot, younger than the green plant.<sup>29\*</sup>

The vegetation and trees brought forth seeds, “each according to its kind.” This expression of Scripture is a key one in Patristic thought; we will devote a lengthy discussion to it under the Fifth Day of Creation, when living creatures were brought forth likewise “each according to its kind.”

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\* Before Sts. Basil, Ambrose, and John Chrysostom, the second-century Holy Father St. Theophilus of Antioch set forth the same teaching: “On the Fourth Day the luminaries were made; because God, Who possesses foreknowledge, knew the follies of the vain philosophers, that they were going to say that the things which grow on the earth are produced by the heavenly bodies, so as to exclude God. In order, therefore, that the truth might be obvious, the plants and seeds were produced prior to the heavenly bodies, for what is posterior cannot produce that which is prior” (*To Autolycus* 2.15, ANF 2, p. 100). Here God’s foreknowledge can be seen to have anticipated not only the naturalistic origin theories current in the time of the early Fathers, but also those prevalent today.—ED.

4. *The Fourth Day (Genesis 1:14–19)*

**1:14–19** *And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth. And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; He made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.*

The Fourth Day of Creation is a source of great embarrassment for those who would like to fit the Six Days into an evolutionary framework. There is absolutely no way this can be done if the sun was actually created on the Fourth Day.

For this reason, such apologists for the evolutionary interpretation have to believe that the sun was really created on the First Day with the heavens, but only *appeared* on the Fourth Day—apparently after the cloud covering of the earth during the first three days had lifted.\*

But we should remind ourselves once more that the first chapters of Genesis are not an account of the natural development of the earth according to the laws now governing this development, but an account of the miraculous beginnings of all things. We are not free to rearrange the Days of Genesis to fit our theories; we must rather humble our understanding so as to comprehend what the sacred text actually says. And here as always the Holy Fathers are our key to this comprehension. How did they understand the Fourth Day?

The Holy Fathers are unanimous in affirming that the sun and the heavenly luminaries were *created* on the Fourth Day; they did not merely *appear* then. There is no reason why, if the text of Genesis permitted it, the Fathers could not have accepted the seemingly more “natural explanation” that the light of the sun illuminated the first

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\* This explanation is given by “old-earth/progressive creationists” as well as by “Christian evolutionists.”—ED.



The creation of the sun, moon, and stars ("lights in the firmament of the heavens") on the Fourth Day of Creation. (It will be noticed that, in this icon and in the ones on p. 172 and the front cover, the plants are shown to have already been created on the Third Day.)

*Contemporary wall painting from the Far Monastery of St. John the Forerunner, Greece.*

## THE SIX DAYS (DAY BY DAY)

three days of creation, but that the orb of the sun only became visible from earth on the Fourth Day. That they universally reject this explanation can only mean that the text of Genesis does not allow it.

St. John Chrysostom writes: “He created the sun on the Fourth Day so that you might not think that it produces the day.”<sup>30</sup>

St. Basil teaches:

The heavens and the earth had come first; after them, light had been created, day and night separated, and in turn, the firmament and dry land revealed. Water had been collected into a fixed and definite gathering. The earth had been filled with its proper fruits; for, it had brought forth countless kinds of herbs, and had been adorned with varied species of plants. However, the sun did not yet exist, nor the moon, lest men might call the sun the first cause and father of light, and lest they who are ignorant of God might deem it the producer of what grows from the earth.... If the creation of light had preceded, why, now, is the sun in turn said to have been made to give light?.... At the time [the First Day] the actual nature of light was introduced, but now this solar body has been made ready to be a vehicle for that first-created light....\* And do not tell me that it is impossible for these to be separated. I certainly do not say that the separation of light from the solar body is possible for you and me, but that that which we are able to separate in thought can also be separated in actuality by the Creator of its nature.... “Let them serve,” He says, “for the fixing of days,” not for making days, but for ruling the days. For, day and night are earlier than the generation of the luminaries.<sup>31</sup>

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\* St. John Damascene also states that the sun and other luminaries, created on the Fourth Day, were made to serve as “receptacles” of the light created on the First Day (*On the Orthodox Faith* 2.7, FC 37, pp. 215–16). Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus sets forth the same teaching in order to explain the order of God’s creative acts. To the question “Why did God create the plants before, and the animals after, the heavenly lights?” Blessed Theodoret replies, “Animals have eyes and could not have tolerated the excessively bright light. But when this [light] was apportioned among the lesser and the greater lights, it emitted a brightness commensurate with the vision of the animals. Plants, in contrast, have no senses” (*Questions on Genesis* 16, LEC 1, pp. 39–40).—ED.



The creation of the sun, moon, and stars on the  
Fourth Day of Creation (detail).

*Interior fresco from Sucevita Monastery,  
Moldavia, Romania, 1595–1596.*

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St. Ambrose makes a special emphasis on this point:

Look first upon the firmament of heaven which was made before the sun; look first upon the earth which began to be visible and was already formed before the sun put in its appearance; look at the plants of the earth which preceded in time the light of the sun. The bramble preceded the sun; the blade of grass is older than the moon. Therefore, do not believe that object to be a god to which the gifts of God are seen to be preferred. Three days have passed. No one, meanwhile, has looked for the sun, yet the brilliance of light has been in evidence everywhere. For the day, too, has its light which is itself the precursor of the sun.<sup>32</sup>

The idea that life on earth from the beginning was dependent on the sun, and even that the earth itself comes from the sun—is a recent idea that is nothing but the sheerest guess; it even has no direct connection with the truth or falsity of the so-called evolution of life on earth. Because men in recent centuries have been looking for a “new” and “natural” explanation of the world’s origin, having rejected the explanation that comes from Divine revelation, it has seemed a matter of course that the sun—so much larger and astronomically more significant than the earth, and the center of the earth’s orbit—should precede the earth, rather than the other way around.

But Divine revelation, as interpreted by the Holy Fathers, tells us the contrary: that the earth comes first, both in time and in significance, and the sun comes second. If our minds were not so chained to the intellectual fashions of the times, if we were not so fearful of being thought “behind the times,” we would not have such difficulty in opening our minds to this alternative explanation of the world’s beginnings.

In the Scriptural-Patristic view the earth—as the home of man, the pinnacle of God’s creation—is the center of the universe. Everything else—no matter what the scientific explanation of its present state and movement, or the physical immensity of it in comparison to the earth—is secondary, and was made for the sake of the earth, that is, for man. Our God is of such power and majesty that we need not doubt that in a single momentary exercise of His creative might He brought

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into being this whole earth—large to us, but only a speck in the whole universe—and that in another moment of His power He made the whole immensity of the stars of heaven. He could do vastly more than that if He willed; in the inspired text of Genesis He has left us the barest outline of what He did do, and this account is not required to accord with our human speculations and guesses.

In our days it has become fashionable and easy to believe that everything “evolved,” by absolutely uniform laws which we can now observe, from a primordial blob of energy or matter; if one needs “God” to explain anything, it is only to be the “creator” of this blob, or the initiator of the “big bang” that supposedly has produced everything there is. Today it requires a broader mind, less chained to “public opinion,” to begin to see the enormity of the creative acts of God as described in Genesis. The Holy Fathers—the most “sophisticated” and “scientific” minds of their time—can be the unchainers of our fettered minds.

But surely, it might be asked, the creations of God must make sense from the “natural” point of view also: Why, therefore, did God create such an enormous body as the sun to serve such a small body as the earth? Couldn’t He have conserved this energy and made a sun more in accordance with the scale of the earth?

One could, of course, conceive of a sun much smaller than the one we know and much closer to the earth, while preserving its apparent size as seen from the earth. But such a sun would expend its energy many times more rapidly than our present sun does. Evidently God made the sun the size and the distance from earth it needs to have if it is to give to earth the amount of light and heat it requires to support life to the end of this age, when “the sun shall be darkened” (Matt. 24:29).

We may also see another, mystical reason for the fact that the light precedes the sun in the days of creation. Here, admittedly, we have no Fathers to quote, and we offer this interpretation as our own opinion.

We will see below that the separation of man into male and female was not part of the original “image” in which God created him; and we know that it will not be part of man’s nature in the eternal Kingdom of Heaven, for “in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven” (Matt. 22:30).

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Rather, God made the division into male and female foreseeing the fall of man and that the increase of mankind would require a passionate mode of generation.

Might it not be, then, that the sun and moon are also not part of God's original "image" of His creation, but were only created to mark the days and months and years of man's fallen estate? The original light, created on the First Day, had no need of a body to contain it. At the end of the world "shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven" (Matt. 24:29); and in the Kingdom of Heaven, as on the First Day of Creation, there will be once more light without the sun and moon—for "the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it" (Apoc. 21:23).

But these are mysteries at which we can do no more than guess.

### 5. *The Fifth Day (Genesis 1:20–23)*

*1:20–23 And God said, Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens. So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth. And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.*

In his commentary on the Fifth Day of Creation, St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the preciseness and accurateness of the order in which the creation is described.

The blessed Moses, instructed by the Spirit of God, teaches us with such detail ... so that we might clearly know both the order and the way of the creation of each thing. If God had not been concerned for our salvation and had not guided the tongue of the Prophet, it would have been sufficient to say that God created the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and living creatures, without indicating either the order of the days or what was created earlier and what later....



The creation of the creatures of the sea and air on the Fifth Day of Creation.  
*Byzantine mosaic from the Monreale Cathedral, Sicily, twelfth century.*

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The creation of the creatures of the sea and air on the Fifth Day of Creation.  
*Fresco from Decani Monastery, Kosovo, Serbia, 1338–1347.*

But he distinguishes so clearly both the order of creation and the number of days, and instructs us about everything with great condescension, in order that we, coming to know the whole truth, would no longer heed the false teachings of those who speak of everything according to their own reasonings, but might comprehend the unutterable power of our Creator.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, on the Fifth Day, he writes:

Just as of the earth He said only: "Let it bring forth," and there appeared a great variety of flowers, herbs, and seeds, and everything occurred by His word alone, so also here He said: "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens," and suddenly there appeared so many kinds of crawling things, such a variety of birds, that it is impossible even to enumerate them with words.<sup>34</sup>



The creation of the creatures of the sea and air on the Fifth Day of Creation.

*Interior fresco from Sucevita Monastery, Moldavia, Romania, 1595–1596.*

## THE SIX DAYS (DAY BY DAY)

St. Basil writes:

All water was in eager haste to fulfill the command of its Creator, and the great and ineffable power of God immediately produced an efficacious and active life in creatures of which one would not even be able to enumerate the kinds, as soon as the capacity for propagating living creatures came to the waters through His command.<sup>35</sup>

And St. Ambrose:

At this command the waters immediately poured forth their offspring. The rivers were in labor. The lakes produced their quota of life. The sea itself began to bear all manner of reptiles.... We are unable to record the multiplicity of the names of all those species which by Divine command were brought to life in a moment of time. At the same instant substantial form and the principle of life were brought into existence.... The whale, as well as the frog, came into existence at the same time by the same creative power.<sup>36</sup>

Here, as in the creation of all living things, God creates the first of each kind:

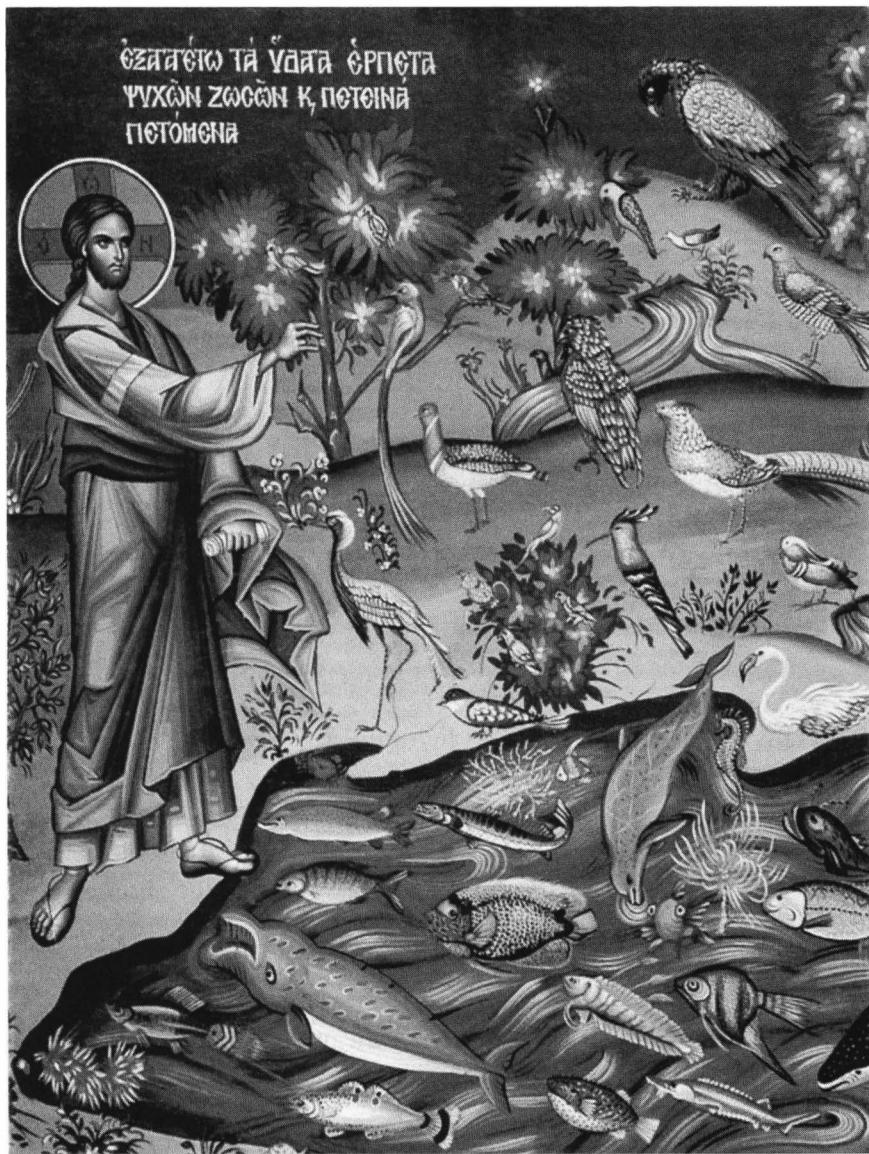
God orders the firstlings of each kind to be brought forth, seeds, as it were, for nature; and their numbers are controlled by successive progeny, whenever they must increase and become numerous (St. Basil).<sup>37</sup>

Here, therefore, let us examine the meaning of the expression, repeated on each of the three days in which life is created, "each according to its kind."\*

There can be no doubt whatever that the Holy Fathers understood, clearly and unanimously, that on these three days God created all the *kinds* of creatures that we know today. This can be seen in their

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\* In the Septuagint, the Greek word for "kind" is *γένος*; in the Masoretic Text, the Hebrew word is *min*.—ED.



The creation of the creatures of the sea and air on the Fifth Day of Creation.  
*Contemporary wall painting from the Far Monastery of St. John the Forerunner, Greece.*

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often-repeated assertions that God creates immediately and instantly, that it is His word alone that brings the creatures into being, that it is not a natural property of the waters or earth to bring forth life. On the latter point St. Basil writes (speaking of the Sixth Day):

When He said: “Let it bring forth,” [the earth] did not produce what was stored up in it, but He Who gave the command also bestowed upon it the power to bring forth. Neither did the earth, when it heard, “Let it bring forth vegetation and the fruit trees,” produce plants which it had hidden in it; nor did it send up to the surface the palm or the oak or the cypress which had been hidden somewhere down below in its womb. On the contrary, it is the Divine Word that is the origin of all things made. “Let the earth bring forth”; not, let it put forth what it has, but, let it acquire what it does not have, since God is enduing it with the power of active force.<sup>38</sup>

The Holy Fathers have a very definite teaching on the “kinds” of creation. Let us only bear in mind here that we need not define precisely the limits of these “kinds.” The “species” of modern taxonomy (the science of classification) are sometimes arbitrary and do not necessarily correspond to the “kinds” of Genesis,\* but in general one might say that the Fathers understand as included in a “kind” those

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\* The definition of “species” has been the subject of much debate in the modern scientific community. In the first half of the twentieth century, a species was generally defined as a group of plants or animals that are able to interbreed and produce fertile offspring. In 1940 and again in 1942, evolutionary biologist Ernst Mayr proposed a definition that was much less limiting: a species is a group that is “reproductively isolated from other such groups,” i.e., does not generally mate with another group, although it may be capable of doing so (Mayr, *Systematics and the Origin of Species*, p. 120). This new definition of species is today accepted by many biologists. Because it is so loose, it makes it easier to show that one “species” (actually a breeding population) can “evolve” into another. Thus, for example, the polar bear and the grizzly bear are classified in modern taxonomy as separate species, although they are capable of mating with each other and producing fertile offspring. In view of the Patristic teaching on the “kinds” described in Genesis, however, it is evident that these two “species” of bear are but different varieties within one of the original created “kinds.”—ED.

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creatures capable of producing a fertile offspring, as will be seen in what follows.

St. Basil teaches that the “kinds” of Genesis (except, of course, for those that may have become extinct)\* maintain their nature to the end of time:

There is nothing truer than this, that each plant either has seed or there exists in it some generative power. And this accounts for the expression “of its own kind.” For the shoot of the reed is not productive of an olive tree, but from the reed comes another reed; and from seeds spring plants related to the seeds sown. Thus, what was put forth by the earth in its first generation has been preserved until the present time, since the kinds persisted through constant reproduction.<sup>39</sup>

And further:

The nature of existing objects, set in motion by one command, passes through creation without change, by generation and destruction, preserving the succession of the kinds through resemblance, until it reaches the very end. It begets a horse as the successor of a horse, a lion of a lion, and an eagle of an eagle; and it continues to preserve each of the animals by uninterrupted successions until the consummation of the universe. No length of time causes the

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\* The physical extinction of many of the original “kinds” mentioned in Genesis is one of the results of the “bondage of corruption” (Rom. 8:21) that began at the fall of man. In a sense, however, the extinction of these “kinds” is not absolute. Viewing this question theologically, the Orthodox priest Fr. Timofey Alferov writes: “In the present condition we see both individual death and the dying out of species. Information on the majority of living creatures has already been lost, is disincarnate, has lost its material bearers, and has returned to its Source, in a pre-creation condition. These creatures exist only in their ideas, which were in God pre-eternally, before time. For us, though, there remains only a partial knowledge of certain traits of these creatures in excavated bones and imprints” (Alferov, *Two Cosmogonies* [in Russian], p. 72). (On the “ideas” [*logoi*] of created beings that preexisted in God, see pp 86n above and pp. 217n, 477n below.)—ED.

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specific characteristics of the animals to be corrupted or effaced,\* but, as if established just recently, nature, ever fresh, moves along with time.<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, St. Ambrose teaches:

In the pine cone nature seems to express an image of itself; it preserves its peculiar properties which it received from that Divine and celestial command, and it repeats in the succession and order of the years its generation until the end of time is fulfilled.<sup>41</sup>

And the same Father says even more decisively:

The Word of God permeates every creature in the constitution of the world. Hence, as God had ordained, all kinds of living creatures were quickly produced from the earth. In compliance with a fixed law they all succeed each other from age to age according to their aspect and kind. The lion generates a lion; the tiger, a tiger; the ox, an ox; the swan, a swan; and the eagle, an eagle. What was once enjoined became in nature a habit for all time. Hence the earth has not ceased to offer the homage of her service. The original species of living creatures is reproduced for future ages by successive generations of its kind.<sup>42</sup>\*\*

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\* Here St. Basil is not necessarily claiming that no “kind” of creature ever goes extinct. Within the context of St. Basil’s broader discussion, one may understand this statement to mean simply that, no matter how much time passes, each kind of animal maintains its “characteristics” (“peculiarities”—τὰ ἴδια ματὰ) as a kind: a horse will always beget a horse, etc.—ED.

\*\* St. Athanasius the Great likewise writes on how each kind of creature preserves its own essence, and specifically on how irrational creatures cannot be transformed into rational man: “‘The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made’ (Rom. 1:20); and neither the light is as the night, nor the sun as the moon; nor the irrational as rational man; nor the Angels as the Thrones, nor the Thrones as the Authorities, yet they are all creatures, but each of the things made according to its kind exists and remains in its

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The attempts of breeders, both of animals and plants, in all ages to make a new species by mating individuals of different species produces (when it succeeds) a result that only proves the Patristic maxim of the constancy of species: these “hybrids” are sterile and cannot reproduce themselves.\* St. Ambrose uses this example to warn men against “unnatural unions” which go against the laws which God established in the Days of Creation:

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own essence, as it was made” (*Four Discourses against the Arians* 2.19, NPNF 2 4, pp. 358–59).

The modern Holy Father St. John of Kronstadt (†1908) echoes the same Patristic teaching with regard to animals and man: “The Creator in the beginning made only the beginnings of fish and birds, their kinds, and left their propagation to them themselves, under His protection, just as the propagation of the human race. Even till now all kinds of fish and birds, having propagated themselves infinitely, exactly preserve the appearance, temperaments and habits of their own kinds, not mixing themselves in the slightest with other ones. Every kind of fish and bird, and every kind of reptile, remain also the same even now such as they were several thousand years ago, with the same characteristics which they received from the Creator in the beginning” (*Talks on the Days of Creation*, in *Complete Collected Works* [in Russian], vol. 1, p. 79). (It will be noted that St. John of Kronstadt here contradicts not only the theory of evolution but also its corollary of “millions of years” of earth history, despite the fact that both ideas had gained wide acceptance in his time. Elsewhere, St. John explicitly rejected evolutionary theory; see pp. 794–95 below.)—ED.

\* Today, most Protestant creation scientists take a broader view of the “kinds” than did Sts. Basil and Ambrose. While the latter included within the same “kind” only those creatures that produce fertile offspring, the former also include creatures that generally produce infertile offspring—arguing that, in very rare cases, pairings of such creatures (mules and horses, lions and tigers) do produce fertile offspring. However, as Orthodox Christian doctor of zoology Yuri Zharikov has pointed out, there are fundamental biological reasons why such pairings do not generally produce fertile offspring, and the rare exceptions do not disprove the rule. Dr. Zharikov says that the ability to regularly produce fertile progeny is a good indicator of the “kinds” described in Genesis, but he adds that it is impossible to know the exact biological limits of what the original “kinds” might have been. This is because, not only is there no way for us to scientifically investigate what creatures were like before the fall, but we cannot even discover what they were like immediately after the fall, before the loss and reshuffling of genetic information that has taken place in the post-fall world through mass extinctions and divergence of populations (personal communication). (See Dr. Zharikov’s article on pp. 822–60 below.)—ED.

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What pure and untarnished generations follow without intermingling one after another, so that a thymallus produces a thymallus; a sea-wolf, a sea-wolf. The sea-scorpion, too, preserves unstained its marriage bed.... Fish know nothing of union with alien species. They do not have unnatural betrothals such as are designedly brought about between animals of two different species as, for instance, the donkey and the mare, or again the female donkey and the horse, both being examples of unnatural union. Certainly there are cases in which nature suffers more in the nature of defilement rather than that of injury to the individual. Man as an abettor of hybrid barrenness is responsible for this. He considers a mongrel animal more valuable than one of a genuine species. You mix together alien species and you mingle diverse seeds.<sup>43</sup>

The distinctness and integrity of the “seeds” of each of the “kinds” of creation is so much a part of Scriptural and Patristic thought that it serves in the Gospel as the basis for the Parable of our Lord regarding the distinctness of good and evil, virtue and sin. St. Ambrose uses this parable (Matt. 13:24–30) to illustrate the integrity of the seeds of each “kind”:

There is no danger that the precept of God, to which nature has accustomed itself, may become void in future time by a failure of propagation, since today the integrity of the stock is still preserved in the seeds. We know that cockle and the other alien seeds which often are interspersed among fruits of the earth are called “weeds” in the Gospel. These, however, belong to a special species and have not degenerated into another species by a process of mutation from the seed of the wheat plant. The Lord told us that this is so when He said: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while men were asleep, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat.” We gather from this that weeds and wheat certainly seem to be distinct both in name and in kind. Hence, the servants, too, said to the householder, “Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? How then does it have weeds?” He said to them, “An enemy hath done this.” One is the seed of the devil; the other, that of

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

Christ which is sown in accordance with justice. Therefore, the Son of Man sowed one and the devil sowed the other. For that reason the nature of each is distinct, since the sowers are opposed. Christ sows the Kingdom of God, whereas the devil sows sin. How, therefore, can this kingdom be of one and the same race as sin? “This is the Kingdom of God,” He says, “as though a man should cast seed into the earth” (Mark 4:26).<sup>44</sup>

Just as the distinction of species is related to the distinction between good and evil, so is the confusion of species related to moral relativity. It is certainly well known how believers in the relativity of good and evil, of virtue and vice, make use of the cosmological theory of universal evolution to defend their belief as “scientific” and “factual”: if man was “once” a lower animal and is “evolving” into something else, then how can his inconstant nature be compelled to obey commandments given at only one stage of his “development”? Marxist atheism bound itself to this theory of evolution from the very beginning and to this day preaches it as one of the cardinal doctrines of its relativistic philosophy.

