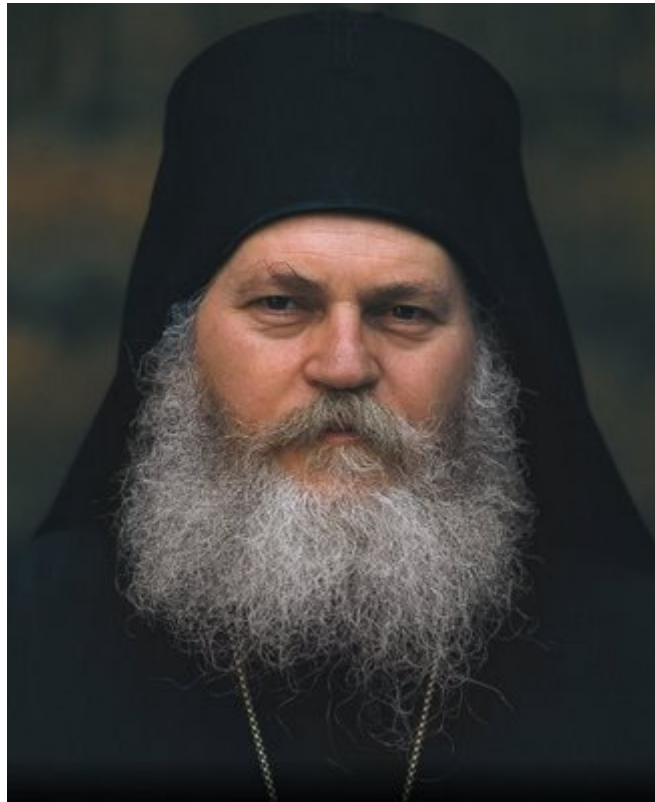


## Creation· the end of ages (part 1)

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Man has been trying to make sense of the creation ever since antiquity as it is manifested in the teachings of many religions and philosophies. Generally, we may say that ancient Greek philosophers have offered three explanations as to the creation of the world: a) the Stoics and the Epicureans advocated that the world was self-existent, autonomous and eternal, b) The Pythagoreans argued that the physical elements and laws were divine and c) The Aristotelians attributed the cause of the creation to a god “who was the first mover, unmoved”. We may also argue that all subsequent theories, whether hailing from scientific or philosophical/religious circles, are divided into the following three main categories: the materialists, the pantheists and the theocrats.

However, we derive from the Scriptures definite proof that God created the entire physical and non-material world not from previously existent matter but “from what was not” (Maccabeus 7, 28) and that the Lord lives in the world (see psalms

138, 7-10) and He is not an unmoved being. These are the basic dogmas of our Church. Word-God created every living being: "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1, 3). The creation of the world from nothing does not mean that that which was created subsequently becomes autonomous and independent. It means that God and the world are two different entities which are connected with unbreakable bonds. The uncreated Lord is the only uncreated cause and the world is the created outcome. When the Lord said "Let it be light" and "it was so" or when He said "let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens" and "it was so" or when He finally created everything that was made "and it was very good" He did not withdraw from the world ( see Genesis 1, 3-31).

The Triune God created the world in His infinite goodness and wisdom. The word 'kosmos' (world) means 'kosmima' (jewel); a jewel is an artefact which causes pleasure even to the artist. Of course the self-sufficient Lord does not need such gratification, but He wished and became Creator in an outward expression of His excessive love (which is other than the love which exists among the Persons of the Trinity).

The Lord's presence is continuous throughout the universe; just as with His creative energy He brought all beings into being 'from what was not', through His 'cohesive and observational' energy He maintains all beings 'into existence' (St Gregory Palamas: Writings). The Lord's cohesive and observational or providential, uncreated energy determines all physical and spiritual laws which govern the material and the spiritual worlds. The Lord's uncreated energy as a cause becomes created as an outcome and is 'altered' into various kinds of created powers like the physical force, motion, heat, chemical and nuclear power.