The idea of the consistency of nature and the integrity and distinctness of its “kinds” runs throughout Patristic literature. It serves as a model, for example, of the resurrection of the human body. St. Ambrose writes, in his treatise on the resurrection:

Nature in all its produce remains consistent with itself.... Seeds of one kind cannot be changed into another kind of plant, nor bring forth produce differing from its own seeds, so that men should spring from serpents and flesh from teeth; how much more, indeed, is it to be believed that whatever has been sown rises again in its own nature, and that crops do not differ from their seed, that soft things do not spring from hard, nor hard from soft, nor is poison changed into blood; but that flesh is restored from flesh, bone from bone, blood from blood, the humors of the body from humors. Can ye then, ye heathen, who are able to assert a change, deny a restoration of the nature?<sup>45</sup>

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In a similar view, St. Gregory of Nyssa writes:

Whereas we learn from Scripture in the account of the first Creation, that first the earth brought forth “the green herb” (as the narrative says), and that then from this plant seed was yielded, from which, when it was shed on the ground, the same form of the original plant again sprang up, the Apostle, it is to be observed, declares that this very same thing happens in the resurrection also; and so we learn from him the fact, not only that our humanity will be then changed into something nobler, but also that what we have therein to expect is nothing else than that which was at the beginning.<sup>46</sup>

A strange parallel to the modern theory of universal evolution may be seen in the ancient pagan teaching of the transmigration of souls (reincarnation). The reaction of the Holy Fathers to this idea, which they universally condemned, shows how concerned they were to preserve the orderliness of creation and the distinctness of its kinds of creatures. St. Gregory of Nyssa writes:

Those who would have it that the soul migrates into natures divergent from each other seem to me to obliterate all natural distinctions; to blend and confuse together, in every possible respect, the rational, the irrational, the sentient, and the insensate; if, that is, all these are to pass into each other, with no distinct natural order excluding them from mutual transition. To say that one and the same soul, on account of a particular environment of body, is at one time a rational and intellectual soul, and that then it is cavered along with the reptiles, or herds with the birds, or is a beast of burden, or a carnivorous one, or swims in the deep; or even drops down to an insensate thing, so as to strike out roots or become a complete tree, producing buds on branches, and from those buds a flower, or a thorn, or a fruit edible or noxious—to say this, is nothing short of making all things the same and believing that one single nature runs through all beings; that there is a connection between them which blends and confuses hopelessly all the marks by which one could be distinguished from another.<sup>47</sup>

The idea that “one single nature runs through all beings,” of course, lies at the heart of the theory of universal evolution. Erasmus Darwin (the grandfather of Charles) had already pointed scientific speculation in this direction at the end of the eighteenth century.\* Such an idea is profoundly alien to Scriptural and Patristic thought.

#### 6. *The Sixth Day (Genesis 1:24–31)*

**1:24–25** *And God said, Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds. And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.*

The teaching of the Holy Fathers on the creation of the land animals on the Sixth Day does little more than repeat what has already been said about the other living creatures. Thus, St. Ephraim writes:

The earth at God’s command immediately brought forth creeping things, beasts of the field as companions to the wild beasts; it brought forth as many beasts as were necessary for the service of him who, on that very day, transgressed the commandment of his Lord.<sup>48</sup>

St. Basil teaches:

The soul of brute beasts did not emerge after having been hidden in the earth, but it was called into existence at the time of the command.<sup>49</sup>

With this act of creation, all is ready for the appearance of man, who is to be lord over it all. But this magnificent creation is not merely for the practical use of man. There is something mystical in it; being the good creation of the All-good God, it can raise our minds to Him. St. John Chrysostom writes:

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\* See pp. 462n, 508n, 516–17, 516n, 540n below.—ED.

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God created everything not only for our use, but also that we, seeing the great wealth of his creations, might be astonished at the might of the Creator and might understand that all this was created with wisdom and unutterable goodness for the honor of man, who was to appear.<sup>50</sup>

St. Basil, marvelling at the grandeur of God's creation, says:

Let us glorify the Master Craftsman for all that has been done wisely and skillfully; and from the beauty of the visible things let us form an idea of Him Who is more than beautiful; and from the greatness of these perceptible and circumscribed bodies let us conceive of Him Who is infinite and immense and Who surpasses all understanding in the plenitude of His power. For even if we are ignorant of things made, yet, at least, that which in general comes under our observation is so wonderful that even the most acute mind is shown to be at a loss as regards the least of the things in the world, either in the ability to explain it worthily or to render due praise to the Creator, to Whom be all glory, honor, and power forever.<sup>51</sup>

God made the world, as St. John Damascene teaches, because, "not content to contemplate Himself, by a superabundance of goodness He saw fit that there should be some things to benefit by and participate in this goodness."<sup>52\*</sup>

Perhaps no part of Scripture expresses so well the awe-inspiring

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\* This teaching—that God's goodness is the only motive and reason for the creation—is also found in the writings of earlier Fathers. St. Athanasius, for example, writes: "For God is good, or rather is the very source of goodness, and one who is good could not be grudging about anything; hence, grudging existence to no one, He has made all things out of nothing through His own Word, our Lord Jesus Christ" (*On the Incarnation of the Word* 3, SC 199.270, NPNF 2 4, p. 37\*). St. Gregory of Nyssa writes that God created man "in the superabundance of love ... because it was fitting that neither His light should be unseen, nor His glory without witness, nor His goodness unenjoyed" (*Catechetical Oration* 5, GNO 3.4.17, NPNF

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

majesty of God in His creation, and man's nothingness in comparison, as does the passage in which God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind:

Where wast thou when I founded the earth? Tell me now, if thou hast knowledge, who set the measures of it, if thou knowest? Or who stretched a line upon it? On what are its rings fastened? And who is he that laid the cornerstone upon it? When the stars were made, all My angels praised Me with a loud voice. And I shut up the sea with gates, when it rushed out, coming forth out of its mother's womb. And I made a cloud its clothing, and swathed it in mist. And I set bounds to it, surrounding it with bars and gates. And I said to it, Hitherto shalt thou come, but thou shalt not go beyond, but thy waves shall be confined within thee. Or did I order the morning light in thy time; and did the morning star then first see his appointed place; to lay hold of the extremities of the earth, to cast out the ungodly out of it? Or didst thou take clay of the ground, and form a living creature, and set it with the power of speech upon the earth? (Job 38:4–14, LXX).

The Genesis account of the creation of man is given in two accounts, those of chapter 1 and chapter 2; these we shall examine in the next chapter.

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2 5, p. 478\*; see also St. Gregory the Theologian, *Oration* 38.9–10, NPNF 2 7, p. 347).

The Fathers also emphasize that God was not bound by necessity to create. In the superabundance of His goodness and love, God created all things freely, solely through the exercise of His will. See the quotations of St. John Chrysostom and St. Gregory of Nyssa on pp. 136, 165 above, as well as St. Hippolytus, *Against Noetus* 10, ANF 5, p. 227; St. Methodius of Olympus, *Extracts from the Work on Things Created* 7, ANF 6, p. 381; St. Athanasius, *Four Discourses against the Arians* 2.2, 2.31, NPNF 2 4, pp. 349, 364–65; St. Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron* 1.7, NPNF 2 8, p. 56; St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration* 5, NPNF 2 5, p. 478; St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.8, NPNF 2 9, p. 7b; St. Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Texts on Love* 4.3–4, *Philokalia* 2, p. 100; and St. Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science* 103, 135, *Philokalia* 4, pp. 393, 410.—ED.



The creation of Adam.  
*Fresco from Decani Monastery, Kosovo, Serbia, 1338–1347.*

*7. The Seventh Day (Genesis 2:1–3)*

**2:1–3** *Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all His work which He had done in creation.*

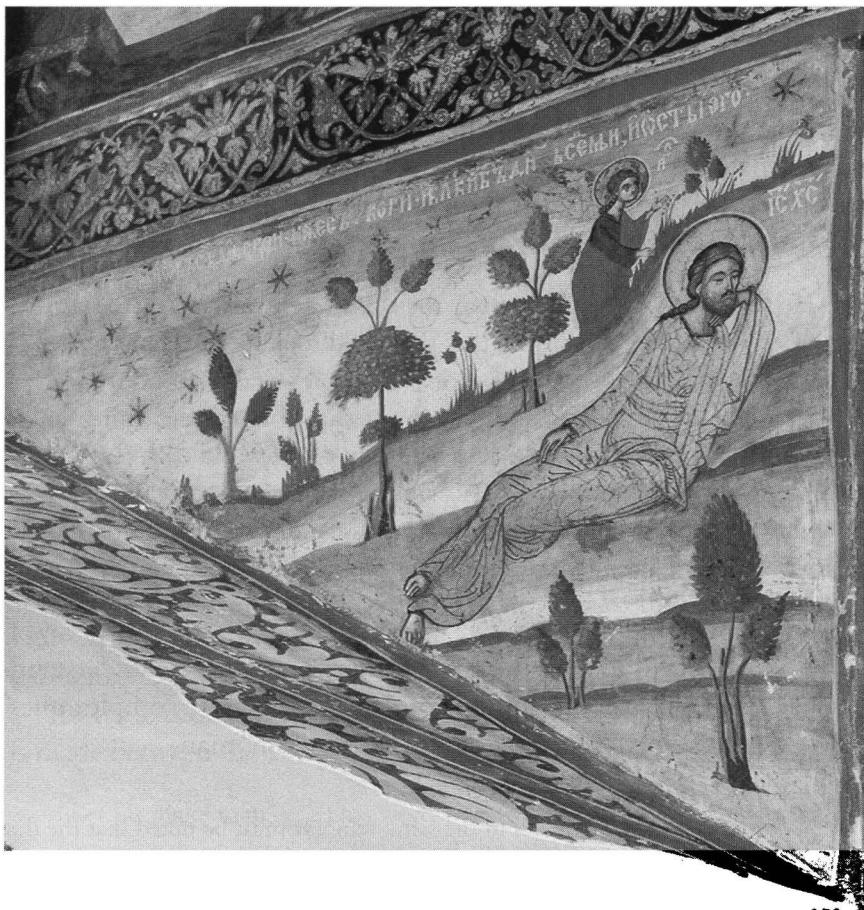
Of this, God’s “sabbath” rest from creation, St. John Chrysostom writes:

The Divine Scripture indicates here that God rested from His works; but in the Gospel Christ says: “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). In comparing these utterances, is there not a contradiction to be found in them? May it not be so; in the words of the Divine Scripture there is no contradiction whatever. When the Scripture here says: “God rested from all His works,” it thereby instructs us that on the Seventh Day He ceased to create and to bring out of non-existence into existence; but when Christ says: “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,” it thereby indicates to us His uninterrupted Providence, and it calls “work” the preservation of what exists, the giving to it of continuance (of existence) and the governance of it at all times. Otherwise, how could the universe exist, if a higher hand did not govern and order everything visible and the human race?<sup>53</sup>

Viewing the marvel of what happens every day in what we have become accustomed to call “nature”—the development, for example, of a fully mature plant, animal, or even human being from a tiny seed—we cannot help but see the continuous creative activity of God. But this is not at all the same as the Creation of the Six Days, the original bringing into being of everything there is. The first chapter of Genesis describes this unique and unrepeatable creation.

Being accustomed to the “working” of God in our present world, we can scarcely conceive of that other kind of “work” which He did in the Six Days. The world, then, while perfect and fully formed, was still

## THE SIX DAYS (DAY BY DAY)



God resting on the Seventh Day from all His work.  
*Interior fresco from Sucevita Monastery, Moldavia, Romania, 1595–1596.*

“new.” St. Gregory the Theologian emphasizes that when God wished to create Adam of the dust, “the Word … having taken a part of the newly created earth, with His immortal hands formed my image.”<sup>54</sup> St. Ephraim the Syrian teaches:

Just as the trees, the grasses, the animals, birds and man were at the same time both old and young: old in the appearance of their members and structures, young in the time of their creation; so also the

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

moon was at the same time both old and young: young because it was just created, old because it was full as on the fifteenth day.<sup>55\*</sup>

St. Ephraim<sup>56</sup> and other Fathers emphasize this newness by stating their belief that the world was created in the spring. St. Ambrose ties this together with the fact that among the Hebrews the year began in the spring:

He created heaven and earth at the time when the months began, from which time it is fitting that the world took its rise. Then there was the mild temperature of spring, a season suitable for all things. Consequently, the year, too, has the stamp of a world coming to birth.... In order to show that the creation of the world took place in the spring, Scripture says: "This month shall be to you the beginning of months, it is for you the first in the months of the year" (Ex. 12:2), calling the first month the springtime. It was fitting that the beginning of the year be the beginning of generation.<sup>57</sup>

Now, after this look at the Holy Fathers' very realistic understanding of the Six Days of Creation, let us turn to the more complex question of the making of the crown of God's creation, man.

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\* St. Bede the Venerable writes in the same vein: "It must be noted that the first shoots of the trees and plants did not come from seed, but they sprang forth from the earth; for the earth, which appeared dry in accordance with the command of the Creator, suddenly was beautified with plants and arrayed with flowering groves, and fruits of every type continuously came forth from the seeds they bear. It was fitting that in the beginning, whatever the form of each thing, it came forth according to the command of God as mature; in the same manner it must be believed that man, for whom all things on earth had been created, was fashioned in a mature form, that is, as a youthful man" (*Commentary on Genesis* 1:10–13, ACT, pp. 121–22).

This teaching—that God's first creations were fully formed, with the appearance of age, having no need of generation or growth—was used by St. John Chrysostom as a demonstration of God's power to bring about the general resurrection at the end of the world. "[God] took earth ... and made man," he said; "no pangs of travail preceded" the coming-into-being of the irrational creatures, and "no rains came down" to facilitate the fashioning of the plants. "This is more inexplicable than the resurrection.... With God nothing is difficult" (*Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 17.2, PG 61.141, NPNF 1 12, pp. 97–98 [7.3]\*).—ED.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The Creation of Man*

(Genesis 1:26–31, 2:4–7)

**1:26–27** *Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

We have seen that the Creation of the Six Days is the work of the Holy Trinity, and in particular that the Father commands: “Let there be!” and the Son creates.

In the creation of man, however, a special consultation, as it were, is made between the Persons of the Trinity. Of this St. Basil says:

“Let Us make man” ... This word was not yet used for any of the organized beings; there was light, and the commandment was simple: “God said, Let there be light.” The heaven was made, and there was no deliberation for the heaven.... Here, man is not yet, and there is a deliberation over man. God did not say, as for the other beings: “Let man be!” Recognize the dignity that belongs to you. He did not cause your origin by a commandment, but there was a consultation in God in order to know how to introduce into life this living being worthy of honor....

Why did God not say, “Make,” but “Let Us make man”? It is so that you might recognize the sovereignty. He desires that in bringing your attention on the Father, you would not deny the Son; He desires you to know that the Father has created by the Son and that the Son has created by the will of the Father, and that you should glorify the Father in the Son, and the Son in the Holy Spirit....



The Holy Trinity appearing to Abraham in the form of three visitors.  
*Fresco by Theophanes the Greek in the Church of the Transfiguration,  
Novgorod, Russia, 1378.*

## THE CREATION OF MAN

[But] He did not say: "And They created," so that you might not draw from this a pretext for polytheism.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, St. John Chrysostom says:

Why, when the heaven was created, was it not said: "Let Us make," but rather: Let there be heaven, let there be light, and so concerning each part of creation; but here only is there added: "Let Us make," by which is expressed counsel, deliberation, and communication with someone equal in honor? Who is it that is to be created that he is granted such honor? It is man—a great and wondrous living being, and for God more precious than all the creation.... There was counsel, deliberation, and communication, not because God has need of counsel—may this not be!—but in order by the very means of expression to show us the dignity of what is created....

And Who is it to Whom God says: "Let us make man"? It is the *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, Father of the age to come* (Is. 9:6 KJV q.v.), the Only Begotten Son of God Himself. To Him He says: "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." He did not say: "In Mine and Thine," or "in Mine and Yours," but "in Our image," indicating a single image and a single likeness.<sup>2\*</sup>

St. Gregory the Theologian speaks very poetically about the creation of man as a mixture of the higher and lower worlds that God had already created. First:

He gave being to the world of thought [i.e., the world of intellectual beings, angels], as far as I can reason on these matters, and estimate great things in my own poor language. Then, when His first Creation was in good order, He conceives a second world, material and visible; and this a system of earth and sky and all that is in the midst

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\* On the counsel or deliberation of the Persons of the Holy Trinity in making man, see also St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 62, 128; St. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 2.18; St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.Preface.4, 4.20.1; Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus, *Questions on Genesis* 19.2; St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 3; and St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Against Julian* 29.—ED.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

of them; an admirable creation indeed when we look at the fair form of every part, but yet more worthy of admiration when we consider the harmony and unison of the whole, and how each part fits in with every other in fair order.... This was to show that He could call into being not only a nature akin to Himself [i.e., the angelic, invisible world], but also one altogether alien to Him. For akin to Deity are those natures which are intellectual, and only to be comprehended by mind; but all of which sense can take cognizance are utterly alien to It; and of these the furthest removed from It are all those which are entirely destitute of soul and power of motion.

Mind, then, and sense, thus distinguished from each other, had remained within their own boundaries, and bore in themselves the magnificence of the Creator-Word, silent praisers and thrilling heralds of His mighty work. Not yet was there any mingling of both, nor any mixture of these opposites, tokens of a greater wisdom and generosity in the creation of natures; nor as yet were the whole riches of goodness made known. Now the Creator-Word, determining to exhibit this, and to produce a single living being out of both (the invisible and the visible creation, I mean) fashions man; and taking a body from already existing matter, and placing in it a breath taken from Himself (which the Word knew to be an intelligent soul, and the image of God),\* as a sort of second world, great in littleness,\*\* He placed him on the earth, a new angel, a mingled worshipper, fully initiated into the visible creation, but only partially into the intellectual; king of all upon earth, but subject to the King above; earthly and heavenly; temporal and yet immortal; visible and yet intellectual; halfway between greatness and lowness; in one person combining spirit and flesh; spirit because of the favor bestowed on him, flesh on account of the height to which he had been raised; the one that he might continue to live and glorify his benefactor, the other that he might suffer, and by suffering be put in remembrance,

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\* St. Maximus the Confessor expounds on the above teaching of St. Gregory the Theologian, observing that “our progenitor Adam came into being in a secret way”; see St. Maximus, *Ambigua* 42, PPS 25, p. 88.—ED.

\*\* Or, “as a sort of second world, a great one within a small one (*ἐν μικρῷ μέγαν*)” (SC 358.124).—ED.

## THE CREATION OF MAN

and be corrected if he became proud in his greatness; a living creature, trained here and then moved elsewhere; and to complete the mystery, deified by its inclination to God.<sup>3</sup>

What is this image of God? Different Holy Fathers have emphasized different aspects of the image of God in man: some have mentioned man's dominion over the lower creation (which is mentioned specifically in the text of Genesis); others, his reason; still others, his freedom.\* St. Gregory of Nyssa sums up the meaning of the image of God most concisely:

He creates man for no other reason than that He is good; and being such, and having this as His reason for entering upon the creation of our nature, He would not exhibit the power of this goodness in an imperfect form, giving our nature some one of the things at His disposal, and grudging it a share in another: but the perfect form of goodness is here to be seen by His both bringing man into being from nothing, and fully supplying him with all good gifts. But since the list of individual good gifts is a long one, it is out of the question to apprehend it numerically. The language of Scripture therefore expresses it concisely by a comprehensive phrase, in saying that man was made "in the image of God": for this is the same as to say that He made human nature participant in all good; for if the Deity is the

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\* St. Irenaeus speaks of the "image of God" in a Christological light. As he makes clear, while man was created *in* the image of God (Gen. 1:26), the Word of God *is* the image of God; and when this invisible Word became flesh in Christ, "He showed forth the image truly" (*Against Heresies* 5.16.2, ANF 1, p. 544). St. Basil the Great also speaks of the Son as the image of the Father, and adds that the Son and Father have one and the same image: "Father and Son have by absolute necessity the same form, but the form is here understood as becomes the Divine, not in bodily shape, but in the proper qualities of Godhead.... To Whom does He [God the Father] say, 'in Our image,' to Whom if it is not to Him Who is 'the brightness of His glory and the express image of His Person' (Heb. 1:3), 'the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15)? It is then to His living image, to Him Who has said 'I and My Father are one' (John 10:30), 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father' (John 14:9), that God says 'Let Us make man in Our image.' Where is the unlikeness in these Beings Who have only one image?" (*Hexaemeron* 9.6, NPNF 2 8, p. 106).—ED.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

fullness of good, and this is His image, then the image finds its resemblance to the Archetype in being filled with all good.<sup>4</sup>

What is the difference between the “image” and the “likeness” of God in man? The Holy Fathers explain that the image is given to us in full and cannot be lost; the likeness, however, was given in the beginning only potentially, and man himself was to work on attaining its perfection. St. Basil the Great teaches:

“Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.” We possess the one by creation, we acquire the other by free will. In the first structure it is given us to be born in the image of God; by free will there is formed in us the being in the likeness of God.... “Let Us make man in Our image”: Let him possess by creation what is in the image, but let him also become according to the likeness. God has given the power for this; if He had created you also in the likeness, where would your privilege be? Why have you been crowned? And if the Creator had given you everything, how would the Kingdom of Heaven have opened for you? But it is proper that one part is given you, while the other has been left incomplete: this is so that you might complete it yourself and might be worthy of the reward which comes from God.<sup>5\*</sup>

In the very passage of Genesis which describes the creation of man, it is said that he was created “male and female.”\*\* Is this distinction,

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\* The distinction between the image and likeness of God in man is discussed in several passages of *The Philokalia*. See, for example, St. Diadochus of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination* 4, 78, 89, *Philokalia* 1, pp. 253, 278, 288; St. Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Texts on Love* 3.25, *Philokalia* 2, pp. 86–87; idem, *On the Lord’s Prayer*, *Philokalia* 2, p. 294; Nicetas Stethatos, *On Spiritual Knowledge* 8, *Philokalia* 4, p. 141; and St. Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science* 39, 64, *Philokalia* 4, pp. 363, 376.—ED.

\*\* Christ Himself quoted this passage from Genesis. In Mark 10:6 He says: “But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.” His words “from the beginning of the creation,” it may be noted, contradict the modern secular notion that there were billions of years of earth history before the appearance of human beings (see also the words of Christ quoted on p. 298n below).—ED.

## THE CREATION OF MAN

then, part of the image of God? St. Gregory of Nyssa explains that the Scripture refers here to a *twofold* creation of man:

That which was made “in the image” is one thing, and that which is now manifested in wretchedness is another. “God created man,” it says; “in the image of God He created him.” There is an end of the creation of that which was made “in the image”: then it makes a resumption of the account of creation, and says, “male and female created He them.” I presume that everyone knows that this is a departure from the Prototype: for “in Christ Jesus,” as the Apostle says, “there is neither male nor female” (Gal. 3:28). Yet the phrase declares that man is thus divided.

Thus the creation of our nature is in a sense twofold: one made like to God, one divided according to this distinction: for something like this the passage darkly conveys by its arrangement, where it first says, “God created man, in the image of God He created him,” and then, adding to what has been said, “male and female He created them”—a thing which is alien from our conceptions of God.

I think that by these words Holy Scripture conveys to us a great and lofty doctrine; and the doctrine is this. While two natures—the Divine and incorporeal nature, and the irrational life of brutes—are separated from each other as extremes, human nature is the mean between them [this is similar to the idea of St. Gregory the Theologian we have already quoted]: for in the compound nature of man we may behold a part of each of the natures I have mentioned—of the Divine, the rational and intelligent element, which does not admit the distinction of male and female; of the irrational, our bodily form and structure, divided into male and female: for each of these elements is certainly to be found in all that partakes of human life. That the intellectual element, however, precedes the other,\* we learn as from one who gives in order an account of the making of man; and we learn also that his community

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\* “Precedes,” that is, in an ontological rather than a chronological sense. On the instantaneous creation of man, see pp. 218–19, 483–85 below.—ED.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

and kindred with the irrational is for man a provision for reproduction....

He Who brought all things into being and fashioned man as a whole by His own will to the Divine image ... saw beforehand by His all-seeing power the failure of their will to keep a direct course to what is good, and its consequent declension from the angelic life. In order that the multitude of human souls might not be cut short by its fall ... He formed for our nature that contrivance for increase which befits those who had fallen into sin, implanting in mankind, instead of the angelic majesty of nature, that animal and irrational mode by which they now succeed one another.<sup>6\*</sup>

Thus the image of God, which, as the Holy Fathers teach, is to be found in the soul and not the body of man,\*\* has nothing to do with the division into male and female. In God's *idea* of man, one might say—man as he will be in the Kingdom of Heaven—there is neither

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\* That is, the whole sexual function [in man] is seen to be taken from the animal creation. It was not meant to be that way in the beginning.—AUTH.

\*\* Some of the Holy Fathers—St. Justin Martyr (*On the Resurrection—Fragments* 7), St. Irenaeus of Lyons (*Against Heresies* 5.6.1–2), and St. Epiphanius of Salamis (*Panarion* 70.3)—state that the “image of God” refers to the whole man. However, the vast majority of Holy Fathers teach that the “image of God” refers to man’s soul, or, more particularly, to the highest faculty of the soul: the *nous* (*νοῦς*). Many of them categorically deny that the “image” refers to the body. Thus, for example, Nicetas Stethatos writes: “Only in ignorance would one claim that man is created in the image of God with respect to the organic structure of his body. He is in the image by virtue of the spiritual nature of his *nous*” (*On Spiritual Knowledge* 4, *Philokalia* 4, pp. 139–40). St. Gregory Palamas likewise writes: “To know that we have been created in God’s image prevents us from deifying even the noetic world. ‘Image’ here refers not to the body but to the nature of the *nous*” (*Topics of Natural and Theological Science* 27, *Philokalia* 4, p. 357). St. John Damascene and St. Gregory Palamas make a further distinction in this teaching, which may point to a deeper unity between those who say the “image” refers to the whole man and those who say it refers to the soul. According to Sts. John and Gregory, while the “image of God” refers to the soul, human beings are more in the image of God than are angels, because the human soul governs, sustains and gives life to the body just as God does with regard to His creation (St. John Damascene, *On the Two Wills in Christ* 16, 30, PTS 22, pp. 199, 216; St. Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science* 38–40, *Philokalia* 4, pp. 362–64).—ED.

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male nor female; but God, foreknowing man's fall, made this division which is an inseparable part of man's earthly existence.\*

However, the reality of sexual life did not come about before the fall of man.\*\* St. John Chrysostom, commenting on the passage, "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived" (Gen. 4:1)—which occurred after the fall—says:

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\* Besides St. Gregory of Nyssa (as quoted above) and St. John Damascene (see p. 204 below), Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus (*Questions on Genesis* 37.2) and St. Maximus the Confessor (*Ambigua* 41) taught that the division between male and female human beings was made by God in foreknowledge of the fall.

Speaking of the saving work of Christ, St. Maximus says that the God-man "has done away with the difference and division [διαφοράν τε καὶ διαιρεσίν] of nature into male and female, which human nature in no way needed for generation.... Instead of men and women He has shown us as properly and truly to be simply human beings, thoroughly transfigured in accordance with Him, and bearing His intact and completely unadulterated image, touched by no trace at all of corruption" (*Ambigua* 41, PG 91.1309A, 1309D–1312A, in Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, pp. 159–60\*). From this one may surmise that the "difference and division" between male and female will not exist in the state beyond the general resurrection. At the same time, however, the experience and worship of the Church would seem to indicate that human beings will bear some kind of "imprint" of maleness or femaleness in that state, since the incarnate Son of God and His Most Holy Mother—as the only ones already in their fully glorified, spiritual bodies, beyond the resurrection (see St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 37.8)—are regarded by the Church as still in some sense man and woman. One should be careful not to try to define this point too precisely, since the Scriptural-Patristic testimony of the Church does not elaborate on it. St. Gregory of Nyssa, relating the teaching of his sister St. Macrina, said that we are not now given to know what will become of each of our bodily members and organs (including sexual organs) in the state beyond the general resurrection, when they are no longer needed. "The true explanation of all these questions," he writes, "is still stored up in the hidden treasure-rooms of Wisdom, and will not come to the light until that moment when we shall be taught the mystery of the resurrection by the reality of it; and then there will be no more need of phrases to explain the things which we now hope for. Just as many questions might be started for debate among people sitting up at night as to the kind of thing that sunshine is, and then the simple appearing of it in all its beauty would render any verbal description superfluous, so every calculation that tries to arrive conjecturally at the future state will be reduced to nothingness by the object of our hopes, when it comes upon us" (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*, NPNF 2 5, p. 464).—ED.

\*\* On this subject, see also pp. 275n, 694–95, 721–22 below.—ED.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

After the disobedience, after the banishment from Paradise, then it was that married life began. Before the disobedience, the first people lived like angels, and there was no talk of cohabitation. And how could this be, when they were free of bodily needs? Thus, in the beginning life was virginal; but when, because of the carelessness (of the first people) disobedience appeared and sin entered the world, virginity fled away from them, since they had become unworthy of such a great good, and in its place there entered into effect the law of married life.<sup>7</sup>

And St. John Damascene writes:

Virginity was practiced in Paradise.... After the fall,... to keep the race from dwindling and being destroyed by death, marriage was devised, so that by the begetting of children the race of men might be preserved.

But they may ask: What, then, does “male and female” mean, and “increase and multiply”? To which we shall reply that the “increase and multiply” does not mean increasing by the marriage union exclusively, because if they had kept the commandment unbroken forever, God could have increased the race by some other means.\* But, since God, Who knows all things before they come to be, saw by His foreknowledge how they were to fall and be condemned to death, He made provision beforehand by creating them male and female and commanding them to increase and multiply.<sup>8</sup>

In this as in other respects, as we shall see later, man—like the rest of the creation—before the fall was in a state different from that after the fall, even though there is a continuity between these two states provided by God’s foreknowledge of the fall.

It should not be thought, however, that any of the Holy Fathers looked upon marriage as a “necessary evil” or denied that it is a state blessed by God. They regard it as a good thing in our present state of

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\* This teaching is found in the writings of other Holy Fathers. See pp. 291, 291n, 494–95n, 721–22, 721n, 722n below.—ED.

## THE CREATION OF MAN

sin, but it is a good thing that is second to the higher state of virginity in which Adam and Eve lived before their fall, and which is shared even now by those who have followed the counsel of the Apostle Paul to be “even as I am” (1 Cor. 7:7–8). St. Gregory of Nyssa, the very Father who teaches so clearly the origin of marriage in our kinship with the beasts, also defends the institution of marriage in the clearest fashion. Thus, in his treatise *On Virginity*, he writes:

Let no one think that we deprecate marriage as an institution. We are well aware that it is not a stranger to God’s blessing.... But our view of marriage is this: that, while the pursuit of heavenly things should be a man’s first care, yet if he can use the advantages of marriage with sobriety and moderation, he need not despise this way of serving the state.... Marriage is the last stage of our separation from the life that was led in Paradise; marriage is the first thing to be left; it is the first station, as it were, for our departure to Christ.<sup>9</sup>

*1:28 And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.*

“Be fruitful and multiply” are the very words already addressed by God to the creatures of the water (Gen. 1:22) and indicate man’s kinship with the lower creation and, through his fall, with their mode of sexual generation.\* But there is also a deeper meaning to these words. St. Basil writes:

There are two kinds of increase: that of the body, and that of the soul. The increase of the soul is the development of knowledge with

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\* As St. John Damascene says in the above-cited quotation (p. 204), the command that man “be fruitful and multiply” refers in one sense to the means of increasing the human race that God would have employed if man had not fallen, and in another sense it is as an expression of God’s foreknowledge of the sexual procreation that would be introduced into human life through the fall. (On this, see also Blessed Theodoret, *Questions on Genesis* 37.2, LEC 1, p. 83.) This interpretation is complemented by that of St. Basil, which Fr. Seraphim presents below.—ED.

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the aim of perfection; the increase of the body is the development from smallness to normal stature.

To the animals deprived of reason He therefore said “increase” according to bodily development, in the sense of completing nature; but to us He said “increase” according to the interior Man, in the line of progress that leads to God. This is what Paul did, stretching out towards that which is ahead, forgetting that which he leaves behind (Phil. 3:13). Such is the increase in spiritual things....

“Multiply”: This blessing concerns the Church. Let the Divine word not be limited to a single individual, but let the Gospel of salvation be preached throughout the earth. “Multiply”: to whom is this order addressed?—To those who give birth according to the Gospel....

Thus, these words apply equally well to the animals deprived of reason, but they acquire a particular meaning when we have to do with the being who is in the image with which we have been honored.<sup>10</sup>

Man is to “have dominion,” also, not only over the external creation, but also over the beast-like passions that lurk within him. St. Basil writes:

You have dominion over every kind of savage beast. But, you will say, do I have savage beasts within me? Yes, many of them. It is even an immense crowd of savage beasts that you carry within yourself. Do not take this as an insult. Is not anger a small wild beast when it barks in your heart? Is it not more savage than the first dog that comes? And is not the trickery that crouches in a treacherous soul more ferocious than the bear of the caverns?... What kind of savage beast do we not have within us?... You were created to have dominion; you are the master of the passions, the master of savage beasts, the master of serpents, the master of birds.... Be master of the thoughts within you in order to become master of all beings. Thus, the power which was given us through living beings prepares us to exercise dominion over ourselves.<sup>11</sup>

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The beast-like passions are within us owing to our kinship with the animal creation through our fall. St. Gregory of Nyssa writes:

As brute life first entered into the world, and man, for the reason already mentioned, took something of their nature (I mean the mode of generation), he accordingly took at the same time a share of the other attributes contemplated in that nature; for the likeness of man to God is not found in anger, nor is pleasure a mark of the superior nature; cowardice also, and boldness, and the desire of gain, and the dislike of loss, and all the like, are far removed from that stamp which indicates Divinity. These attributes, then, human nature took to itself from the side of the brutes.<sup>12</sup>

This is a very profound teaching. The people who believe in evolutionary ideas say, “Man comes from monkeys; therefore, you’re an animal-like creature.” The Holy Fathers, however, say that we are a mingled creation, part heavenly, part earthly. In the earthly side, God made allowance for the animal-like mode of reproduction; and thus we see how animalistic we are when we let passions control us. We have these “animals” within ourselves, but we also have the heavenly side, to which we are striving to get back.

*1:29–30 And God said, Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to every thing that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food. And it was so.*

Here we are told that in the beginning, when the earth and all its creatures were still new and man had not fallen, not only men, but even the beasts, were given only green plants for food; the beasts were not meant to be, and in the beginning were not, carnivorous. Of this St. Basil says:

Let the Church neglect nothing: everything is a law. God did not say: “I have given you the fishes for food, I have given you the cattle,

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

the reptiles, the quadrupeds." It is not for this that He created, says the Scripture. In fact, the first legislation allowed the use of fruits, for we were still judged worthy of Paradise.

What is the mystery which is concealed for you under this?

To you, to the wild animals and the birds, says the Scripture, fruits, vegetation, and herbs [are given].... We see, however, many wild animals who do not eat fruits. What fruit does the panther accept to nourish itself? What fruit can the lion satisfy himself with?

Nevertheless, these beings, submitting to the law of nature, were nourished by fruits. But when man changed his way of life and departed from the limit which had been assigned him, the Lord, after the Flood, knowing that men were wasteful, allowed them the use of all foods: "Eat all that in the same way as edible plants" (cf. Gen. 9:3). By this allowance, the other animals also received the liberty to eat them.

Since then the lion is a carnivore, since then also vultures watch for carrion. For the vultures were not yet looking over the earth at the very moment when the animals were born; in fact, nothing of what had received designation or existence had yet died so that the vultures might eat them. Nature had not yet divided, for it was in all its freshness; hunters did not capture, for such was not yet the practice of men; the beasts, for their part, did not yet tear their prey, for they were not carnivores.... But all followed the way of the swans, and all grazed on the grass of the meadow....

Such was the first creation, and such will be the restoration after this. Man will return to his ancient constitution in rejecting malice, a life weighed down with cares, the slavery of the soul with regard to daily worries. When he has renounced all this, he will return to that paradisal life which was not enslaved to the passions of the flesh, which is free, the life of closeness to God, a partaker of the life of the angels.<sup>13\*</sup>

This life of the original creation, it should be noted, is not the life of Paradise, into which man has not yet been led; it is the life of the

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\* On the absence of carnivory in the first-created world, see also pp. 453–55, 706–8 below.—Ed.

## THE CREATION OF MAN

earth outside of Paradise, which God has already blessed as man's dwelling-place after his fall. St. Ephraim the Syrian writes of this:

God blessed our first ancestors on the earth, because, even before they sinned He prepared the earth for their dwelling; for, before they sinned, God knew that they would sin.... He blessed [man] before settling him in Paradise, on the earth, so that by the blessing, which was preceded by His goodness, He might weaken the power of the curse which soon struck the earth.<sup>14</sup>

In the beginning, therefore, before man's fall, the whole earth was like a kind of Paradise. St. Symeon the New Theologian teaches:

God, in the beginning, before He planted Paradise and gave it over to the first-created ones, in five days set in order the earth and what is on it, and the heaven and what is in it. And on the Sixth Day He created Adam and placed him as lord and king of the whole visible creation. Then there was not yet Paradise. But this world was from God as a kind of Paradise, although it was material and sensuous.... God gave it over to the authority of Adam and all his descendants, as the Divine Scripture says (Gen. 1:26–30).... God gave over to man at the beginning this whole world as a kind of Paradise.... Adam was made with a body that was incorrupt, although material and not yet spiritual, and was placed by the Creator God as an immortal king over an incorrupt world, not only over Paradise, but also over the whole of creation which was under the heavens.... This whole creation in the beginning was incorrupt and was created by God in the manner of Paradise. But later it was subjected by God to corruption, and submitted to the futility of men.<sup>15</sup>

That is a remarkable view of the original creation.

*1:31 And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.*

The first chapter of Genesis is entirely devoted to the Six Days of Creation. In chapter 2, the creation of man is described in more detail.

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One might say that chapter 1 describes the creation of *humanity*, both in the exalted sense as God's image, and in its divided, earthly aspect as male and female; while in chapter 2 the specific creation of the *first man* Adam and the *first woman* Eve is set forth. Some of the other creations of the Six Days are also mentioned in chapter 2, but not in the strict chronological order of the first chapter. We should keep this in mind to avoid the elementary mistakes of rationalist critics who find "contradictions" between these two chapters and suppose there must be different authors of them.\*

**2:4–6** *These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth,\*\* and watered the whole face of the ground* (KJV).

This is a brief description of the state of the world before the appearance of man, emphasizing that without God there would have been nothing, that He brought everything into being out of nothing. St. John Chrysostom comments on this passage:

When [the Scripture] speaks of heaven and earth, it understands everything together that is in heaven and on earth. Therefore, just as in the account of the creatures [in chapter 1] it does not speak about all of them in order, but having mentioned the most important, it does not relate to us about each one in detail—so also this whole book, although it contains in itself much else, it calls the book of "the generations of the heaven and of the earth," allowing us to conclude from the mention of them that in this book is to be included everything visible that is in heaven and on earth.... The Holy Spirit shows ... what occurred first and what afterwards, and likewise the fact that the earth produced its seeds by the word and command of the Lord

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\* On this, see p. 410, 410n below.—ED.

\*\* LXX: "a spring came up from the ground."—ED.

## THE CREATION OF MAN

and began to give birth without needing either the cooperation of the sun, nor the moisture of rain, nor the tilling of man, who was not yet created.... This [passage] means that what had not existed previously received existence, and what had not been appeared suddenly by His word and command.... All this is so that we might know that the earth, for the germination of its seeds, had no need of the cooperation of other elements, but the command of the Creator was sufficient for it.<sup>16</sup>

*2:7 Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.\**

Here we are given as much as we can know of the *how* of man's creation. There can be no doubt that the Holy Fathers understood by "dust" the literal dust of the earth; but when they speak of the "hands" of God which "took" this dust, they mean to emphasize the great care of God and His direct action in this work.\*\* Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus writes:

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\* LXX: "And God formed man of dust from the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul."—ED.

\*\* St. Irenaeus also points out the connection between God's creation of man from the dust and Christ's healing of the blind man by means of earth (John 9:6): "To that man who had been blind from his birth, He gave sight, not by means of a word, but by an outward action; doing this not without a purpose, or because it so happened, but that He might show forth the hand of God, that which at the beginning had molded man. And therefore, when His disciples asked Him for what cause the man had been born blind, whether for his own or his parents' fault, He replied, 'Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him' (John 9:3). Now the work of God is the fashioning of man. For, as Scripture says, he made man by a kind of process: 'And the Lord took clay from the earth, and formed man' (cf. Gen 2:7). Wherefore also the Lord spat on the ground and made clay, and rubbed it on the eyes [of the blind man], indicating the original fashioning of man—how it was effected—and manifesting the hand of God to those who can understand by what hand man was formed out of the dust" (*Against Heresies* 5.15.2, SC 153.204–7, ANF 1, p. 543\*). (This parallel was later brought out in Patristic commentaries on the Gospel of St. John, e.g., St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John* 56.2; St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St.*

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When we hear in the account of Moses that God took *dust* from the earth and formed man, and we seek out the meaning of this utterance, we discover in it the special good disposition of God towards the human race. For the great Prophet notes, in his description of the creation, that God created all the other creatures by His word, while man He created with His own hands.... We do not say that the Divinity has hands ... but we affirm that every one of these expressions indicates a greater care on God's part for man than for the other creatures.<sup>17</sup>

St. Basil states that this verse emphasizes how different in his origin is man from the animals:

Above, the text says that God created; here it says *how* God created. If the verse had simply said that God created, you could have believed that He created [man] as He did the beasts, the wild animals, the plants, the grass. This is why, to avoid your placing him in the class of wild animals, the Divine word has made known the particular art which God has used for you: God took of the “dust from the earth.”<sup>18</sup>

The same Father tells of the difference between the “creation” of man and his “fashioning”:

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*John 6.1; Blessed Theophylact of Ohrid and Bulgaria, Explanation of the Holy Gospel according to St. John 9.6–7.)*

Elsewhere, St. Irenaeus reveals yet another Christological parallel—God’s fashioning of Adam from virgin soil, he says, prefigures Christ’s birth from a virgin: “And as the protoplast himself, Adam, had his substance and formation from untilled and as yet virgin soil—for God had not yet sent rain, and man had not tilled the ground’ (cf. Gen. 2:5)—and was formed by the hand of God, that is, by the Word of God, for ‘all things were made through Him’ (John 1:3), and the Lord took dust from the earth and formed man, so did He Who is the Word, recapitulating Adam in Himself, rightly receive a birth from Mary, who was as yet a virgin, enabling Him to gather up Adam into Himself” (*Against Heresies* 3.21.10, SC 211.428–29, ANF 1, p. 454\*). (St. Irenaeus gives the same teaching in *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 32, as do St. Ephraim in *Hymns on the Nativity* 1.16, St. Maximus in *Ambigua* 42, and St. Photius in *Homily 5: On the Annunciation* 7.)—ED.

## THE CREATION OF MAN



The creation of Adam.

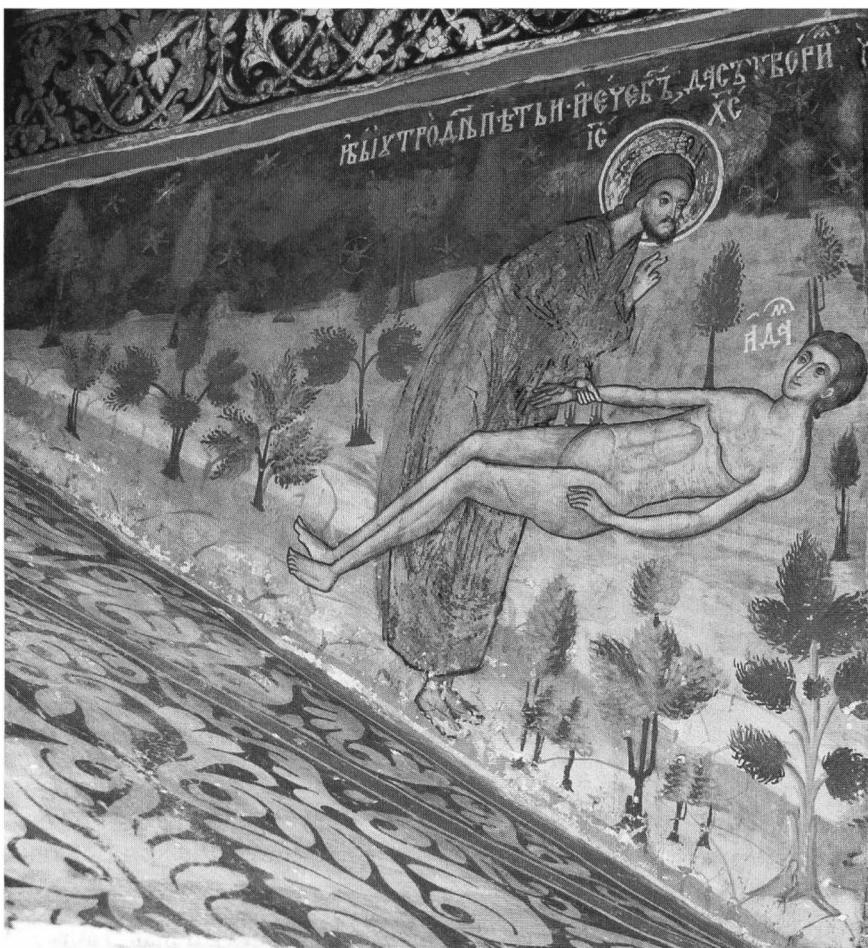
*Detail of a Russian icon, ca. 1570, Solvychegodsk Museum of History and Art,  
Arkhangelsk Oblast, Russia.*

God *created* the inward man, and *fashioned* the outward man. Fashioning is suited to the clay, and creation to that which is in the image. Thus, the flesh was fashioned, but the soul was created.<sup>19</sup>

The creation of man indicates both his greatness and his nothingness:

God took “dust from the earth” and “formed man.” In this word I have discovered the two affirmations that man is nothing and that man is great. If you consider nature alone, he is nothing and has no value; but if you regard the honor with which he has been treated, man is something great.... If you consider what it is that [God]

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The creation of Adam.

*Interior fresco from Sucevita Monastery, Moldavia, Romania, 1595–1596.*

took, what is man? But if you reflect on the One Who fashioned, what a great thing is man! Thus at the same time he is nothing because of the material, and great because of the honor (St. Basil).<sup>20</sup>

In the usual interpretation of the Holy Fathers, what was “breathed” into man was his *soul*. St. John Chrysostom writes:

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"And God formed man of dust from the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul"! Moses used such a crude manner of speaking because he was speaking to people who could not listen to him otherwise, as we are able to do; and also to show us that it was pleasing to God's love of mankind to make this thing created out of earth a participant of the rational nature of the soul, through which this living creature was manifest as excellent and perfect. "And He breathed into his face the breath of life": that is, the inbreathing communicated to the one created out of earth the power of life, and thus the nature of the soul was formed. Therefore Moses added: "And man became a living soul"; that which was created out of dust, having received the inbreathing, the breath of life, "became a living soul." What does "a living soul" mean? An active soul, which has the members of the body as the implements of its activities, submissive to its will.<sup>21</sup>

St. Seraphim of Sarov has a rather different interpretation of this passage of Scripture; in his "Conversation with Motovilov" he states that what was made from the dust of the earth was the entire human nature—body, soul, and spirit ("spirit" being the higher part of the soul)—and that what was breathed into this nature was the grace of the Holy Spirit.\* This is a different perspective on the creation of man (found in few other Fathers), and does not really contradict the usual interpretation that it was the soul that was breathed into man; those who hold the latter view also believe that man was created in the grace of God.\*\*

St. Gregory the Theologian speaks of the exalted nature of man, the

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\* See pp. 479–86 below.—ED.

\*\* In the *Homilies* of St. Gregory Palamas, we can find evidence of the inner harmony of these two views. In some places St. Gregory says that God breathed Adam's soul into him at his creation (*Homilies* 6.10, 18.2), and in other places he says that God's Spirit was breathed into him (*Homilies* 17.14, 58.8, 60.3). In yet another place, the Saint says that both were breathed into Adam at the same time: "From the beginning man was not just a creation of God, but also a son in the Spirit, which was given to him at the same time as his soul, through God's quickening breath (Gen. 2:7)" (*Homily* 57.2, trans. Christopher Veniamin, p. 469).—ED.

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highest part of whose nature comes not from earth but directly from God:

The soul is the breath of God, and while being heavenly, it endures being mixed with what is of the dust. It is a light enclosed in a cave, but still it is divine and inextinguishable.... The Word spoke, and having taken a part of the newly created earth, with His immortal hands formed my image and imparted to it His life; because He sent into it the Spirit, which is a ray of the invisible Divinity.<sup>22</sup>

Such expressions, however, should not lead us to the false opinion that the soul itself is Divine, or a part of God. St. John Chrysostom writes about this:

Certain senseless ones, being drawn away by their own conceptions, without thinking of anything in a God-befitting manner, and without paying any attention to the adaptation of the expressions (of Scripture), dare to say that the soul has proceeded from the Essence of God. O frenzy! O folly! How many paths of perdition has the devil opened up for those who will to serve him!...\* Thus, when you

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\* The Holy Fathers also make this point with regard to the whole of creation: that is, not only the soul of man but all of creation was brought into existence from non-existence, not from the Essence or Nature of God; therefore, creation does not have the same essence as God, and it is not a part of God. In this connection, the Fathers emphasize the difference between the pre-eternal, beginningless begetting of the Son of God from the Father—which, in the words of St. John Damascene, is “the work of [God’s] Nature and a producing out of His own Essence”—and God’s creation of the world, which has a beginning in time and is “the work of [God’s] will.” “For the creation,” writes St. John Damascene, “even though it originated later, is nevertheless not derived from the Essence of God, but is brought into existence out of nothing by His will and power, and change does not touch God’s Nature. For ‘begetting’ means that the begetter produces out of his essence offspring similar in essence. But ‘creation’ and ‘making’ mean that the creator and maker produces from that which is external, and not out of his own essence, a creation of an absolutely dissimilar nature” (*On the Orthodox Faith* 1.8, PTS 12.20–21, NPNF 2 9, p. 7b\*).

Likewise, St. Gregory of Nyssa states: “He Who made all the creation is assuredly something else besides the creation.... Who that is in any sense classed among

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hear that God “breathed into his face the breath of life,” understand that, just as He brought forth the bodiless powers, so also He was pleased that the body of man, created out of dust, should have a rational soul which could make use of the bodily members.<sup>23</sup>

There are those today who would like to use the order of man’s creation in this verse to “prove” that man “evolved” from lower beasts: that his body or earthly nature came first in time, and his soul or state of being in God’s grace came second. Such an interpretation is quite impossible if we accept the Patristic understanding of man’s creation.

To begin with, we have seen that in the Patristic view the “days” of creation—whatever their precise “length” may have been—were very short periods of time; that God’s work in each of the days was swift, indeed, instantaneous; that at the end of the Six Days the world was still “new” and not yet given over to corruption and death.

Secondly, the Holy Fathers themselves insist that the creation of

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Christians admits that the definition of the essence of the parts of the world, and of Him Who made the world, is the same? For my own part I shudder at the blasphemy” (*Against Eunomius* 3.1, 4.2, NPNF 2 5, pp. 136, 156). St. Gregory also makes clear that the creation is not coeval with God, but has a temporal beginning (*ibid.* 1.26, p. 71). As St. Maximus teaches, only the Uncreated *logoi* (Divine “thought-wills”) of creatures preexist in God from eternity: these are distinct from the creatures themselves, which are “brought out of non-being into being” by God in time (*Ambigua* 7, PPS 25, pp. 54–61; here, p. 54).

On the fundamental distinction between creation of the world and the begetting of the Son of God, see also St. Athanasius, *Four Discourses against the Arians* 1.20–21, 2.2, 2.21, 3.59–67; and St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* 4.8. On created nature being wholly other than Divine Nature, and on creation not being coeval with God, see also St. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 2.10; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 2.16; St. Hippolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies* 10.28–29; St. Methodius of Olympus, *Extracts from the Work on Things Created* 2–5; St. Alexander of Alexandria, *Epistle to Alexander, Bishop of Constantinople* 4, 11; St. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Councils* 10, 17, 83; idem, *On the Trinity* 5.4, 8.53, 11.8, 12.16; St. Athanasius, *Against the Heathen* 41; St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies* 49.4; St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 16.12; Blessed Augustine, *Confessions* 12.7, 12.17, 12.22, 12.28; St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus on the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity* 15; St. Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Texts on Love* 4.6; as well as p. 60n above and p. 477n below.—ED.

man is not to be understood *chronologically*; it is rather an *ontological* description that tells the *makeup* of man, but not the chronological order in which it occurred. When St. John Chrysostom states that “before” the inbreathing man was a “lifeless dummy,”<sup>24</sup> or St. Seraphim states that he was *not* a “lifeless dummy” but a living and active human being—we must understand the word “before” in the ontological sense of “without.” But the creation of man itself—both body and soul, together with the grace in which man was made—was instantaneous. The Fathers found it necessary to set forth this teaching quite explicitly because in ancient times there were two opposed but equally false teachings on this subject: one, that of the Origenists, who stated that souls “preexisted” the creation of bodies and only entered their bodies as a “fall” from a higher state; and the other, that the body preexisted the soul and was therefore of a nobler nature. St. John Damascene teaches:

From the earth He formed his body and by His own inbreathing gave him a rational and understanding soul, which last we say is the divine image.... The body and the soul were formed at the same time—not one before and the other afterwards, as the ravings of Origen would have it.<sup>25</sup>

And St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches in more detail (referring both to the original creation of man and the conception of individual men today), after refuting the opposite error of Origen:

Others, on the contrary, marking the order of the creation of man as stated by Moses, say that the soul is second to the body in order of time, since God first took dust from the earth and formed man, and then animated the being thus formed by His breath. And by this argument they prove that the flesh is more noble than the soul, that which was previously formed [more noble] than that which was afterwards infused into it.... Nor again are we in our doctrine to begin by making up man like a clay figure, and to say that the soul came into being for the sake of this; for surely in that case the intellectual nature would be shown to be less precious than the clay figure. But

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as man is one, the being consisting of soul and body, we are to suppose that the beginning of his existence is one, common to both parts, so that he should not be found to be antecedent and posterior to himself, as if the bodily element were first in point of time, and the other were a later addition.... For as our nature is conceived as twofold, according to the apostolic teaching, made up of the visible man and the hidden man, if the one came first and the other supervened, the power of Him that made us will be shown to be in some way imperfect, as not being completely sufficient for the whole task at once, but dividing the work, and busying itself with each of the halves in turn.<sup>26 \*</sup>

The idea of the “evolution” of man from a lower animal cannot be harmonized with the Patristic and Scriptural view of man’s creation, but requires a sharp break with it: If man “evolves” solely according to the laws of nature, then his rational nature, his soul, the image of God, differs not *qualitatively* but only *quantitatively* from the beasts; he is then a creature only of the earth, and there is no room for the Patristic view that he is partly of earth and partly of heaven, a “mixture” of two worlds, to use the phrase of St. Gregory the Theologian. But if, to escape such earthly thinking, a Christian evolutionist admits a Divine creation of man’s soul—“when his body was ready for it,” as some say—then he not only parts company with scientific thinkers, who will not admit “Divine” acts into their conceptual framework, but he also presents no consistent Christian outlook, mixing scientific speculations with “revealed” knowledge in a most haphazard way. In the Patristic-Scriptural view, the entire Six Days of Creation is a series of Divine acts; in the uniformitarian scientific view, the origins of things (as far back as scientists think they can be traced) are nothing but natural processes. These two views are as opposed as any two views can be, and any mixture of the two must be purely arbitrary and fanciful.

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\* St. Maximus the Confessor likewise teaches that, both in the original creation of man and in the conception of individual human beings today, the soul and body come into existence at the same time. See *Ambigua* 42, in PPS 25, pp. 87–89.—Ed.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Paradise*

(Genesis 2:8–24)

*2:8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east;\* and there he put the man whom He had formed.*

In the garden (“paradise” in Greek) where Adam dwelt before his fall, we approach a subject that is subtle and mystical, and at the same time is a necessary key to understanding the whole of Christian teaching. This Paradise, as we shall see, is not merely something that existed before the fall; it exists even now and has been visited by some while still alive on this earth; and it is also (in a somewhat different form) the goal of our whole earthly life—the blessed state to which we are striving to return and which we shall enjoy in its fullness (if we are among the saved) at the end of this fallen world.

Our knowledge of Paradise, therefore, is in a sense fuller than our knowledge of the world of the Six Days of Creation; but at the same time it is of a mystical nature that renders “precise” statements about it very difficult to make.

Let us see here what the Holy Fathers say about it.

St. Ambrose reminds us, in the first chapter of his treatise on “Paradise,” that we must be very careful in discussing the “place” of Paradise and its nature:

On approaching this subject I seem to be possessed by an unusual eagerness in my quest to clarify the facts about Paradise, its place, and its nature to those who are desirous of this knowledge. This is all the more remarkable since the Apostle did not know whether he was

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\* LXX: “And God planted a garden eastward in Eden.”—ED.

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in the body or out of the body, yet he says that he “was caught up to the third heaven” (2 Cor. 12:2). And again he says: “I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—that he was caught up into Paradise and heard secret words that man may not repeat” (2 Cor. 12:3–5).... If Paradise, then, is of such a nature that Paul alone, or one like Paul, could scarcely see it while alive, and still was unable to remember whether he saw it in the body or out of the body, and moreover, heard words that he was forbidden to reveal—if this be true, how will it be possible for us to declare the position of Paradise which we have not been able to see and, even if we had succeeded in seeing it, we would be forbidden to share this information with others? And, again, since Paul shrank from exalting himself by reason of the sublimity of the revelation, how much more ought we to strive not to be too anxious to disclose that which leads to danger by its very revelation! The subject of Paradise should not, therefore, be treated lightly.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the difficulty of speaking about it, there are certain things we can know about Paradise, as interpreted by the Holy Fathers.

First of all, it is not merely a spiritual phenomenon which may be beheld now in vision as the Apostle Paul beheld it (of which more below); it is also a part of the history of the *earth*. The Scripture and Holy Fathers teach that in the beginning, before the fall of man, Paradise was right here on earth. St. Ambrose writes:

Take note that God placed man [in Paradise] not in respect to the image of God, but in respect to the body of man. The incorporeal does not exist in a place. He placed man in Paradise, just as He placed the sun in heaven.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, St. John Chrysostom teaches:

Blessed Moses registered even the name of this place [Eden], so that those who love to speak empty words could not deceive simple listeners and say that Paradise was not on earth but in heaven, and rave

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with similar mythologies....\* As you hear that “God planted a garden eastward in Eden,” the word “plant” understand of God in a God-be-fitting way, that is, that He commanded; but regarding the following words, believe that Paradise precisely was created and in the very place where the Scripture has assigned it.... And the word “plant” let us understand as if it had been said: He commanded man to live there, so that his view of Paradise and his stay there might furnish him a great satisfaction and might arouse him to a feeling of gratitude.<sup>3</sup>

*2:9 And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

The connection of Paradise with the earth is understood by St. Ephraim in such a literal way that he specifies, in his *Commentary on Genesis*, that as a place of trees it was created on the Third Day with the rest of the vegetable creation.<sup>4</sup>

But what connection can there be between this earthly Paradise with its growing trees, and the obviously spiritual Paradise that St. Paul beheld? We may see an answer to this question in the description of Paradise by a Holy Father of the highest spiritual life, St. Gregory the Sinaite, who visited Paradise in the same state of Divine vision as St. Paul:

Eden is a place in which there was planted by God every kind of fragrant plant. It is neither completely incorruptible, nor entirely

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\* Here St. John Chrysostom was refuting the notion of Origen (*Selecta on Genesis* 29) and his followers that the Paradise mentioned in the second chapter of Genesis was located in heaven. Other Holy Fathers rejected this idea as well. Thus, for example, St. Methodius of Olympus wrote that Paradise was created as a place on earth, and that when St. Paul spoke of being caught up to the third heaven and to Paradise, he was speaking of two separate revelations (*On the Resurrection*, quoted in St. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 64.47, trans. Frank Williams, vol. 2, p. 172; see also St. Methodius, *From the Discourse on the Resurrection* 3.9, ANF 6, p. 370). To the statement “Some commentators locate Paradise in heaven,” Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus replied: “Since Holy Scripture says, ‘Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food’ (Gen. 2:9), it is quite rash to abandon the teaching of the Spirit and follow one’s own reasoning” (*Questions on Genesis* 25, LEC 1, p. 61).—ED.

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corruptible. Placed between corruption and incorruption, it is always both abundant in fruits and blossoming with flowers, both mature and immature. The mature trees and fruits are converted into fragrant earth which does not give off any odor of corruption, as do the trees of this world. This is from the abundance of the grace of sanctification which is constantly poured forth there.<sup>5</sup>

A number of cases are known in the Lives of saints and righteous people of literal fruits being brought back by those who have been lifted up to Paradise—for example, the apples which St. Euphrosynus the Cook (ninth century) brought back and which were eaten by the pious as some holy thing with a nature quite different from that of ordinary earthly fruits (*Lives of Saints*, September 11).

A striking experience of Paradise is found in the Life of St. Andrew the Fool for Christ of Constantinople (ninth century). This experience was written down in the Saint's own words by his friend Nicephorus:

Once during a terrible winter when St. Andrew lay in a city street frozen and near death, he suddenly felt a warmth within him and beheld a splendid youth with a face shining like the sun, who conducted him to Paradise and the third heaven. “By God’s will I remained for two weeks in a sweet vision.... I saw myself in a splendid and marvelous Paradise.... In mind and heart I was astonished at the unutterable beauty of the Paradise of God, and I took sweet delight walking in it. There were a multitude of gardens there, filled with tall trees which, swaying in their tips, rejoiced my eyes, and from their branches there came forth a great fragrance.... One cannot compare these trees in their beauty to any earthly tree.... In these gardens there were innumerable birds with wings golden, snow-white, and of various colors. They sat on the branches of the trees of Paradise and sang so wondrously that from the sweetness of their singing I was beside myself....<sup>6\*</sup>

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\* A similar vision of Paradise is recounted in the Life of a holy man of our own times: Elder Cleopa (Ilie) of Sihastria Monastery, Moldavia, Romania (1912–1998). See Archimandrite Ioanichie Balan, *Shepherd of Souls: The Life and Teachings of Elder Cleopa* (2000), pp. 71–72.—ED.

Therefore, Paradise, while originally a reality of this earth, akin to the nature of the world before the fall of man, is of a “material” which is different from the material of the world we know today, placed between corruption and incorruption. This exactly corresponds to the nature of man before his fall—for the “coats of skins” which he put on when banished from Paradise (as we shall see) symbolically indicate the cruder flesh which he then put on. From that time on, in his cruder state, man is no longer capable of even seeing Paradise unless his spiritual eyes are opened and he is “raised up” like St. Paul. The present “location” of Paradise, which has remained unchanged in its nature, is in this higher realm, which also seems to correspond to a literal “elevation” from the earth; indeed, some Holy Fathers state that even before the fall Paradise was in an elevated place, being “higher than all the rest of the earth” (St. John Damascene, *Orthodox Faith* 2.11; see also St. Ephraim, *Commentary on Genesis* 2).<sup>7</sup>

Concerning the two trees—one of life and one of the knowledge of good and evil—we shall speak later.

**2:10–14** *A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Cush (LXX: “Ethiopia”). And the name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.*

This passage emphasizes that Paradise before the fall was located in a definite place on earth. The Fathers forbid merely allegorical interpretations of these four rivers. Thus, St. John Chrysostom says:

Perhaps those who love to speak from their own wisdom here also will not allow that the rivers are actually rivers, nor that the waters are precisely waters, but will instill, in those who decide to listen to them, the idea that they (under the names of rivers and waters) represented something else. But I entreat you, let us not pay heed to

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these people, let us stop up our hearing against them, and let us believe the Divine Scripture.<sup>8\*</sup>

These four rivers are generally understood by the Fathers to be the Tigris, Euphrates, Nile and Danube (or, according to others, the Ganges); the area of the earthly Paradise, therefore, is in the cradle of ancient civilization. St. John Chrysostom says of this passage (in another treatise):

From this know that Paradise was not a small garden which had an insignificant area. It is watered by such a river that from its fullness come out four rivers.<sup>9</sup>

It would be fruitless to speculate how the one river of Paradise divided into four rivers which, as we know them today, have four distinct sources. The world of today is so different from the world before the fall, and even before the Flood in Noah's time, that such geographical questions are not to be traced out.

What is more difficult for our modern mentality, formed by literalistic science, to puzzle out is how the Fathers can speak without distinguishing between Paradise as a geographical location (before the fall), and Paradise as a spiritual habitation of the righteous (at the present time). Thus, St. John Chrysostom, in the same treatise just quoted, speaks of the one river of Paradise being so abundant because it was prepared also for the later Patriarchs, Prophets, and other saints (beginning with the thief on the cross—Luke 23:43) who are to inhabit Paradise.<sup>10</sup> Evidently our modern ideas have become too dualistic: we divide things too easily into “spirit vs. matter,” whereas the reality of Paradise partakes of both.

*2:15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till and to keep it.*

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\* While St. John Chrysostom here forbids reducing the rivers of Paradise to mere symbols, in another place he speaks of these actual rivers as being *also* types of the Holy Mysteries which flow forth from the altar of the Church (*Homilies on the Gospel of St. John* 46.4, FC 33, p. 470).—ED.

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In this passage, as interpreted by the Fathers, we may see something of the *spiritual* occupation of Adam in Paradise. Before the fall there was no need for a physical tilling or cultivation of Paradise; this refers to Adam's spiritual state. St. John Chrysostom writes (in a teaching identical to that of St. Ephraim, *Commentary on Genesis*):<sup>11</sup>

“To till.” What was lacking in Paradise? And even if a tiller was needed, where was the plow? Where were the other implements of agriculture? The “tilling” [or “working”] of God consisted in tilling and keeping the commandment of God, remaining faithful to the commandment.... Just as to believe in Christ is the work of God (John 6:29), so also it was a work to believe the commandment that if he touched (the forbidden tree) he would die, and if he did not touch it, he would live. The work was the keeping of the spiritual words.... “To till and to keep it,” it is said. To keep it from whom? There were no thieves, no passersby, no one of evil intent. To keep from whom? To keep it for oneself; not to lose it by transgressing the commandment; to keep Paradise for oneself, observing the commandment.<sup>12</sup>

St. Gregory the Theologian opens up a deeper understanding of this “work” of Paradise:

This being He placed in Paradise ... to till the immortal plants, by which is perhaps meant the Divine conceptions, both the simpler and the more perfect.<sup>13</sup>

And, in general, the ascetic Fathers refer the “tilling” and “keeping” to the spiritual work of prayer. Thus, St. Nilus of Sora, commenting on this interpretation by the ancient Father St. Nilus of Sinai, writes:

Now this Saint brings forth from antiquity that one should till and keep; for the Scripture says that God created Adam and placed him in Paradise to till and keep Paradise. For here this St. Nilus of Sinai calls prayer the tilling of Paradise, and the guarding against evil thoughts after prayer he calls keeping.<sup>14</sup>

And Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky, commenting in his turn on these two Holy Fathers, writes:

From these testimonies it is clear that God, having created man according to His image and likeness, conducted him into a Paradise of sweetness to till the immortal gardens, that is, the most pure, exalted, and perfect Divine thoughts, according to St. Gregory the Theologian. And this means nothing else than that he remained, as being pure in soul and heart, in contemplative, grace-filled prayer, sacredly working in the mind alone, that is, in the sweetest vision of God, and that he manfully preserved this, it being the work of Paradise, as the apple of his eye, lest it ever decrease in his soul and heart. Wherefore, great is the glory of sacred and Divine mental prayer, whose verge and summit, that is, beginning and perfection, were given to man by God in Paradise, and so it is from there that it has its beginning.<sup>15</sup>

*2:16–17 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Thou mayest freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat, for in the day that thou eatest of it thou shalt surely die.*

If one is tempted to find allegory in the account of creation and Paradise, nowhere is the temptation stronger than with regard to the two trees: one of “life” and one of “the knowledge of good and evil.” Yet the whole “realism” of the Patristic interpretation of Genesis, as well as the fact that Paradise was (and is) indeed a “garden” with material (or semi-material) trees, point to the fact that these trees were actually trees; and, as we have already seen, this very fact is emphasized by St. Gregory Palamas, speaking for St. Gregory the Theologian and other Fathers.

The account of the temptation in Paradise, therefore, is not an allegory—a spiritual lesson clothed in the tale of a garden—but an historical account of what actually happened to our first ancestors. What happened, of course, was primarily a spiritual event, just as Adam’s dwelling in Paradise was primarily a spiritual dwelling (as we shall see

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more clearly below); but the way in which this spiritual event occurred was indeed through the tasting of the fruit of a “forbidden tree.”\*

St. John Damascene well describes the double aspect, material and immaterial, of Adam’s dwelling in Paradise:

Some have imagined Paradise to have been material, while others have imagined it to have been spiritual. However, it seems to me that, just as man was created both sensitive and intellectual, so did this most sacred domain of his have the twofold aspect of being perceptible both to the senses and to the mind. For, while in his body he dwelt in this most sacred and superbly beautiful place, as we have related, spiritually he resided in a loftier and far more beautiful place. There he had the indwelling God as a dwelling place and wore Him as a glorious garment. He was wrapped about with His grace, and, like some one of the angels, he rejoiced in the enjoyment of that one most sweet fruit which is the contemplation of God, and by this he was nourished. Now, this is indeed what is fittingly called the tree of life, for the sweetness of Divine contemplation communicates a life uninterrupted by death to them that partake of it.<sup>16\*\*</sup>

Again, St. Damascene says of Adam in Paradise:

While in his body he lived on earth in the world of sense, in his spirit he dwelt among the angels, cultivating thoughts of God and being nurtured on these. He was naked because of his innocence and his

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\* Accordingly, Blessed Theodoret affirms that the “tree of life” and the “tree of knowledge” were actual, material trees even though they were given special names to denote their spiritual significance, and he further points out that other material objects are given such names by the Church as well. Thus, he says, “The tree of the Cross was a tree and is called ‘saving’ because salvation is accomplished by faith in it.... Likewise, Baptism is called ‘living water,’ not because the water of Baptism has a different nature, but because, through that water, Divine grace confers the gift of eternal life” (*Questions on Genesis* 26, LEC 1, pp. 63–65).—Ed.

\*\* Drawing from the teaching of St. John Damascene, Nicetas Stethatos discusses the double aspect of Paradise in his work *Contemplation of Paradise* 3–4, SC 81.156–58.—Ed.

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simplicity of life, and through creatures he was drawn up to their only Creator, in Whose contemplation he rejoiced and took delight.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose of man's dwelling in Paradise and eating of "every tree" was obviously not merely to be satisfied with the delights of this marvelous place, but to look and strive towards something higher; the very presence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and of the commandment not to eat of it, indicates a challenge and a test which man must pass through before ascending higher. St. Damascene thus sets forth the ascension to perfection which was set forth before Adam in Paradise:

God says: "Of every tree of Paradise thou shalt eat," meaning, I think: By means of all created things be thou drawn up to Me, their Creator, and from them reap the one fruit which is Myself, Who am the true Life; let all things be fruitful life to thee and make participation in Me to be the substance of thine own existence; for thus thou shalt be immortal.... He made him a living being to be governed here according to this present life, and then to be removed elsewhere, that is, to the world to come, and so to complete the mystery by becoming Divine through reversion to God—this, however, not by being transformed into the Divine Essence, but by participation in the Divine illumination.<sup>18 \*</sup>

Thus Paradise—and indeed the whole earthly life of man—was made by God, in the phrase of St. Basil, "primarily as a place of training and a school for the souls of men."<sup>19</sup> Man was given in the beginning a path of ascent from glory to glory, from Paradise to the status of a spiritual dweller of heaven, through the training and testing which God might send him, beginning with the commandment not to taste of the one tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Man was placed in Paradise as in a state between that of heaven, where only the purely spiritual may dwell, and the corruptible earth—which came about, as we shall see, because of his fall.

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\* On the original designation of man, see also pp. 691–92, 702–3, 757, 763–66, 772, 774 below.—ED.

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What, then, was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and why was it forbidden to Adam? In the classical interpretation of St. Gregory the Theologian, God gave Adam in Paradise

a Law, as a material for his free will to act upon. This law was a commandment as to what plants he might partake of, and which one he might not touch. This latter was the tree of knowledge; not, however, because it was evil from the beginning when planted; nor was it forbidden because God grudged it to us—let not the enemies of God wag their tongues in that direction, or imitate the serpent. But it would have been good if partaken of at the proper time; for the tree was, according to my view, Contemplation, upon which it is only safe for those who have reached maturity of habit to enter, but which is not good for those who are still somewhat simple and greedy; just as neither is solid food good for those who are yet tender and have need of milk.<sup>20</sup>\*

And St. John Damascene writes:

The tree of knowledge of good and evil is the power of discernment by multiple vision, and this is the complete knowing of one's own nature. Of itself it manifests the magnificence of the Creator and it is good for them that are full-grown and have walked in the contemplation of God—for them that have no fear of changing, because in the course of time they have acquired a certain habit of such contemplation. It is not good, however, for such as are still young and are more greedy in their appetites, who, because of the uncertainty of their perseverance in the true good and because of their not yet being solidly established in their application to the only good, are naturally inclined to be drawn away and distracted by their solicitude for their own bodies.<sup>21</sup>

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\* St. Gregory Palamas expounds on this teaching of St. Gregory the Theologian; see his *Topics of Natural and Theological Science* 49–50, *Philokalia* 4, pp. 369–70.—ED.

To sum up the Orthodox teaching on the two trees of Paradise, St. John Chrysostom writes:

The tree of life was in the midst of Paradise as a reward; the tree of knowledge as an object of contest and struggle. Having kept the commandment regarding this tree, you will receive a reward. And behold the wondrous thing. Everywhere in Paradise every kind of tree blossoms, everywhere they are abundant in fruit; only in the center are there two trees as an object of battle and exercise.<sup>22\*</sup>

This is a profound subject, which is very much bound up with our human nature.\*\* In fact, we see in human life today something of this very temptation that Adam had. Although Adam was not fallen then—and in this regard his state was different from our present state—nonetheless, his situation was similar to that of a young person of sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen years old who is brought up in goodness and then comes to the age when he must himself make the choice of whether to be good or not. It so happens that, because we have freedom, there must be a choice. One must *consciously* will to do good. You cannot simply be good because someone tells you to be good. Sooner or later in your freedom you must actively choose the good or else it does not become part of you. That is true of everyone except, of course, a child who dies quite young.

Therefore, when one comes to the age at which one must become a man, it is then that one must make the same choice Adam made—either to freely choose to do good or else to make the mistake of entering into evil, into a life of sin.

\* Elsewhere St. John Chrysostom explains that God gave the “slight command” not to eat of the tree of knowledge so as “to teach man that he has a Creator and Craftsman Who produces all visible realities,” and to make man “aware he is under God’s dominion and along with everything else is a partaker of His generosity.” God did this, says St. Chrysostom, “lest man be gradually perverted in his thinking and come to regard visible things as self-sufficient and get inflated ideas of his own importance” (*Homilies on Genesis* 16.6, FC 74, pp. 219–20 [16.18]).—ED.

\*\* The following discussion has been taken from Fr. Seraphim’s oral delivery. Many of the people listening to him were in their teens or early twenties, and he was applying the subject matter directly to their own situation.—ED.

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The Holy Fathers say that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is something which is only for *mature* people.\* Because we have freedom, it cannot be that we will not have knowledge of evil. The

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\* Thus, St. Theophilus of Antioch writes: “The tree of knowledge itself was good, and its fruit was good. For it was not the tree, as some think, but the disobedience, which had death in it. For there was nothing else in the fruit than only knowledge; but knowledge is good when one uses it discretely. But Adam, being yet an infant in age, was on this account as yet unable to receive knowledge worthily” (*To Autolycus* 1.25, ANF 2, p. 104).

According to the prevailing Patristic view, while the newly created Adam and Eve were spiritually immature, having not yet been confirmed in the habit of contemplation of God (cf. Sts. Gregory the Theologian and John Damascene above), they were in a physical condition of full maturity from the very beginning. St. Ephraim the Syrian argues this latter point as follows, stating explicitly what is assumed in the writings of other Fathers: “If they [Adam and Eve] were children, as those without say, [Moses] would not have said they ‘were both naked, and were not ashamed’ (Gen. 2:25); nor would he have said, ‘Adam knew Eve his wife’ (Gen. 4:1), if they had not been young adults. The names Adam bestowed should be sufficient to convince us of [the level of] his wisdom. And the fact that [Moses] said he will ‘till and keep it’ (Gen. 2:15) should make known to us Adam’s strength. The law that was set for them testifies to their full maturity, and their transgression of the commandment should bear witness to their arrogance’ (*Commentary on Genesis* 2.14, FC 91, p. 106; see also pp. 193–94, 194n above).

Of all the Fathers, only St. Irenaeus of Lyons appears to state that Adam and Eve were physically immature in Paradise, since he says not only that they were “infants” (which might be interpreted as simply “infants in age,” as in the passage of St. Theophilus above), but also that they were “very little” (*Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 12, SC 406.100). However, as Patristic scholar Hieromonk Irenaeus (M. C. Steenberg) observes, St. Irenaeus’ meaning here “remains elusive,” since together with calling Adam “very little” he speaks of him walking, speaking, and naming all the animals (*ibid.* 12–13)—activities which, as St. Ephraim points out above, would not be associated with those who are physically infants. Elsewhere St. Irenaeus, having asked why God did not make man “perfect” (i.e., in his final state) from the beginning, answers as follows: “Since these things [i.e., God’s creations] are of recent origin, so are they infantile; and since they are infantile, so are they unaccustomed to and unexercised in perfect discipline” (*Against Heresies* 4.38.1, SC 100.944). Here St. Irenaeus identifies “infancy” with lack of spiritual growth due to recent bodily origin, which would accord with the more common Patristic view of Adam and Eve in Paradise, and would suggest that the Saint did not in fact hold strictly to the divergent conception that they were physically infants. (See M. C. Steenberg, “Children in Paradise: Adam and Eve as ‘Infants’ in Irenaeus of Lyons.”)—ED.

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only choice is whether we have knowledge of evil through the mistakes of others, or through ourselves overcoming evil.

Everyone, in order to become a mature Christian and to be established in the way of doing good, *has* to know about evil. He has to know what it is that he has chosen not to do. And this knowledge *can* be without falling into great sins—if you are willing to take the examples of others. If you are able to see, almost as if it is your own experience, when someone else makes a tremendous sin, and if you are able to see the result of that sin, then you can make that part of your experience without falling into sin.

Evidently that is what Adam could have done. If he had resisted this temptation, he would have seen that there was a temptation, that is, that everything was not perfect, and that there was someone out to get him. Then, if a second temptation had come, he would have seen that the serpent (or whatever else was used by the devil) was out to make him fall. He would have begun to realize there was such a thing as evil: an evil will that makes him want to lose his Paradise. Through this he could have attained that knowledge of evil and eventually tasted of that tree.

The tree itself represents the knowledge of evil, since tasting of it meant disobeying the commandment. Adam learned about evil through his disobedience. He chose the way of sin and thereby discovered in bitter experience what it meant to be evil, and then to repent of that evil and come back to goodness.

So that is the path that Adam chose; and because of that our whole nature has been changed. Each person is free—the same as Adam—but we have been born in sins already. Even small children are filled with all kinds of evil things. Nonetheless, real evil does not come in until one consciously chooses to be evil. And that is the choice of adulthood.

Thus, in a sense everyone tastes of this tree, or else refrains from tasting of it and goes on the path of goodness. Unfortunately, the odds are very much against one's surviving without falling into these evils, although there's no reason to fall into them. We see now the evil all around us, and we have instructors and Holy Fathers to keep us on the path of good. A person can be raised in Christianity—like St. Sergius

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of Radonezh or other saints who were in monasteries from their childhood—and he can be surrounded by good examples. He can see the results of evils in others and can choose not to do that himself. Theoretically, it is quite possible. In bitter practice, however, usually it happens that we taste the tree by sinning ourselves.

**2:18–20** *And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a help meet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him* (KJV).

In this passage, again, we should not look for the “contradiction” some rationalist scholars think they have found, as though the text describes the creation of the animals *after* the creation of man, contradicting the order of creation in the first chapter. The subject of this passage is the naming of the animals by Adam, and only incidentally does the text mention that these animals had already been created by God, and that they were not the “help meet” for Adam, which could only be someone of the same nature as he (woman, as mentioned in the next passage).

The animals are “brought” to Adam because their place is not in Paradise but in the earth outside; Paradise is meant for the dwelling of man alone—a preindication that man alone of all earthly creatures is meant for the Heavenly Kingdom to which he can ascend from Paradise through keeping the commandments of God. St. John Damascene writes that Paradise

was a divine place and a worthy habitation for God in His image. And in it no brute beasts dwelt, but only man, the handiwork of God.<sup>23</sup>

And St. John Chrysostom teaches:

Adam was given the whole earth, but his chosen dwelling was Paradise. He could also go outside of Paradise, but the earth outside of

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Paradise was assigned for the habitation not of man, but of the irrational animals, the quadrupeds, the wild beasts, the crawling things. The royal and ruling dwelling for man was Paradise. This is why God brought the animals to Adam—because they were separated from him. Slaves do not always stand before their lord, but only when there is need for them. The animals were named and immediately sent away from Paradise; Adam alone remained in Paradise.<sup>24</sup>

The Holy Fathers interpret the naming of the animals by Adam quite literally, and see in it an indication of man's dominion over them, his undisturbed harmony with them, and a wisdom and intellect in the first man which far surpasses anything since known to man. St. Ephraim writes of this:

The words “He brought them to Adam” show the wisdom of Adam, and the peace which existed between the animals and man before man transgressed the commandment. For they came together before man as before a shepherd filled with love; without fear, according to kinds and types, they passed before him in flocks, neither fearing him nor trembling before each other....\* It is not impossible for a man to discover a few names and keep them in his memory. But it surpasses the power of human nature, and is difficult for him, to discover in a single hour thousands of names and not to give the last of those named the names of the first.... This is the work of God, and if it was done by man, it was given him by God.<sup>25</sup>

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\* St. Isaac the Syrian writes of how, through the redemptive work of Christ, His humble followers can regain this harmonious relationship that Adam had with the animals: “The humble man approaches ravenous beasts, and when their gaze rests upon him, their wildness is tamed. They come up to him as to their Master, wag their heads and tails and lick his hands and feet, for they smell coming from him that same scent that exhaled from Adam before the fall, when they were gathered together before him and he gave them names in Paradise. This was taken away from us, but Jesus has renewed it and given it back to us through His coming. This it is that has sweetened the fragrance of the race of men” (*Ascetical Homilies* 77, trans. Holy Transfiguration Monastery, p. 383).—ED.

ΕΚΑΛΕΣΕΝ ΔΑΪΜ  
ΟΝΩΜΑΤΑ ΠΑΣΙΝ ΚΤΙΝΕΣ  
ΚΠΑΣΙΤΟΥ ΕΠΕΤΗΟΙ  
ΤΘΩΜΟΥ ΚΠΑΣΙΤΙ  
ΘΗΡΙΟΙΣ ΤΑ Φ...





Adam naming the animals.

*Fresco by Monk Theophanes the Cretan in the Catholicon of the Monastery of St. Nicholas Anapavsa, Meteora, Greece, 1527.*

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

In other words, this was a sign of a truly Divine intelligence in Adam. St. John Chrysostom writes:

God does this in order to show us the great wisdom of Adam ... and also so that in the giving of names might be seen a sign of dominion.... Just think what wisdom was needed to give names to so many kinds of birds, reptiles, wild and domestic animals, and other irrational creatures ... to give them all names, and names belonging to them and corresponding to each kind.... Just think of how the lions and leopards, vipers and scorpions and serpents and all the other even more ferocious animals came to Adam as to a lord, with all submission, in order to receive names from him, and Adam did not fear a single one of these wild beasts.... The names which Adam gave them remain until now: God confirmed them so that we might constantly remember the honor which man received from the Lord of all when he received the animals under his authority, and might ascribe the reason for the removal (of this honor) to man himself, who lost his authority through sin.<sup>26</sup>

Because man possesses in himself something of the animal nature, as we have seen, and this animal nature became dominant in him because of his fall, Adam's naming of the animals also indicates the original dominance of man's mind over this lower, passionate nature. St. Ambrose writes:

The beasts of the field and the birds of the air which were brought to Adam are our irrational senses, because beasts and animals represent the diverse passions of the body, whether of the more violent kind or even of the more temperate.... God granted to you the power of being able to discern by the application of sober logic the species of each and every object, in order that you may be induced to form a judgment on all of them. God called them all to your attention, so that you might realize that your mind is superior to all of them.<sup>27</sup>

*2:21–22 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh;*



St. Paul of Obnora, Russia (1317–1429), one of the many Orthodox saints who have regained the likeness of Adam in Paradise; see Fr. Seraphim's mention of him on p. 333 below. St. Paul's Life, translated by Fr. Seraphim, tells of how another Saint (St. Sergius of Nurma, shown here at left) went to where St. Paul was living in the forest and saw there a wondrous sight: "A flock of birds surrounded the marvelous anchorite; little birds perched on the Elder's head and shoulders, and he fed them by hand. Nearby stood a bear, awaiting his food from the Saint; foxes, rabbits, and other beasts ran about, without any enmity among themselves and not fearing the bear. Behold the life of innocent Adam in Eden, the lordship of man over creation, which together with us groans because of our fall and thirsts to be delivered into the 'liberty of the children of God' (Rom. 8:21)." St. Paul lived to be one hundred and twelve years old. See his Life in *The Northern Thebaid*, compiled and translated by Fr. Seraphim (Rose) and Fr. Herman (Podmoshensky) (1975; 3rd ed., 2004), chap. 2. *Illustration from Russkiy palomnik*" (*Russian pilgrim*), 1910.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

*and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman and brought her to the man.*

Perhaps no passage of Genesis is more a touchstone of our interpretation of the whole book than this brief passage of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib. If we understand it "as it is written," as the Holy Fathers did, we will have no difficulty understanding the rest of the book in the same way. But if we have difficulty understanding it in this simple way—and our modern minds almost instinctively rebel against this simple interpretation—we will undoubtedly find much else in Genesis that we have difficulty understanding as the Fathers did.

This passage is also a stumbling block for those who wish to promote the evolutionist view of the origin of life and of mankind. In this view, man (at least in his body) is a descendant of lower animals; the "father" of the first man, therefore, must have been a non-human creature closely related to the higher apes. The whole point of this evolutionary view is that man and every living being developed from more primitive organisms by natural laws now known (or hypothesized) by science; to accept the evolution of the first man from lower animals, and then provide a wife for him by the miracle of taking one of his ribs—is surely something no evolutionist could agree to. If Adam "evolved naturally" from the beasts, then Eve must have done the same; but if you accept the miraculous account of Eve's creation as described in Genesis, you open yourself by this very fact to understanding the entire Six Days of Creation in the Patristic, and not the naturalistic, way.

What do the Holy Fathers say of the creation of Eve? St. Ambrose writes:

Woman was made out of the rib of Adam. She was not made of the same earth with which he was formed, in order that we might realize that the physical nature of both man and woman is identical and that there was one source for the propagation of the human race. For that reason, neither was man created together with a woman, nor were two men and two women created at the beginning, but first a man and after that a woman. God willed it that human nature be established as one. Thus, from the very inception of



The creation of Eve from the rib of Adam.  
*Byzantine mosaic from the Palatine Chapel, Palermo, Sicily, 1140s.*

AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS



The creation of Eve from the rib of Adam.  
*Fresco from Decani Monastery, Kosovo, Serbia, 1338–1347.*

the human stock He eliminated the possibility that many disparate natures should arise.... Reflect on the fact that He did not take a part from Adam's soul but a rib from his body, that is to say, not soul from a soul, but "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23) will this woman be called.<sup>28</sup>

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, trying to make beginning Christians understand the virgin birth of Christ, writes:

Of whom in the beginning was Eve begotten? What mother conceived her the motherless? But the Scripture saith that she was born out of Adam's side. Is Eve then born out of man's side without a mother, and is a child not to be born without a father, of a virgin's womb? This debt of gratitude was due to men from womankind: for

## PARADISE

Eve was begotten of Adam, and not conceived of a mother, but as it were brought forth of man alone.<sup>29</sup>

(We shall see later how the Church sees the parallel between Eve and the Virgin Mary, and between the miracles of the first creation and the miracles of the re-creation through Christ.)

St. John Chrysostom, while warning us that the word “took” must be understood in a way befitting God, Who has no “hands,” clearly indicates his literal interpretation of this passage:

Great are these words; they surpass every mind of man: their greatness can be understood in no other way than by beholding them with the eyes of faith.... “God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept.” This was not a simple ecstasy and not a usual sleep; but since the most wise and skilled Creator of our nature wished to take from Adam one of his ribs, therefore, so that he might not feel the pain and then be hostilely disposed to the one created from his rib, lest, remembering the pain, he hate the created being, God plunged Adam into a deep sleep and, as it were commanding him to be embraced by a kind of numbness, brought upon him such a sleep that he did not feel in the least what happened.... Taking a certain small part from an already prepared creation, from this part He made a whole living being. What power does the Highest Artist, God, have to produce from this small part the composition of so many members, to arrange so many organs of sense and form a whole, perfect and complete being which could converse and, because of its oneness of nature, furnish the man great consolation!<sup>30</sup>

In another treatise the same Father writes:

How did Adam not feel pain? How did he not suffer? One hair is torn out of the body, and we experience pain, and even if one is immersed in a deep sleep he wakes up from the pain. Moreover, such a large member is taken out, a rib is torn out, and the sleeping one



The creation of Eve from the rib of Adam.  
*Exterior fresco from Sucevita Monastery, Moldavia, Romania, 1595–1596.*

## PARADISE

does not wake up? God removed the rib not violently, lest Adam wake up; He did not tear it out. The Scripture, desiring to show the speed of the Creator's act, says: "He took."<sup>31</sup>

And St. Ephraim writes:

The man who up to now had been awake and was enjoying the shining of the light and had not known what sleep was,\* is now stretched out naked on the earth and given over to sleep. Probably, Adam saw in sleep the very thing that was happening to him. When in the twinkling of an eye the rib was taken out, and likewise in an instant flesh took its place, and the bared bone took on the full appearance and all the beauty of a woman—then God brought and presented her to Adam.<sup>32</sup>

All this took place on the very day of man's creation, the Sixth Day. To our limited minds the creation of man and woman is just as inconceivable, as miraculous, as "spectacular" as all the other creations of God when they were made in the beginning.\*\*

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\* In the original Syriac, the word used for "awake," 'ird, is also the word for "angel, watcher," that is, one who is always awake and watchful. The idea implied here—that man did not require sleep in Paradise—is stated more explicitly in St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 13; and St. Gregory the Sinaite, *On Commandments and Doctrines* 9.—ED.

\*\* Together with St. Ambrose (pp. 240, 242 above), other Fathers compare Adam's miraculous creation from the dust with the miracle of Eve's creation from Adam's rib. Thus, for example, St. Chrysostom writes: "The first creation, that of Adam, was from earth; the next, that of the woman, from his rib; the next, that of Abel, from seed" (*Homilies on the Gospel of St. John* 25.2, NPNF 1 14, p. 88); "We show again how man is from earth, and how woman is from man alone, and this without any intercourse whatever; how the earth itself is from nothing, the power of the Creator being everywhere sufficient for all things" (*Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 7.4, PG 61.59, NPNF 1 12, p. 37 [7.8]\*). In his *Hymns*, St. Ephraim sets forth this teaching in a poetic manner: "To Eve our mother a man gave birth, who himself had had no birth" (*Hymns on the Nativity* 1.15, NPNF 2 13, p. 223). St. John Damascene expresses it this way: "Man was formed of the virgin earth. Eve was created from Adam alone" (*On the Orthodox Faith* 4.24, FC 37, p. 394).—ED.



The creation of Eve from the rib of Adam.  
*Interior fresco from Sucevita Monastery, Moldavia, Romania, 1595–1596.*

*2:23–24 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh\* (KJV).*

Here Adam names the first woman even as he had just named the animals, indicating at the same time her oneness in nature with him, owing to her literal origin from his body, and the institution of marriage, since in prophecy he foresaw that the marriage union would be necessary because of the fall.

Commenting on this passage, St. Ephraim writes:

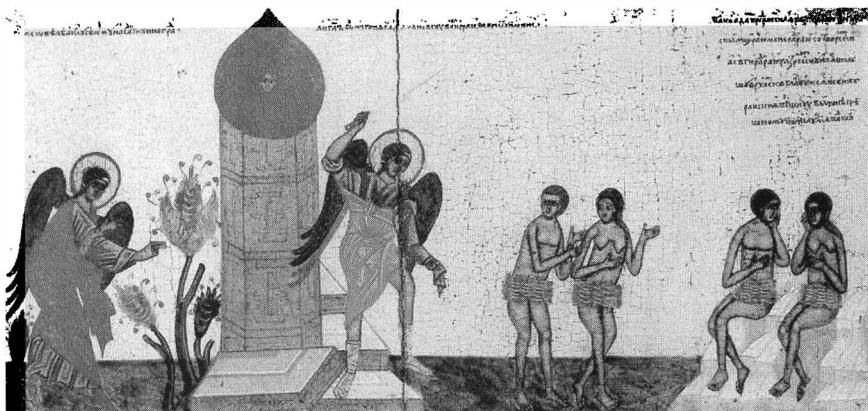
“This now”: that is, the one who has come to me after the animals is not such as they; they came from the earth, but she is “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” Adam said this either in a prophetic way or, as noted above, according to his vision in sleep. And just as on this day all the animals received from Adam their names according to their kinds, so also the bone, made into a woman, he called not by her proper name, Eve, but by the name of woman, the name belonging to the whole kind.<sup>33</sup>

St. John Chrysostom says of the same passage:

How did it come to his mind to say this? How did he know the future, and the fact that the human race would multiply? How did it become known to him that there would be intercourse between man and wife? After all, this occurred after the fall; but before that they lived in Paradise like angels, were not aroused by the flesh, were not inflamed by other passions either, were not weighed down by bodily needs, but being created entirely incorrupt and immortal, did not even need the covering of clothing.... And so, tell me, from whence did the idea come for him to say this? Is it not clear that, since before the transgression he was a participant of the grace of prophecy, he saw all this with his spiritual eyes?<sup>34</sup>

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\* In the Gospels, Christ quotes from this verse of the book of Genesis (see Matt. 19:5 and Mark 10:7–8), following it with the words: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”—ED.



The creation of Adam and Eve, their temptation, their expulsion from Paradise,  
and their sorrow.

*Details of a Russian icon of the seventeenth century.*

Thus we see that Adam was not only a great intellect, a great seer of the reality of this world who was given the ability to name the animals; he was also a prophet who saw the future.

*2:25 And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.\**

Adam and Eve were created, like the whole of the first creation, in the bloom of youth and beauty, and already possessing the sexual distinction that would be needed in their fallen states, yet there was no desire, no passionate thought between them. This, in the view of the Fathers, is the clearest indication of their dispassionateness before the fall, and of the fact that their minds were directed first of all to the glory of the heavenly world above. St. Ephraim writes:

They were not ashamed because they were clothed with glory.<sup>35</sup>

St. John Chrysostom teaches the same thing:

Before sin and disobedience occurred, they were clothed in the glory on high, and were not ashamed; but after the violation of the

\* St. Athanasius relates Adam's nakedness in Paradise with Christ's nakedness on the Cross: "He [Christ] went hastily to the place, and there it was necessary to ascend the Cross, in order to nail to the Cross the handwriting that was against us (cf. Col. 2:14).... And since He was going to do this, He took off His clothing (cf. John 19:23). For it was necessary for Him, when bringing man into Paradise, to be stripped bare of the garments which Adam received when he was cast out of Paradise [i.e., the "garments of skin"—Gen. 3:21]" (*On the Passion and Crucifixion of the Lord*, PG 28.221A).

St. Ambrose makes the same comparison: "It is important to consider what manner of Man ascends [the Cross]. I see Him naked.... Adam who desired clothing was conquered (cf. Gen. 3:7). He Who laid down His garments conquered. He ascended [the Cross] in like manner as nature formed us with God as Creator. In like manner as the first Adam had dwelt in Paradise, the Second Adam entered Paradise" (*Exposition of the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke* 10.110, p. 424).

St. John Chrysostom likewise, in comparing the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with the tree of Christ's Cross, writes: "A tree cloaked the naked one in captivity, but now displays to all on high the Naked One as victorious" (*On the Name of the Cemetery and on the Cross*, PG 49.396).—ED.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

commandment there came both shame and the awareness of their nakedness.<sup>36</sup>

And St. John Damascene writes:

God wanted us to be dispassionate like that, for that is passionlessness to the highest degree.<sup>37</sup>

Let us now sum up the state of Adam in Paradise in the words of a recent Father, St. Seraphim of Sarov:

Adam was created to such an extent immune to the action of every one of the elements created by God, that neither could water drown him, nor fire burn him, nor could the earth swallow him up in its abysses, nor could the air harm him by its action in any way whatsoever.\* Everything was subject to him as the beloved of God, as the king and lord of creation, and everything looked up to him, as the perfect crown of God's creatures. Adam was made so wise by this breath of life which was breathed into his face from the creative lips of God, the Creator and Ruler of all, that there never has been a man on earth wiser or more intelligent than he, and it is hardly likely that there ever will be. When the Lord commanded him to give names to all the creatures, he gave every creature a name which completely expressed all the qualities, powers and properties given it by God at its creation. Owing to this very gift of the supernatural grace of God which was infused into him by the breath of life, Adam could see and understand the Lord walking in Paradise, and comprehend His words, and the conversation of the holy Angels, and the language of all beasts, birds, and reptiles and all that is now hidden from us fallen and sinful creatures, but was so clear to Adam before his fall. To Eve also the Lord God gave the same wisdom, strength, and unlimited power, and all the other good and holy qualities.<sup>38</sup>

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\* Similarly, St. Maximus wrote that “the first man [was] not subject to either cold or heat” (*Ambigua* 45, see p. 700 below), and St. Symeon the New Theologian stated that it was only after the fall that Adam and Eve “began … to be cold and shiver” (*Catechetical Discourses* 5.7, trans. C. J. deCatanzaro, p. 97).—ED.

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To some extent man even today can return to something of this paradisal state through the grace of God, as may be seen in the lives of many saints, which abound in miracles unbelievable to worldly men. The Life of St. George, for example (April 23), who was preserved unharmed in the midst of the crudest tortures and even deaths, reminds us of Adam's invulnerability in Paradise.

Still, however, in his fallen state man can attain to no more than a glimpse of the state of Adam; only in the age to come will this Paradise be restored to us in its fullness, and then (if only we be among the saved) we will see what an angelic state it is (and was). St. Gregory of Nyssa writes:

The resurrection promises us nothing else than the restoration of the fallen to their ancient state; for the grace we look for is a certain return to the first life, bringing back again to Paradise him who was cast out from it. If then, the life of those restored is closely related to that of the angels, it is clear that the life before the transgression was a kind of angelic life, and hence also our return to the ancient condition of life is compared to the angels.<sup>39</sup>

In Orthodox ascetic literature, where the aim constantly kept in view is our restoration to Paradise, the unspoiled and dispassionate nature of Adam before the fall is held up as the model and goal of our ascetic struggle. St. Abba Dorotheus writes, in the very first words of his *Spiritual Instructions*:

In the beginning, when God created man, He placed him in Paradise and adorned him with every virtue, giving him the commandment not to taste of the tree which was in the midst of Paradise. And thus he remained there in the enjoyment of Paradise: in prayer, in vision, in every glory and honor, having sound senses and being in the same natural condition in which he was created. For God created man according to His own image, that is, immortal, master of himself, and adorned with every virtue. But when he transgressed the commandment, eating the fruit of the tree of which God had commanded him not to taste, then he was banished from Paradise, fell away from the

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

natural condition, and fell into a condition against nature, and then he remained in sin, in love of glory, in love of the enjoyments of this age, and of other passions, and he was mastered by them, for he became himself their slave through the transgression.<sup>40</sup>

The awareness that Adam's state in Paradise was the *natural* human condition, and the one to which we may hope to return by God's grace, is one of the greatest spurs to ascetic struggle. This awareness is thus of the most practical benefit to Orthodox Christians who hope to inherit God's Kingdom. With the fall of man, Paradise ceased to be a reality of this earth and was placed out of our reach; but through the grace of God made available to Christians through the Second Adam, Christ, we may still hope to attain it. Actually, through Christ we are able not only to gain back the state of Adam before the fall, but to attain a state even higher than that: the state which Adam would have attained had he not fallen.

Even in our fallen state, can we not be reminded of Paradise and our fall from it in the nature that surrounds us? In the animals it is not difficult to see the passions over which we should be masters, but which have largely taken possession of us; and in the peaceful murmur of the forests (where so many ascetic strugglers have taken refuge) can we not see a reminder of the Paradise of vegetation originally intended for our dwelling and food, and still existing for those able to ascend, with St. Paul, to behold it?

## CHAPTER SIX

### *The Fall of Man*

(Genesis 3:1–24)

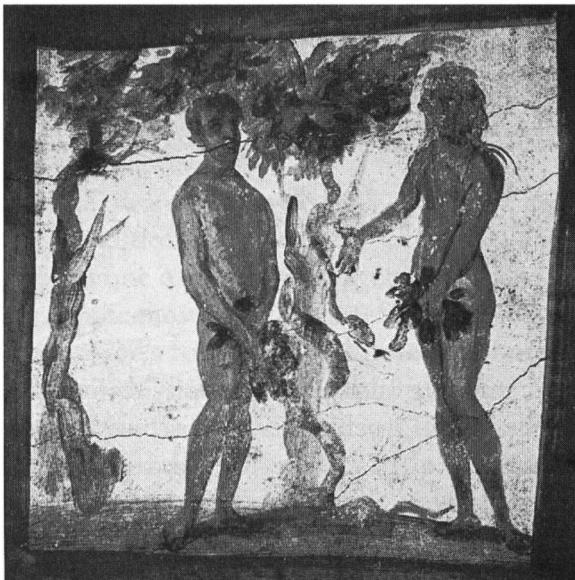
PREPARED by the Patristic teaching on the Six Days of Creation, the creation of the first man and his dwelling in Paradise, we are now ready to understand the account of his fall in the third chapter of Genesis. It is clear that, like all else in this God-inspired book, this is an historical account, but one which must be understood, first and foremost, in a spiritual sense.

*3:1 Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made.*

With the “serpent,” once again, we find an image that our modern rationalistic mind would like to understand allegorically. But here again, the Fathers are relentlessly realistic in their interpretation. St. John Chrysostom teaches:

Do not regard the present serpent; do not regard how we flee it and feel repulsion towards it. It was not such in the beginning. The serpent was the friend of man and the closest of those who served him. And who made it an enemy? The sentence of God: “Cursed are you above all the cattle, and above all wild animals.... I will put enmity between you and the woman” (Gen. 3:14–15). It was this enmity that destroyed the friendship. I mean not a rational friendship, but one of which an irrational creature is capable. Similar to the way that now the dog manifests friendship, not by word but by natural movements, just so did the serpent serve man. As a creature who enjoyed great closeness to man, the serpent seemed to the devil to be a convenient tool (for deception).... Thus, the devil spoke through the

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS



The fall of Adam and Eve at the instigation of the devil, speaking through a serpent.

*Fresco from the Catacombs of Sts. Marcellinus and Peter in Rome, early fourth century.*

serpent, deceiving Adam.\* I beg your love to hear my words not carelessly. The question is not an easy one. Many ask: How did the serpent speak—with a human voice, or with a serpent's hissing, and how did Eve understand? Before the transgression Adam was filled with wisdom, understanding, and the gift of prophecy.... The devil noticed both the wisdom of the serpent and Adam's opinion of it—because the latter considered the serpent wise. And so he spoke through it, so that Adam might think that the serpent, being wise, was able to mimic the human voice also.<sup>1</sup>

To understand why the devil should want to tempt Adam, one must understand that the “warfare” in heaven (Apoc. 12:7) has already

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\* St. John Damascene sets forth the same teaching: “The serpent was accustomed to man, and approached him more readily than it did other living creatures, and held intercourse with him with delightful motions. And hence it was through it that the devil, the prince of evil, made his most wicked suggestion to our first parents” (*On the Orthodox Faith* 2.10, NPNF 2 9, p. 28b). See also Blessed Theodoret, *Questions on Genesis* 32, LEC 1, pp. 72–73.—ED.

## THE FALL OF MAN

occurred, and that the devil and his angels have already been cast out of heaven into the lower realm of earth because of their pride. The motive of the devil is *envy* of man, who is called to the estate the devil has lost. St. Ambrose writes:

“Through the envy of the devil death came into the world” (Wisdom 2:24). The cause of envy was the happiness of man placed in Paradise, because the devil could not brook the favors received by man. His envy was aroused because man, though formed in slime, was chosen to be an inhabitant of Paradise. The devil began to reflect that man was an inferior creature, yet had hopes of an eternal life, whereas he, a creature of superior nature, had fallen and had become part of this mundane existence.<sup>2\*</sup>

*3:1–6 And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat* (KJV).

The childlikeness of this dialogue, and the ease with which our

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\* On the devil's tempting mankind out of envy, see also St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.24.4; idem, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 16; St. Basil the Great, *Homily Explaining That God Is Not the Cause of Evil* 8; St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 12.5; St. Gregory the Theologian, *Orations* 39.13, 45.28; St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration* 6; St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John* 48.1; St. John Cassian, *Institutes* 4.30; Blessed Theodore of Cyrus, *On the Incarnation of the Lord* 6; St. Barsanuphius the Great, *Letters of Sts. Barsanuphius and John* 69; St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 61; St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* 2.30; St. Photius the Great, *Homilies* 9.8, 12.3; and St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 16.1.—ED.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

first parents fell into a transgression of the only commandment that had been given them, indicate the untested nature of their virtue: everything had been given them by God's grace, but they were not yet skilled in "tilling and keeping" their inward state.

The temptation offered by the devil contains the same elements we fallen men know in our own fight against sin. He offers, first of all, not an obvious evil but something which seems good and true. Men were indeed created to be "gods and sons of the most high" (Ps. 81:6, 11th Kathisma), and were aware that from Paradise they were to ascend to a higher condition. The devil, therefore, as it were thought to himself (as St. Ambrose expresses it):

This, therefore, is my first approach, namely, to deceive him while he is desirous of improving his condition. In this way an attempt will be made to arouse his ambition.<sup>3</sup>

In causing our first ancestors to look at the good thing of becoming like gods, the devil hoped to cause them to forget the "small" commandment which was the way God ordained them to achieve this goal.

Again, the devil attacked not through the man, but through the woman—not because the woman was weaker or more passionate, because both Adam and Eve still preserved the dispassionateness of their original nature—but for the simple reason that Adam alone had heard the command of God, whereas Eve knew it only indirectly, and thereby might be considered more likely to disobey it. St. Ambrose writes of this:

[The devil] aimed to circumvent Adam by means of the woman. He did not accost the man who had in his presence received the heavenly command. He accosted her who had learned of it from her husband and who had not received from God the command which was to be observed. There is no statement that God spoke to the woman. We know that He spoke to Adam. Hence we must conclude that the command was communicated through Adam to the woman.<sup>4</sup>

## THE FALL OF MAN

The success of the devil's temptation, finally, was due to his knowledge (or guess) as to what is in the heart of man himself. It was not the devil who caused Adam's fall, but Adam's own desire. St. Ephraim writes:

The tempting word would not have led into sin those who were tempted if the tempter had not been guided by their own desire. Even if the tempter had not come, the tree itself by its beauty would have led their desire into battle. Although the first ancestors sought an excuse for themselves in the counsel of the serpent, they were harmed more by their own desire than by the counsel of the serpent.<sup>5\*</sup>

As a result of the temptation, as St. John Chrysostom describes it,

the devil led the woman into captivity, drew away her mind and caused her to think of herself above her worth, so that, being drawn away by empty hopes, she might lose even what had been given her.<sup>6\*\*</sup>

*3:7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons (KJV).*

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\* St. Irenaeus contrasts Adam and Eve's succumbing to the devil's temptation with Christ's repulsing a similar temptation after fasting for forty days in the wilderness: "As at the beginning it was by means of food that [the enemy] persuaded man, although not suffering hunger, to transgress God's commandments, so in the end he did not succeed in persuading Him Who was hungry to take that food which proceeded from God. For, when tempting Him, he said, 'If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.' But the Lord repulsed him by the commandment of the law, saying, 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone' (Matt. 4:3–4)" (*Against Heresies* 5.21.2, ANF 1, p. 549).—ED.

\*\* St. Ephraim adds that part of Eve's sin lay in her trying to usurp Adam's headship and "seniority": "She hastened to eat before her husband that she might become head over her head, that she might become the one to give command to that one by whom she was to be commanded and that she might be older in divinity than the one who was older than she in humanity" (*Commentary on Genesis* 2.20, FC 91, p. 113).—ED.



"And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked."  
*Fresco from the Christian catacombs in Rome, third century.*

## THE FALL OF MAN

On this passage St. John Chrysostom says:

It was not the eating of the tree that opened their eyes: they had seen even before eating. But since this eating served as an expression of disobedience and violation of the commandment given by God, and for this reason they were then deprived of the glory that clothed them, having become unworthy of such great honor, the Scripture says: They ate, and their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked. Being deprived of the grace from on high for the transgression of the commandment, they saw also their physical nakedness, so that from the shame that took hold of them they might understand into what an abyss they had been cast by the transgression of the Master's commandment.... When you hear, "their eyes were opened," understand this to mean that (God) gave them to feel their nakedness and the loss of the glory which they had enjoyed before the eating.... Do you see that the word "opened" refers not to the bodily eyes, but to mental vision?<sup>7</sup>

With the opening of their eyes through the transgression, Adam and Eve have already lost the life of Paradise, even though they have not yet been banished from it; from now on their eyes will be open to the lower things of this earth, and they will see only with difficulty the higher things of God. They are no longer dispassionate, but have begun the passionate earthly life we still know today.

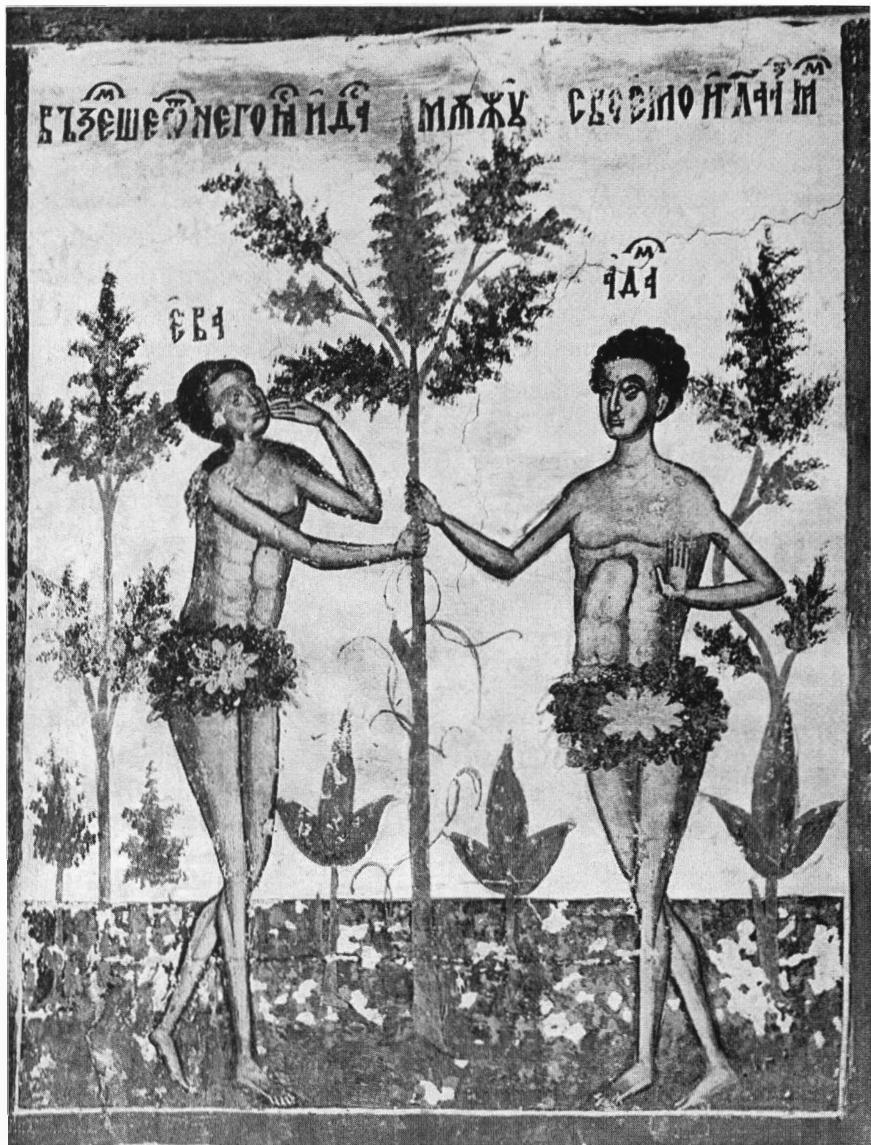
*3:8 And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day;\* and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden (KJV).*

St. John Chrysostom writes of this:

What do you say? God walks? Are you going to ascribe feet to Him, and not understand anything higher? No, God does not walk—may this not be! In very fact, how can He Who is everywhere and fills all things, Whose throne is heaven and the earth His footstool—walk in Paradise? What sensible man would say this? Then what does it

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\* LXX: "in the afternoon" or "in the evening."—ED.



Adam and Eve with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.  
*Exterior fresco from Sucevita Monastery, Moldavia, Romania, 1595–1596.*

## THE FALL OF MAN



Adam and Eve hiding themselves from the presence of the Lord.

*Fresco from Decani Monastery, Kosovo, Serbia, 1338–1347.*

mean: “They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the afternoon”? He wished to arouse in them such a feeling of God’s closeness that it would make them uneasy, which indeed happened: They felt this, and tried to hide themselves from God, Who was approaching them.<sup>8</sup>

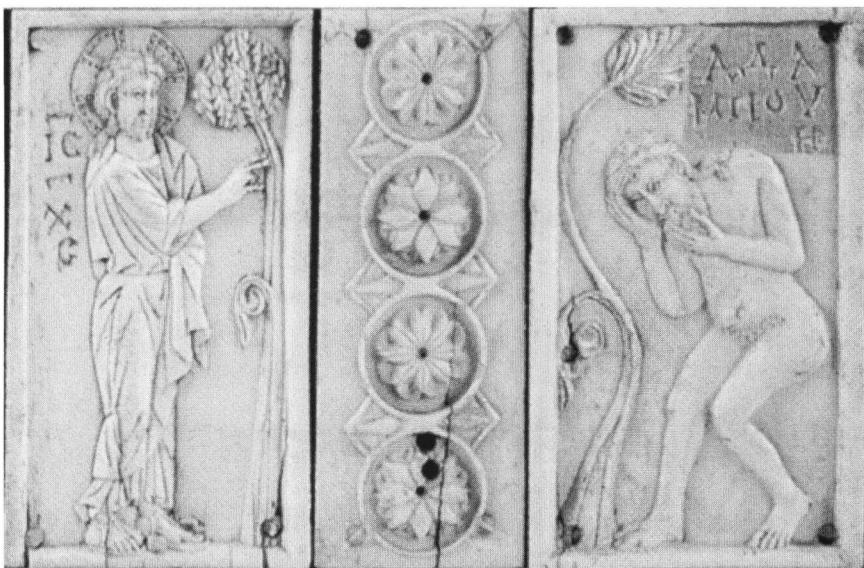
And St. Ambrose writes:

In my opinion God may be said to walk wherever throughout Scripture the presence of God is implied.<sup>9</sup>

In the dialogue that follows, we see that God comes to Adam not to condemn him or banish him from Paradise, but to bring him to his senses. St. John Chrysostom writes:

He did not delay in the least, but as soon as He saw what had happened and the seriousness of the wound, He immediately hastened

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“Adam, where art thou?”

*Ivory carving from a Byzantine casket, Constantinople, tenth century.*

with a treatment, so that the wound would not become inflamed and become incurable.... Pay heed to the Lord's love of mankind and His extreme lack of ill will. He could, without even vouchsafing a reply to the one who had performed such a sin, have immediately subjected him to the punishment which He had already decreed beforehand for the transgression; but He is long-suffering, delays, asks and listens to the answer, and again asks, as if evoking the guilty one to justify himself in order that when the matter had been revealed He might show him His love of mankind even after such a transgression.<sup>10</sup>

**3:9 And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? (KJV).**

Of this St. Ambrose says:

What, then, does He mean by “Adam, where art thou?” Does He not mean “in what circumstances” are you; not, “in what place”? It is,

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therefore, not a question, but a reproof. From what condition of goodness, beatitude, and grace, He means to say, have you fallen into this state of misery? You have forsaken eternal life. You have entombed yourself in the ways of sin and death.<sup>11\*</sup>

*3:10–13 And he said, I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest me to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat (KJV).*

In this dialogue the Fathers see God's call for man to repent. St. John Chrysostom writes:

[God] asks about this not because He did not know: He knew, and knew perfectly; but in order to show His love of mankind He condescends to their weakness and calls them to confess their sin.<sup>12</sup>

But man responds not with repentance, but with self-justification, thereby bringing punishment upon himself. St. Ephraim comments on this passage:

Instead of acknowledging what he had done himself, which acknowledgment would have been profitable for him, Adam retells what

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\* St. Irenaeus draws a parallel between how the Word of God "searched out" Adam in the garden and how He later, when incarnated in Jesus Christ, came to search out fallen humanity: "So the Scripture, pointing out what would come to pass, reports that when Adam had hid himself on account of his disobedience, the Lord came to him in the evening, called him forth and said, 'Where art thou?' This means that in these last times [i.e., the New Testament era] the same Word of God has come to call man, reminding him of his deeds, living in which he had been hidden from the Lord. For just as at that time God spoke to Adam in the evening, searching him out, so in these last times, by means of the same voice, searching out his posterity, He has visited them" (*Against Heresies* 5.15.4, SC 153.212–13, ANF 1, p. 544\*).—ED.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

happened to him, something that was profitless for him.... Adam does not confess his guilt, but accuses the woman.... And when Adam does not wish to confess his guilt, God addresses a question to Eve and says: "What is this that thou hast done?" And Eve, instead of entreating with tears and taking the guilt upon herself, as if she does not desire to obtain forgiveness for herself and her husband, does not mention the promise given her by the serpent and how he persuaded her.... When both had been questioned and it was revealed that they have neither repentance nor any true justification, God turns to the serpent, not with a question but with definite punishment. For where there was room for repentance, there was questioning; but one who is a stranger to repentance is simply given the judge's sentence.<sup>13</sup>

The same Father adds:

If our first ancestors had desired to repent even after the transgression of the commandment, then, even though they would not have restored to themselves what they had before the transgression of the commandment, at least they would have been delivered from the curses that were uttered to the earth and to themselves.<sup>14</sup>

So we cannot simply say that Adam and Eve sinned and then were condemned. They were given a chance to repent before they were condemned.

St. Abba Dorotheus takes this account from Genesis as the classic example of man's unwillingness to repent and his deep-seated desire to justify his own behavior even when it is exposed as sinful by God Himself:

After the fall, (God) gave (Adam) the opportunity to repent and be pardoned, but his neck remained unbending. For (God) came and said to him: "Adam, where art thou?" That is, from what glory into what shame have you come? And then, when He asked him why he sinned, why he transgressed, He prepared him especially so that he might say: "Forgive me." But there was no humility! Where was the word "forgive"? There was no repentance, but the complete opposite. For he contradicted and retorted: "The woman whom Thou

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gavest me" (deceived me). He did not say, "My wife deceived me," but "the woman whom Thou gavest me," as if to say: "this misfortune which Thou hast brought on my head." For thus it always is, brethren: When a man does not wish to reproach himself, he does not hesitate to accuse God Himself. Then (God) came to the woman and said to her: And why did you not keep the commandment? As it were, He especially hinted to her: At least you say "forgive," so your soul might be humbled and you might be pardoned. But again He (did not hear) the word "forgive." For she also replied: "The serpent beguiled me," as if to say: The serpent sinned, and what is that to me? What are you doing, wretched ones? Repent, acknowledge your sin, have pity on your nakedness. But neither of them wished to accuse himself; neither had the least humility. And so you see now clearly to what our state has come, into what great misfortunes we have been led by the fact that we justify ourselves, that we hold to our own will and follow ourselves.<sup>15\*</sup>

*3:14–15 And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field;\*\* upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel\*\*\* (KJV).*

The Fathers, with the realism of their understanding of Genesis, interpret this punishment as applying first of all to the animal who was

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\* Like St. Dorotheus, St. Symeon the New Theologian discusses at length the dialogue between God and Adam, and points out how the latter should have repently admitted his sin and asked for God's mercy: "He does not humble himself, he does not bend. The neck of his heart is like a sinew of iron (cf. Is. 48.4)!.... For had he said this he might have stayed in Paradise. By this one word he might have spared himself that whole cycle of evils without number that he endured by his expulsion and in spending so many centuries in hell" (*Catechetical Discourses* 5.5, trans. C. J. deCatanzaro, pp. 95–96).—ED.

\*\* LXX: "and all the brutes of the earth."—ED.

\*\*\* LXX: "He shall be on guard for thy head, and thou shalt be on guard for His heel."—ED.

the instrument of man's fall, but then also to the devil who used this creature. St. John Chrysostom writes:

But perhaps someone will say: If the counsel was given by the devil, using the serpent as an instrument, why is this animal subjected to such a punishment? This also was a work of God's unutterable love of mankind. As a loving father, in punishing the murderer of his son, breaks also the knife and sword by which he performed the murder, and breaks them into small pieces—in similar fashion the All-good God, when this animal, like a kind of sword, served as the instrument of the devil's malice, subjects it to a constant punishment, so that from this physical and visible manifestation we might conclude the dishonor in which it finds itself. And if the one who served as the instrument was subjected to such anger, what punishment must the other be undergoing?...\* The unquenchable fire awaits him (Matt. 25:41).<sup>16</sup>

St. John even speculates that before the curse the serpent, without having legs, went about in an upright position similar to the way it now stands up when ready to strike.<sup>17</sup>

Before Adam fell, he could be naked and not notice it; afterwards, this is impossible. Before the fall, Adam had friendship with the serpent like we have with dogs or cats or some domestic animal; afterwards we have an instinctive reaction against snakes—which everyone has probably experienced. This shows that our nature has somehow changed.

The “enmity” in our fallen life, of course, much more than between man and serpent, is between man and the devil; and in a special sense the “seed of the woman” is Christ. One nineteenth-century Orthodox commentary on this passage says:

The first woman in the world was the first to fall into the devil's net and easily gave herself into his power; but by her repentance she will shake off his power over her. Likewise, in many other women also, especially in the person of the most blessed woman, the Virgin Mary, he will meet a powerful resistance to his wiles.... By the seed of the

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\* See p. 123 above and p. 712n below on how to understand Biblical and Patristic references to God's anger or wrath.—ED.

## THE FALL OF MAN

woman, which is hostile to the seed of the devil, one must understand in particular one person from among the posterity of the woman, namely, Him Who from eternity was predestined for the salvation of men and was born in time of a woman without a man's seed. He subsequently appeared to the world to "destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8), that is, the kingdom of the devil, filled with his servants, with his seed.... The striking of the spiritual serpent in the head by the seed of the woman signifies that Christ will completely defeat the devil and take away from him all power to harm men.... Until the Second Coming the devil will have the opportunity to harm men, including Christ Himself; but his wounds will be easily healed, like wounds in the heel, which are not dangerous because in the heel, which is covered with hard skin, there is little blood. A wound in the heel was given by the powerless malice of the devil to Christ Himself, against Whom he aroused the unbelieving Jews who crucified Him. But this wound served only for the greater shame of the devil and the healing of mankind.<sup>18\*</sup>

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\* This nineteenth-century commentary identifying the "seed of woman" (Gen. 3:15) with Christ is based on an early Patristic teaching. In the second century, St. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote: "He [Christ] has therefore, in His work of recapitulation, summed up all things, both waging war against our enemy, and crushing him who had at the beginning led us away captives in Adam, and trampled upon his head, as you can perceive in Genesis that God said to the serpent, 'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; He shall be on guard for thy head, and thou shalt be on guard for His heel.' For from that time, He Who should be born of a woman, [namely] from the Virgin, after the likeness of Adam, was preached as keeping watch for the head of the serpent. This is the seed of which the Apostle says in the Epistle to the Galatians, that the law of works was established 'till the seed should come to whom the promise was made' (Gal. 3:19). This fact is exhibited in a still clearer light in the same Epistle, where he thus speaks: 'But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman' (Gal. 4:4). For indeed the enemy would not have been fairly vanquished, unless it had been a man [born] of a woman who conquered him. For it was by means of a woman that he got the advantage over man at first, setting himself up as man's opponent (*Against Heresies* 5.21.1, ANF 1, pp. 548–49; see also 5.23.7, p. 457).

Likewise, St. Epiphanius of Salamis wrote in the fourth century: "Since Eve in Paradise fell into the sin of disobedience while still a virgin, the obedience of grace

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Thus the “wound in the heel” represents the small amount that the devil is able to harm us since the coming of Christ.

*3:16 And to the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy pains and thy groanings; in pain thou shalt bring forth children, and thy submission shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee* (LXX).

Even while cursing the serpent, God is awaiting the repentance of Adam and Eve. St. Ephraim writes:

God began with the despised [serpent] so that, while the anger of righteous judgment was directed against it alone, Adam and Eve might become terrified and repent, and thereby the opportunity would have been given to [God's] goodness to deliver them from the curses of righteous judgment. But when the serpent had been cursed, and Adam and Eve did not hasten to entreaties, God uttered the punishment to them. He addressed Eve first, because by her hand sin was given to Adam.<sup>19</sup>

St. John Chrysostom writes of Eve's punishment:

Behold the Lord's goodness, and what meekness He shows after such a transgression. He says: I wished that you would lead a life without sorrow and pain, free of every grief and bitterness, and filled with every satisfaction; that, being clothed in a body, you might not feel anything bodily. But since you did not make fitting use of such

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came in its turn through the Virgin, when she was told of the descent from heaven of Christ's incarnation, and life immortal. For in Paradise God tells the serpent, ‘And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.’ But there is no example of a woman's seed, unless, as the obscure saying suggests, the ‘enmity’ is taken to mean Eve's enmity towards the progeny of the snake itself, and of the devil who dwelt in the snake, and his envy. And in fact, the whole cannot have its complete fulfillment in Eve. But it will truly be fulfilled in the holy Seed, the elect Seed, the unique Seed, the Seed which originated from Mary alone, and not from union with a man. For He came to ‘destroy’ the ‘crooked dragon serpent that flees’ (cf. Is. 27:1, LXX).... And so the Only Begotten came from a woman for the destruction of the serpent—that is, of heresy, corruption and deceit, imposture and iniquity” (*Panarion* 78.18–19, GCS 37.469, trans. Frank Williams, vol. 2, p. 615\*).—ED.

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happiness, but the abundance of good things brought you to such great ingratitude, therefore, so that you might not be given over to yet greater self-will, I am laying upon you a bridle, and I condemn you to sorrow and groaning. I shall arrange that your giving birth to children—a source of great consolation—will begin with sorrow, so that in daily grief and sorrow in giving birth you might have a constant reminder of how great was this sin and disobedience.... At first I created you equal in honor (to your husband) and wished that, being of one dignity with him, you might have communion in everything with him; and I entrusted to you, as to your husband, authority over all creatures. But since you did not make fitting use of the equality in honor, for this I am subjecting you to your husband.... I subject you to him and proclaim him your lord, so that you might acknowledge his authority; since you are unable to lead, therefore, learn to be a good subject.<sup>20</sup>

St. John Chrysostom provides the answer to the problem of “women’s liberation”: become saints and your problems are ended.

*3:17–19 And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife,\* and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.\*\* Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat of the herb of*

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\* St. John Chrysostom writes that the equality of honor that existed between Adam and Eve before the fall did not exclude a certain order in which Adam even then was the head. Thus, he blames Adam for not guiding and correcting Eve: “After all, you are head of your wife, and she has been created for your sake; but you have inverted the proper order: not only have you failed to keep her on the straight and narrow but you have been dragged down with her, and whereas the rest of the body should follow the head, the contrary has in fact occurred, the head following the rest of the body, turning things upside down” (St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 17.4, FC 74, p. 231 [17.17]).—ED.

\*\* LXX: “cursed is the earth in thy labors; in pains shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.” Here the Greek word for “pains,” λύπαις, is the same as that found in the sentence pronounced on Eve in Genesis 3:16.—ED.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

*the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken. For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return* (KJV).

Here Adam is given an image of the trials and tribulations of simply living in this fallen world. First of all, the earth is cursed for his sake. St. John Chrysostom writes:

Behold the reminders of the curse! Thorns it will bring forth, He [God] says, and thistles. I will do this so that you will endure severe labor and cares and spend your whole life in sorrow, that this might be a restraint for you, that you might not dream that you are higher than your station; but that you might constantly remember your nature and might henceforth not allow yourself to come to a similar state of deception.

“Thou shalt eat of the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.” See how after his [Adam’s] disobedience everything was not as it had been before in his life! I, He says, bringing you into this world, wanted you to live without afflictions, without labors, without cares, without sorrows; to be in contentment and prosperity and not be subject to bodily needs, but to be a stranger to all this and enjoy perfect freedom. But since such freedom was not of benefit to you, I will curse the earth so that henceforth it will not be as it was formerly, giving forth fruit without sowing and cultivation, but will do so only with great labor, exertion and cares. I will subject you to constant afflictions and sorrows, and force you to do everything with exhausting efforts, that these tormenting labors might be for you a constant lesson to behave modestly and know your own nature.<sup>21\*</sup>

Secondly, Adam now becomes *mortal*. St. John Chrysostom writes that, even though Adam and Eve lived a long time after their fall,

nevertheless from the moment they heard, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,” they received a death sentence, became mor-

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\* I.e., so that Adam would recognize that he was a created being and not God, since he had succumbed to the devil’s temptation: “Ye shall be as gods.”—ED.

## THE FALL OF MAN

tals and, one may say, died. Indicating this, the Scripture said, “In the day that thou eatest of it [the tree] thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17)—in other words, you shall receive a sentence; you shall now be mortals.<sup>22\*</sup>

In the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans there is a teaching about how the whole creation is “groaning” because it is subject to “futility,” that is, to the corruption (decay) that entered the world because of the pride of one man. The creation is waiting for man to be delivered so that it itself can be restored to the original state of incorruption—when the creatures will be wandering around the forest like they are now, but incorrupt like they were in the days of Adam.

In Romans 8:19–22 we read: “For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation was made subject to futility, not willingly, but by reason of Him Who hath subjected it in hope. Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”\*\* For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”\*\*\*

The commentary of St. John Chrysostom on this passage makes the doctrine absolutely explicit:

What means “for the creation was made subject to futility”? It became corruptible. Why, and by what cause? By your fault, O man. Because

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\* Sts. Gregory of Nyssa, Macarius the Great, Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas add to this teaching by saying that man’s subjection to physical death followed upon a spiritual death that occurred at the time of the fall. See pp. 716–18, 717–18n, 723 below.—ED.

\*\* Here as in other places in this book where Romans 8:19–21 is referenced, the King James Version’s “creature” for *ἡ κτίσις* and “vanity” for *ἡ ματαίότης* have been changed to the New King James and Revised Standard Versions’ “creation” and “futility,” respectively. The latter translations better render the original meaning in present-day English.—ED.

\*\*\* Earlier in the same Epistle (Rom. 5:12), St. Paul explains that “by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin.” See also the relevant passages from St. Paul’s Epistles quoted on pp. 395n, 733–34, 751–52, 777 below.—ED.

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you received a body mortal and subject to sufferings, so the earth also was subject to a curse, and brought forth thorns and thistles.

And later in the same section:

Just as the creation became corruptible when your body became corruptible, so also when your body will be incorrupt, the creation also will follow after it and become corresponding to it.<sup>23\*</sup>

Here, it should be noted, the word “you” means the same thing as the word “I” often does in the Orthodox Divine services: Adam (because we are all one man). St. John makes this clear in another passage:

What armed death against the whole universe? The fact that only one man tasted of the tree (Commentary on Romans 5:15–21).<sup>24</sup>

St. Macarius the Great says the same thing:

Adam was placed as lord and king of all the creatures.... But after his captivity, there was taken captive together with him the creation which served him and submitted to him, because through him death came to reign over every soul.<sup>25</sup>

St. Symeon the New Theologian is also very explicit that the material creation—and not just Paradise—before Adam’s fall was incorrupt.\*\* As we saw earlier, he writes that Adam was originally “placed by the Creator God as an immortal king over an incorrupt world, not only over Paradise, but also over the whole of creation

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\* Further Patristic commentary on Romans 8:19–23 is found on pp. 456, 727–33, 762–63, 772 below.—ED.

\*\* In his notes, Fr. Seraphim introduces this teaching with the following words about St. Symeon: “Let us now read and be inspired by this teaching as set forth in perfect and unequivocal form by one of the greatest Saints of the Orthodox Church, a late Father who stated the teaching of the Orthodox Church so divinely and clearly that he was the third and last, after St. John the Evangelist and St. Gregory Nazianzen, to be called ‘Theologian’ by the Church.”—ED.

## THE FALL OF MAN

which was under the heavens." In the same Homily he goes on to say that, after Adam's transgression,

God did not curse Paradise ... but He cursed only the whole rest of the earth, which also was incorrupt and brought forth everything by itself....

And thus it was fitting in all justice for the one who had become corrupt and mortal by reason of the transgression of the commandment, to live upon the corruptible earth and eat corruptible food.... Then also all creatures, when they saw that Adam was banished from Paradise, no longer wished to submit to him, the criminal.... But God restrained all these creatures by His power, and in His compassion and goodness He did not allow them immediately to strive against man, and He commanded that the creation should remain in submission to him, and having become corrupt, should serve corrupt man for whom it had been created....

Do you see that this whole creation in the beginning was incorrupt and was created by God in the manner of Paradise? But later it was subjected by God to corruption, and submitted to the futility of men.<sup>26\*</sup>

The Fathers also mention that the sentence of death, which took effect at the fall, was not just a punishment. It was also a good, because once man fell, if he were to still be immortal, there would be no way out for him. Imagine being in a state of being unable to redeem yourself, unable to get to Paradise, and then living and living and living, with no hope of getting out of this state. Death puts an end to sin. The fact that we are afraid of death already wakes us up to begin to struggle. Even if we forget about Paradise, we will be afraid of death and begin to struggle, to overcome our fallen nature.\*\*

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\* On the original incorruption of the whole of creation, and on creation's becoming corruptible through man's fall, see also pp. 451–65, 547, 573, 649–51, 662, 669, and appendix 1 below.—ED.

\*\* On why God providentially allowed death (along with suffering, disease, etc.) to enter the world, see also pp. 743–46, 748 below.—ED.

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

Finally, St. Symeon the New Theologian writes of how, through the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the sentence of death is abolished:

The decree of God, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,” just like everything else laid upon mankind after the fall, will be in effect until the end of the age. But by God’s mercy, through the power of the extraordinary sacrifice of Christ, in the future age it will no longer have any effect, when the general resurrection will occur, which resurrection could not possibly occur unless the Son of God Himself had risen from the dead, Who had died for the abolition of the above-mentioned decree and for the resurrection of the entire human nature.<sup>27</sup>

In the general resurrection, all of creation will be delivered from corruption together with man, just as it once became subject to corruption because of him. St. Symeon writes:

When man again will be renewed and become spiritual, incorrupt, and immortal, then also the whole creation, which had been subjected by God to man to serve him, will be delivered from this servitude, will be renewed together with him, and become incorrupt and as it were spiritual....

It is not fitting for the bodies of men to be clothed in the glory of resurrection and to become incorrupt before the renewal of all creatures. But just as in the beginning, first the whole creation was created incorrupt, and then from it man was taken and made, so also it is fitting that again first all the creation should become incorrupt, and then the corruptible bodies of men also should be renewed and become incorrupt, so that once more the whole man might be incorrupt and spiritual and that he might dwell in an incorruptible, eternal, and spiritual dwelling.<sup>28</sup>

*3:20 And Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living (KJV).*

## THE FALL OF MAN

Eve means “life.” Adam now gives her a particular name in addition to the name Woman.

*3:21 Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them (KJV).*

St. Gregory of Nyssa says this means that they literally put on “coats of skins,” but it also means, figuratively, that they became clothed in a *different* kind of flesh; that is, their nature was changed.\*

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\* In *On Virginity* 12, St. Gregory interprets the “coats (or garments) of skins” in a literal sense: “And after that [the fall], they covered themselves with the skins of dead animals” (NPNF 2 5, p. 358). In *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, he interprets them in a figurative sense, associating them with “such accretions [as] sexual intercourse, conception, parturition, impurities, suckling, feeding, evacuation, gradual growth to full size, prime of life, old age, disease, and death” (*ibid.*, p. 465). In *On Those Who Have Fallen Asleep*, he relates the “garments of skin” to the passions: “The garments of skin have all the properties belonging to an irrational nature: pleasure, anger, gluttony, greed, and similar tendencies which allow man to choose between virtue and evil” (GNO 9.55, trans. Richard McCambly). Finally, in *Catechetical Oration* 8, he associates the “garments” specifically with physical mortality (NPNF 2 5, p. 483).

Both literal and figurative interpretations of the “garments of skin” are found in the writings of other Holy Fathers. St. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.23.5), St. Athanasius (see p. 249n above and p. 276n below), St. Basil (*The Long Rules* 22), St. John Chrysostom (p. 720 below), St. Ephraim (p. 453 below), St. Ambrose (*Two Books concerning Repentance* 2.11.99), St. Epiphanius (*Panarion* 52.3, 64.66), and Blessed Theodoret (*Questions on Genesis* 39), for example, interpret them literally. St. Methodius of Olympus refers to them figuratively as “mortality” (*From the Discourse on the Resurrection* 1.4, ANF 6, p. 364), as does St. Athanasius (see below), and St. Maximus (p. 719 below). St. Gregory the Theologian says that they can perhaps represent “denser flesh, mortal and unyielding” (pp. 487, 693 below), St. John Damascene says that they denote “the mortality and material density of the flesh” (pp. 719–20 below), and St. Gregory Palamas associates them with “our infirm mortal bodies beset with pain” (*Homily* 31.1, trans. Christopher Veniamin, p. 243).

In light of Fr. Seraphim’s discussion of the different levels of Patristic interpretation of the Genesis account, the literal and figurative readings of the “garments of skin” may be regarded as complementary, not mutually exclusive. This is evidenced by the above-quoted passages of St. Gregory of Nyssa, in which the same Father offers both kinds of interpretations. Even more illustrative in this regard is the following quotation of St. Athanasius, in which the Saint sets forth both interpretations

## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

*3:22–23 And the Lord God said, Behold the man is become as one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever, therefore, the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken (KJV).*

The Lord says “as one of Us,” referring to Himself in plural: the Holy Trinity.\* He casts Adam out so that Adam would not eat of the tree of life, which we see also in the book of the Apocalypse: the tree of life in the center of Paradise (cf. Apoc. 2:7, 22:2, 14). Eating of this tree would make man immortal without being good, and God does not want that; therefore, He casts him out.\*\*

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simultaneously: “When he [Adam] sinned, and hence was going to die, he received garments of skins, which were from dead animals, and which were a symbol of the mortality that through sin was added to him” (*On the Passion and Crucifixion of the Lord*, PG 28.221A).

It should be further noted that, when venturing to give figurative interpretations of the reception of “garments of skin,” the Holy Fathers never embraced the Gnostic notion that this could mean the reception of bodies, as though Adam and Eve were previously without bodies. This idea was explicitly rejected by St. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 1.5.5), Clement of Alexandria (*Stromateis* 3.95), St. Methodius (*From the Discourse on the Resurrection* 1.2), St. Epiphanius (*Panarion* 64.4, 64.65), Blessed Jerome (*To Pammachius against John of Jerusalem*), and Blessed Theodoret (*Questions on Genesis* 39).—ED.

\* St. Ephraim writes: “By saying ‘He has become as one of Us,’ [God] symbolically reveals the Holy Trinity” (*Commentary on Genesis* 2.34.1, FC 91, p. 122).—ED.

\*\* Furthermore, as St. Ephraim points out, God in His mercy separated Adam and Eve from the tree of life so that they would not live forever in their new condition of pain and suffering: “If Adam had rashly eaten from the one tree he was commanded not to eat from, how much faster would he hasten to the one about which he had not been so commanded? But it was now decreed that they should live in toil, in sweat, in pains, and in pangs. Therefore, lest [Adam and Eve], having eaten of this tree, live forever and remain in eternal lives of suffering, [God] forbade them to eat, while they were clothed with a curse, that which He had been prepared to give them before they incurred the curse and when they were still clothed with glory. [God did this] lest this life-giving gift that they would receive through the tree of life become misery, and thus bring worse evil upon them than what they had already obtained from the tree of knowledge” (*Commentary on Genesis* 2.35.1–2, FC 91, p. 122).—ED.

## THE FALL OF MAN



Adam and Eve hiding themselves from the presence of the Lord,  
and being cast out of Paradise.

*Exterior fresco from Sucevita Monastery, Moldavia, Romania, 1595–1596.*

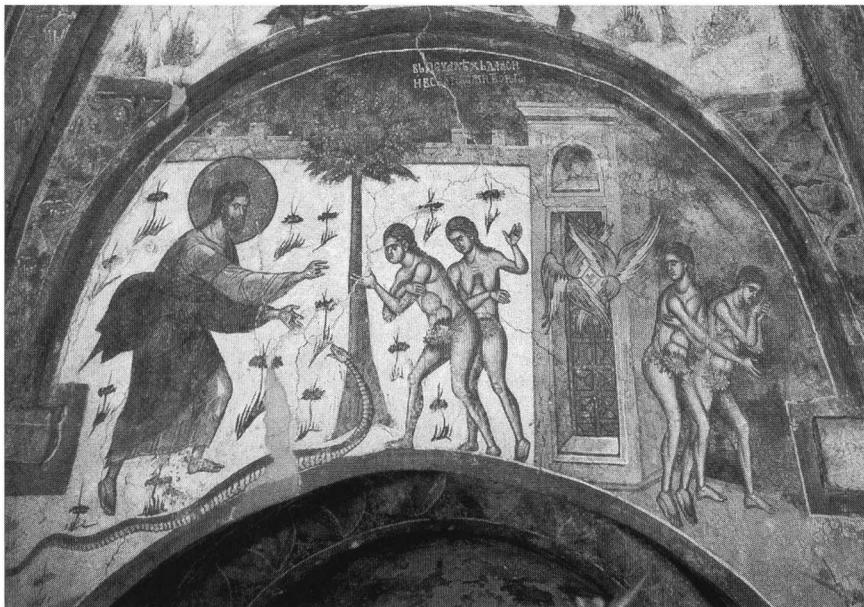
*3:24 And He cast out Adam and caused him to dwell over against the Garden of Delight, and stationed the Cherubim and the fiery sword that turns about to keep the way of the tree of life (LXX).*

As we said in the first talk, St. Macarius of Egypt interprets this mystically, saying that this is what happens to every soul when Paradise is closed to it. But it also means exactly what it says: that there is a Cherubim with a flaming sword.

\* \* \*

We have now covered the first three chapters of Genesis, from which is taken the basic theology of the Church about the origin of man and, therefore, his goal. The services are filled with this theology, especially the services to the Cross. On September 14th, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, there are a number of very good verses which show how the Church views what happened in Paradise and what happened when Christ came. They compare the tree of which Adam tasted with the Tree which was the Cross. One of the verses for Great Vespers says:

AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS



God pronouncing the sentence on Adam and Eve,  
and casting them out of Paradise.

*Fresco from Decani Monastery, Kosovo, Serbia, 1338–1347.*

Come, O ye peoples, let us venerate the blessed Wood, through which the eternal justice has been brought to pass. For he who by a tree deceived our forefather Adam, is by the Cross himself deceived; and he who by tyranny gained possession of the creature endowed by God with royal dignity, is overthrown in headlong fall. By the Blood of God the poison of the serpent is washed away; and the curse of a just condemnation is loosed by the unjust punishment inflicted on the Just. For it was fitting that wood should be healed by wood, and that through the Passion of One Who knew not passion should be remitted all the sufferings of him who was condemned because of wood.<sup>29</sup>

It is very profound and moving when you read verses like this, knowing the theology of Paradise and the future age.

In the Sessional Hymn of Matins of that same service, we sing:

At right: The banishment of Adam and Eve from Paradise.

Below: Cain slaying Abel, Cain asking God for mercy, Adam and Eve weeping over Abel's death, Eve (with child) and Adam lamenting, Adam tilling the ground. Here are shown some of the major consequences of the fall:

an inclination toward sin (including murder), pain (including pain in childbirth), sorrow, hard

labor, and death.

*Details of a Russian icon of the eighteenth century.*



## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

In Paradise of old, the wood [i.e., of the tree] stripped me bare, for by giving its fruit to eat, the enemy brought in death. But now the wood of the Cross that clothes men with the garment of life has been set up in the midst of the earth, and the whole world is filled with boundless joy.<sup>30</sup>

Another canticle:

O thrice-blessed Tree, on which Christ the King and Lord was stretched! Through thee the beguiler fell, who tempted mankind with the tree. He was caught in the trap set by God, Who was crucified upon thee in the flesh, granting peace unto our souls.<sup>31</sup>

And the Ninth Song, Irmos:

Today the death that came to man through eating of the tree is made of no effect through the Cross. For the curse of our mother Eve that fell on all mankind is destroyed by the fruit of the pure Mother of God, whom all the powers of heaven magnify.<sup>32 \*</sup>

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\* This parallel between Eve and the Mother of God appears in Patristic literature as well as in liturgical hymns. The Fathers contrast the “two virgins,” Eve and Mary (the former having been a virgin at the time of the fall), speaking of the opposite consequences of the disobedience of the one and the obedience of the other. Thus, St. Justin Martyr writes: “Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her, and the power of the Highest would overshadow her: therefore also the Holy Thing born of her is the Son of God (cf. Luke 1:35); and she replied, ‘Be it unto me according to thy word’ (Luke 1:38). And by her has He been born, to Whom we have proved so many Scriptures refer, and by Whom God destroys both the serpent and those angels and men who are like him; but works deliverance from death to those who repent of their wickedness and believe upon Him” (*Dialogue with Trypho* 100, ANF 1, p. 249).

The same formulation is found in St. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.22.4, 5.19.1, ANF 1, pp. 455, 547), St. Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechetical Lectures* 12.15, NPNF 2 7, p. 75), St. Proclus of Constantinople (*Homily 4: On the Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, PG 65.712A), and St. Photius the Great (*Homily 7: On the Annunciation* 5,

## THE FALL OF MAN

The Canon of the Feast of Epiphany, composed by St. John Damascene, tells us that the devil introduced death into the creation, but that Christ has overcome him:

He who once assumed the appearance of a malignant serpent and implanted death in the creation, is now cast into darkness by Christ's coming in the flesh.<sup>33\*</sup>

That is briefly the theology of the beginning of all things, Paradise, original Adam, his fall, and the state to which we have to try to get back by the Second Adam, Who is Christ.

If you interpret all these events in the early history of mankind as simply an allegory, as a pretty story which says something else entirely, you will be deprived of a true understanding of Paradise. For example, many Roman Catholic theologians say that the idea of Paradise does

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trans. Cyril Mango, pp. 143–44). St. Cyril speaks further of how womankind owed a “debt of gratitude” to men because Eve was created out of Adam’s rib, without a mother (see pp. 242–43 above), and that this debt was paid back by the Mother of God when she gave birth to Jesus Christ by the power of God, without a man (*Catechetical Lectures* 12.29, p. 80).

Together with St. Cyril, St. Symeon the New Theologian compares Eve’s miraculous creation with the virginal birth-giving of the Mother of God: “Consider the parallelism of the things of old, with what balance they parallel the economy and covenant of God. Thus, first, Adam was introduced into Paradise and then Eve was brought forth [from him]. Even so, first the Son of God, Himself the Creator of Adam, came down and entered into the pure womb of the Virgin, and then received from her the rib of Adam, which is to say, her all-pure flesh, and became man, and, in place of Eve who had been deceived by the serpent, He went forth into the world as the new Adam come to slay the serpent, Eve’s seducer” (*Ethical Discourses* 2.7, PPS 14, p. 110). The same parallel is drawn by St. John Damascene; see p. 432 below.

On the comparison of Eve and the Mother of God, see also St. Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Oration 2: On the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos* 22, PG 87c.3241BC; and the quotations from Sts. Irenaeus and Epiphanius on pp. 267–68 above.—ED.

\* Similarly, in the services of the *Octoechos*, we read: “The tree of disobedience brought death into the world, but the Tree of the Cross blossomed life and incorruption. Therefore, we worship Thee, the Crucified Lord; let the light of Thy countenance shine upon us” (Aposticha, Tone 3, Tuesday Vespers).—ED.

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not fit in with the findings of modern anthropology; therefore, we have to reinterpret everything from the conclusion that man evolved from lower animals. Original sin, they say, must mean that as soon as man became sufficiently developed to become aware of himself, and therefore to become man, this *awareness* was like a fall. They cannot fit Paradise into this scheme, because in Paradise man was a being clothed in Divine glory.

It is very important for us to see these two entirely opposed conceptions. The first view is that man was created directly by God with a superhuman intelligence, with that original nature from which we fell away and to which we are called back. The other view is that man comes up from lower creatures. This second view, of course, leads to a philosophy of moral relativism, because if we were once something else, some kind of ape-like creature, then we are going to *be* something else—we are heading for Superman. (Most evolutionists say in so many words that collective humanity will become Superman.) This view also leads to religious ideas like those of Teilhard de Chardin, who says that the whole world is evolving into a higher state, that the world itself is like the bread which is being transmuted into the other world, and then it all becomes Christ. Of course, that is like pantheism, like some frightful heresy—which is exactly what Antichrist needs in order to come to reign. People will think they are gods while actually having this animalistic philosophy.

The first view—that of the Holy Fathers—is very realistic. Christ died on the Cross. This was a real, physical event, not an image or allegory; and through it comes an actual change in man's condition, both spiritual and bodily.\* It gives us salvation: not figurative salvation, but actual salvation. Likewise, Adam tasted of a tree and thereby lost Paradise. This, too, was a real, physical event, bringing about an actual change in man's spiritual and bodily condition.

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\* That is, through Christ's death together with His bodily Resurrection which inevitably followed it, salvation is given to man's soul and ultimately (in the general resurrection) to his body. On the order of man's redemption, see pp. 753–61 below.—ED.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Life outside Paradise*

(Genesis 4:1–6:5)

**I**N THE PRECEDING CHAPTER we examined the banishment of Adam from the point of view of Paradise; now we will look to see where he went. With Genesis chapter 4 begins earthly life as we know it now—but in many respects very different from our life now, as we shall see.

Unlike the first three chapters of Genesis, which have abundant Patristic commentaries, the later chapters have only a few. We will rely chiefly on the Genesis Commentaries of St. John Chrysostom and St. Ephraim the Syrian. In the West there are also the Commentaries of Blessed Augustine, which I have not seen, and a few others.

In the fourth and succeeding chapters we will be mainly following the Greek (Septuagint) text of Genesis, with a few variants from the King James Version, which is translated from the Hebrew.\*

#### *1. The Banishment of Adam*

Chapter 4 begins with Adam in a state of banishment. To where was Adam banished? The Greek text of Genesis 3:24 reads: “The Lord God … cast out Adam and caused him to dwell over against the Garden of Delight.”

Since, as we have seen, Paradise is an actual place, so also the earth to which Adam was banished was an actual place, near to Paradise. We saw in Genesis chapter 2 (v. 7–8) that Adam was created out of the earth and then led into Paradise; so now he is banished to the place where he was created. The Holy Fathers are surprisingly “geographical”

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\* In these chapters, Fr. Seraphim follows the chapter and verse numbering found in Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton’s translation of the Septuagint (London, 1851).—ED.

AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS



Adam and Eve lamenting outside Paradise.  
*Fresco from Decani Monastery, Kosovo, Serbia, 1338–1347.*

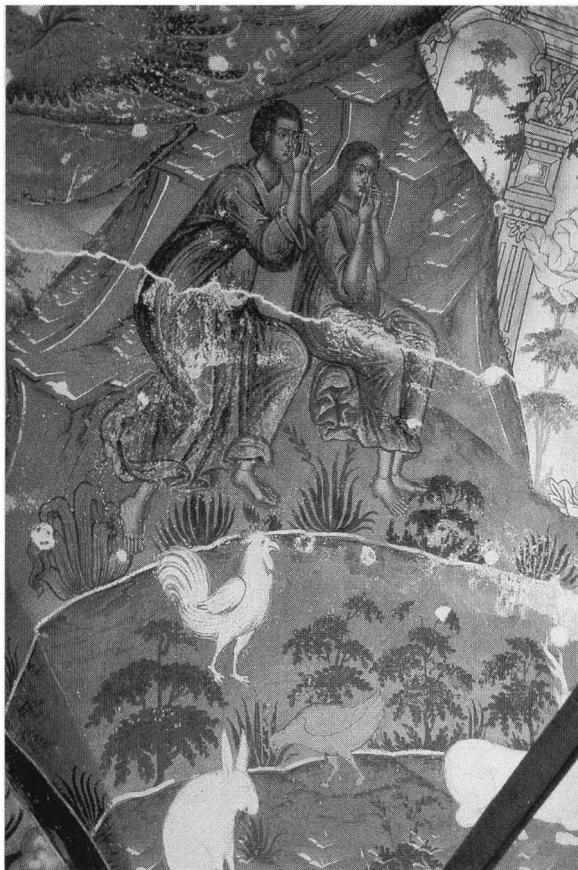
about this place, which they see as near Paradise, even within sight of it, and as offering spiritual opportunities which will be lost to later mankind. St. Ephraim the Syrian writes:

When Adam sinned, God banished him from Paradise, and in His goodness He gave him a dwelling outside the boundaries of Paradise; He settled him in a valley near Paradise. But men sinned there also, and for this they were scattered....

The family of the two brothers became divided: Cain went away and began to live in the land of Nod, lower than the places where the families of Seth and Enosh dwelt. But the descendants of those who dwelt above and were called the sons of God abandoned their land, went down and entered into marriage with the daughters of men, the daughters of those who dwelt below.<sup>1</sup>

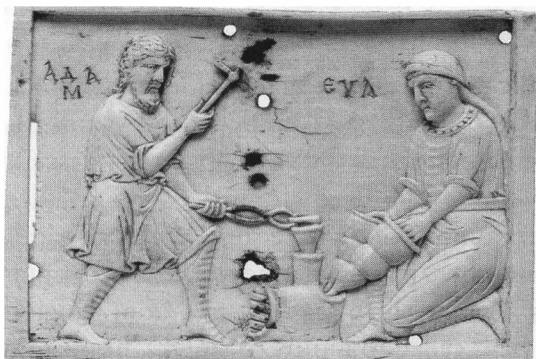
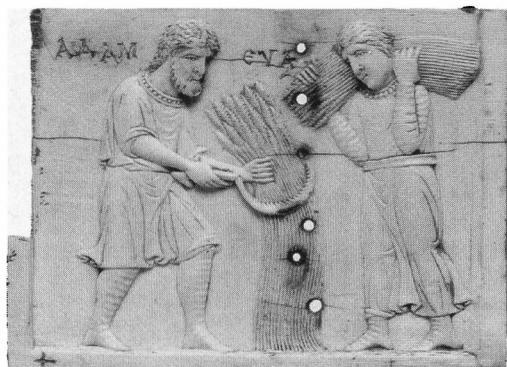
## LIFE OUTSIDE PARADISE

Adam and Eve beholding  
Paradise from afar.  
*Russian fresco of the  
sixteenth century.*



We will take up this subject again in Genesis chapter 6; for now, let us only note that the state of Adam outside of Paradise—a state lasting at least for his long lifetime and perhaps in his descendants down to the Flood—was rather different from the state of fallen mankind to-day. We will examine in this course some of the physical characteristics of this difference; here let us note the *spiritual* benefit of being close to Paradise, of still seeing the place and state from which man had fallen and to which he is called to return. St. John Chrysostom writes:

The view (of Paradise), even if it aroused in Adam an unbearable grief, at the same time afforded him much profit: the constant



Scenes from the life of Adam and Eve after the fall: Adam sorrowing,  
Adam and Eve harvesting, Adam and Eve at the forge.  
*Ivory carvings from a Byzantine casket, Constantinople, tenth century.*



Adam tilling the ground, after his banishment from Paradise.  
*Exterior fresco from Voronet Monastery, Moldavia, Romania, 1547.*

beholding (of Paradise) served for the grieving one as a warning for the future, so that he would not fall again into the same (transgression).<sup>2</sup>\*

Seeing Paradise still there, Adam is still somehow close to God; he is not nearly as far away from God as mankind became later on. Moreover, spiritually he can look and see what he lost. Therefore, you can imagine that Adam was in a state of repentance and struggle. He fell once and lost his original state, and now he is going to be less tempted by seeing the Paradise which he lost.

This teaching is set forth also in the Orthodox Church service for Forgiveness Sunday, when Orthodox Christians preparing to enter the struggle of Great Lent are given, as an inspiration to repentance, precisely the image of Adam sitting outside Paradise and beholding what he had lost:

Adam sat before Paradise and, lamenting his nakedness, he wept:  
“Woe is me! By evil deceit was I persuaded and led astray. Now I am  
an exile from glory ...” (“Glory” for “Lord, I Have Cried”).<sup>3</sup>

## *2. Cain and Abel*

*4:1 And Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and brought forth Cain and said, I have gained a man through God. And she again bore his brother Abel.*

(The name Cain means “gained.”)

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\* St. Cyril of Jerusalem likewise teaches: “Adam, God’s first-formed man, transgressed: could He not at once have brought death upon him? But see what the Lord does in His great love toward man. He cast him [Adam] out from Paradise, for because of sin he was unworthy to live there; but He cast out Adam and ‘caused him to dwell over against the Garden of Delight,’ that seeing whence he had fallen, and from what and into what a state he was brought down, he might afterwards be saved by repentance” (*Catechetical Lectures* 2.7, NPNF 2 7, p. 9). Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus also writes that God ordered Adam “to live directly opposite the garden so that he would remember his trouble-free existence and hate sin for causing his life of hardship” (*Questions on Genesis* 40, LEC 1, p. 91).—ED.



At left: the conception of Cain. At right: the young Cain.  
*Fresco from Decani Monastery, Kosovo, Serbia, 1338–1347.*

AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS



Adam and Eve in affliction, with Cain and Abel bearing their offerings.

*Fresco from the Christian catacombs in Rome, third century.*

Chapter 4 begins with the first story of life after the fall, when Adam is living in his new place: the story of Cain and Abel.

Here we see the first difference in the life of Adam and Eve between their state in Paradise and their state outside of Paradise: it is only after their banishment that married life and the begetting of children begin. As we have seen, the Fathers are quite specific that, before the fall, Eve was a virgin. St. John Chrysostom writes of this:

After the disobedience, after the banishment from Paradise—then it was that married life began. Before the disobedience, the first people lived like angels and there was no talk of cohabitation.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, this does not deprive the institution of marriage of its honor and blessing from God. It simply shows that the original state of Adam was not married life as we know it. The original state was like

the state to which we will return, when there will be no marriage or giving in marriage (cf. Matt. 22:30), and everyone will be in the virginal state.

The Fathers do raise the question: how would children have been born if Adam had not fallen? They say that children would have been born in a way that God knew, but not according to this way we have now,\* which, as St. Gregory of Nyssa discusses, is bound up with our animal nature. This [the sexual mode of reproduction] will not be in the Paradise to come, and was not in the original Paradise.

*4:2–5 And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And it was so after some time that Cain brought of the fruits of the earth a sacrifice to the Lord. And Abel also brought of the firstborn of his sheep and of his fatlings. And God looked upon Abel and his gifts, but Cain and his sacrifices He regarded not. And Cain was exceedingly sorrowful, and his countenance fell.*

Where did Cain and Abel get the idea of sacrifice? The Fathers tell us that the idea of offering sacrifice to God, of returning to Him the best things of the earth, was placed in the conscience of man from the very beginning of his existence.<sup>5</sup> God made people to serve Him, and so the first thing they thought of was to offer thanksgiving to Him for what they had.

\* This teaching—that, if man had not fallen, God would have increased the human race by a means other than sexual reproduction—is found in the writings of Sts. Athanasius the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, John Damascene, and Symeon of Thessaloniki. (See references on pp. 721n, 722n below, and the quotation from St. John Damascene on p. 204 above.) St. Maximus observes that the virginal birth of Christ showed that “there was perhaps another way, foreknown to God, for human beings to increase, if the first human being had kept the commandment” (*Ambigua* 41, in [Fr.] Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, p. 159), while St. Gregory of Nyssa suggests that if man had remained in his original, angel-like condition, God would have increased the human race according to the mode by which He multiplied the number of angels—a mode which is “unspeakable and inconceivable by human conjectures, except that it assuredly exists” (*On the Making of Man* 17.2, NPNF 2 5, p. 407).—ED.

But why did God look favorably on the sacrifice of Abel and not on that of Cain? Is He playing favorites? Even from the little text we have here, we see that Abel offered the best that he had, his “firstborn and fatlings” of the sheep; but Cain offered only some “fruits,” not caring to give the best he had. He had the idea of sacrifice, but he had the attitude: “Well, I’ll give some of this that I have.” He didn’t make a particularly important thing of it, whereas Abel was careful to give the best that he had. Cain had it in his nature to offer sacrifice, but he did not add from his own nature the willing thanksgiving of his heart; and Abel did. Therefore, God was pleased with Abel’s offering, and not with Cain’s.\*

St. Ephraim writes:

Abel offered a sacrifice of the choicest, but Cain without choice. Abel chose and offered the firstborn and fatlings, while Cain offered either the ears, or together with them the fruits which were there at that time. Although his sacrifice was poorer than the sacrifice of his brother, still if he had offered it not with disdain, his sacrifice also would have been pleasing, as was the sacrifice of his brother.... But he did not do this, even though it was easy to do so; he did not take care for the good ears or the best fruits. In the soul of the one offering sacrifice there was no love for the One Who received the offering. And because he offered sacrifice with disdain, God rejected it.<sup>6\*\*</sup>

Cain was sorrowful not merely because his sacrifice was rejected, but also because of a deep passion which is revealed here for the first

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\* Two other places in Scripture speak of the sacrifices of Cain and Abel, but they speak only generally: 1 John 3:12 and Hebrews 11:4.—AUTH.

\*\* St. Macarius the Great makes the same observation and draws out from it a lesson for Christians: “I always remember that it was Abel who offered a sacrifice to God of the fat and firstlings of his flock, while Cain offered gifts of the fruits of the earth, but not of the firstfruits. It is said: ‘And God looked upon Abel and his gifts, but Cain and his sacrifices He regarded not’ (Gen. 4:4–5). This teaches us that everything that is done in fear and in faith is pleasing to God, and not that which is done for display and without love” (*The Great Letter*, trans. George A. Maloney, p. 265).—ED.



Cain harvesting grain and Abel tending sheep.  
*Exterior fresco from Voronet Monastery, Moldavia, Romania, 1547.*



Cain and Abel laboring, and offering their respective sacrifices to God.  
*Fresco from Decani Monastery, Kosovo, Serbia, 1338–1347.*



Cain and Abel offering sacrifices to God, and Cain slaying Abel.  
*Fresco by the Cretan iconographer Tzortzis, Dionysiou Monastery, Mount Athos, 1547.*

time in human history: envy. St. John Chrysostom says of this passage:

His sorrow proceeded from two reasons: not only from the fact that he himself was rejected, but also from the fact that the gift of his brother was accepted.<sup>7</sup>

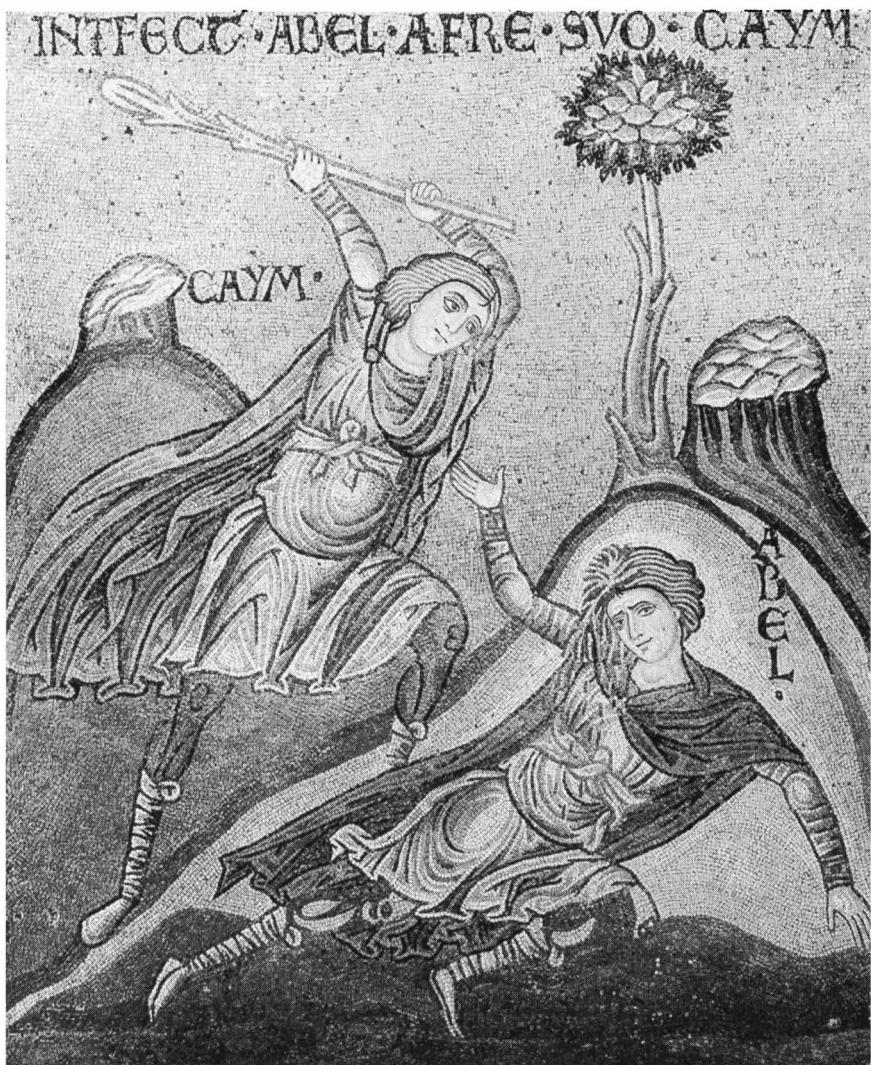
St. Ephraim specifies that God's acceptance of Abel's gift was manifested by fire which came down from heaven to consume it, while Cain's offering remained without being consumed.<sup>8</sup>

But here again God's mercy is shown. Just as He came to Adam after he sinned and asked him, "Where art thou?" giving him a chance to repent, so now He comes to Cain with the same opportunity:

*4:6–7 And the Lord God said to Cain, Why art thou become very sorrowful and why is thy countenance fallen? Hast thou not sinned if thou hast brought it rightly, but not rightly divided it? Be still, to thee shall be his submission, and thou shalt rule over him.*

St. John Chrysostom says of these verses:

Behold what an unutterable condescension of concern! God saw that Cain was possessed, so to speak, by the passion of envy; but see how, in His goodness, He applies to him a corresponding treatment so as to raise him immediately and not allow him to drown.... [God says to him,] Since you have sinned, "Be still," calm your thoughts, be delivered from the shock of the waves which besiege your soul; calm your agitation lest to your earlier sin you add another more serious.... God already knew in advance that (Cain) would rise up against his brother, and by these words He warns him.... He desires to meeken the rage and fierceness of Cain and restrain him from rising up against his brother. Seeing the movements of his mind and knowing the cruelty of his murderous intent, God wishes beforehand to soften his heart and calm his mind, and for this purpose He subjects his brother to him and does not take away his authority over him. But even after such care and after



Cain slaying Abel.  
*Byzantine mosaic from the Monreale Cathedral, Sicily, twelfth century.*



Above: Cain slaying Abel.  
*Fresco from Decani Monastery,  
Kosovo, Serbia, 1338–1347.*

At right: Cain, instigated by  
a demon, slaying Abel.

*Russian fresco of the  
sixteenth century.*



## AN ORTHODOX PATRISTIC COMMENTARY ON GENESIS

such treatment, Cain received no benefit. Such is the difference in the inward dispositions (of Cain and Abel); such is the power of evil!<sup>9</sup>

We see the same thing today, as indeed throughout the history of mankind: God chastises only after giving men abundant opportunity to repent and change their ways.

*4:8 And Cain said to Abel his brother, Let us go out into the plain; and it came to pass that when they were in the plain Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.\**

In the early chapters of Genesis we see the beginnings of everything that is to be repeated later in human history.<sup>\*\*</sup> Here we see the first murder—and it is a fratricide, the killing of one's own brother.

But here again, as with Adam after his sin in Paradise, God shows first His concern that the guilty should *repent*, and then shows His mercy even when there is no repentance.

*4:9–16 And the Lord God said to Cain, Where is Abel thy brother?*

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\* In Luke 11:50–51, Christ speaks of the murder of righteous Abel: “That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation: from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias.” By affirming that the murder of Abel occurred “from the foundation of the world,” the words of Christ again contradict the modern secular idea that there were billions of years of earth history before the appearance of man.—ED.

\*\* St. Irenaeus points out that Cain—who offered sacrifice merely for the sake of appearance and obligation, and who slew Abel out of envy—can be likened to the Pharisees in the time of Christ, who made offerings to God with the same unworthy motives and who slew the Lord out of the same passion of jealousy (*Against Heresies* 4.18.3, ANF 1, p. 485).

St. Bede the Venerable also writes of the connection between the murder of Abel and the passion and crucifixion of Christ: “[Some] understand the murderer Cain as the Jews’ lack of faith, the killing of Abel as the passion of the Lord and Savior, and the earth that opened its mouth and received Abel’s blood from Cain’s hand as the Church (which received, in the mystery of its renewal, the blood of Christ poured out by the Jews)” (*Homilies on the Gospels* 1.14, trans. L. T. Martin and D. Hurst, vol. 1, pp. 139–40).—ED.