The creation is the result of the divine will-which for the Triune God is the same for all three Persons- and not the product of divine substance, otherwise pantheism would govern the universe ( St John of Damascus: A publication of the Orthodox Faith). The Triune God through His uncreated energies is connected to the entire creation. As St Gregory Palamas says the simple beings (the non-living) participate in the substance-creating energy of the Lord; the living beings (animals, plants) also participate in His life-giving energy; additionally, rational beings participate in His wisdom-giving energy. Only angels and men, who attain deification, participate in His deifying energy (St Gregory Palamas: Writings).

The Lord first created the spiritual, invisible world, which includes the myriads of angels and then the material world, which became visible through His Word, the divine commands. Finally, He created man, the crown of the creation, who as St

John of Damascus says, is made of visible and invisible substance. For this reason St Gregory Palamas describes man as “the major in a small world”.

Human nature was not created by command like the rest of the visible and invisible creation where the Lord “spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Psalm 33, 9). In order to create man all the three Persons of the Holy Trinity came together and said: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1, 26). Thus the Lord and Creator Himself took dust from the ground and created the body and breathed into his nostrils ‘the breath of life’, namely divine Grace, His uncreated deifying energies. Thus man has acquired “an abundance of life” (John 10, 10) more than any other being; namely, his adoption. St Gregory Palamas says that “the image’ of man is higher than ‘the image’ of angels. Man’s soul is the only one with intellect, word and life-giving spirit. Because the angels do not possess a material body they do not have a life-giving spirit which would give life to the attached body, like humans have”. (St Gregory Palamas: Writings. Chapters 38-39).

The creation is a mystery for man; a mystery which encompasses the creative and providential presence of the Lord in the world and at the same time proves His divine greatness. Man has the ability to penetrate this mystery and comprehend the love, all-wisdom and special providence the Lord has for His creatures. Thus, he may choose to live in constant communion with the Lord by giving thanks and glory to the One, who because of His excessive love, gives him everything and especially his deification, namely his ‘likeness’.

According to Christian anthropology, Adam, the first man, having been placed in Paradise, was given the command to ‘work and keep it’ and govern over the entire material creation ‘freely’. In order to preserve the necessary reliance on the Lord-Creator, man was issued with a prohibition; namely not to eat from a certain fruit, in order to test his free will. Adam, being free, did not keep this command and as theology says ‘the forefathers sinned’ or “fell’.

Many explanations are given as to what caused man’s fall. One of the most distinctive, which is harmonized with patristic tradition, is the explanation given by St Erinaios, Bishop of Lougdounou (Lyon). He argues that Adam was like an infant, who was placed in Paradise in order to grow into adulthood by exercising his free will. After his creation, man had to be raised, grow up, multiply and gain spiritual strength before being glorified through his deification (Άγιος Ειρηναίος Λουγδούνου: Έλεγχος ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως, βιβλίο Δ). However, he was deceived and acted wrongly. For this reason repentance was given to him as an opportunity to return to Paradise. This was something which was not given to the ‘fallen

angels', who became demons; namely specific evil and crafty beings.

After the fall, the forefathers, Adam and Eve, 'were clothed with garments of skins' (Genesis 3, 21); namely with corruption, mortality and with the blameless passions: hunger, thirst, sleep and pain. The powers of their soul were also diffused. 'The image' was blackened and man's spiritual energy, with which he was united with the uncreated deifying energy, was hidden. Thus, divine Grace, as a deifying gift, withdrew until the time man was to recall it through repentance. Repentance is an act of man's free will; the latter remained intact.

Let us cite here the Catholic and Protestant views of the fall. The Catholics believe that after the fall, man was left with 'the image' untarnished but lost the special supra-natural (created) Grace, he had acquired from God, to attain 'the likeness'. It is from this point onwards that logic prevails in the western theological and social circles. The Protestants on the other hand, believe that human nature was totally perverted after the fall, even as to 'the image'. Thus they advocate the premise on the 'absolute destination'.

The fall of man, who was the 'crown of the creation', has caused the fall of the entire creation which "has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth" (Romans 8, 22). This explains the main teaching of our Church, which views the creation as a whole, which is being guided towards perfection and deification; man and nature together. Man and nature are not distinct in the design of the creation. Therefore man has a duty to maintain a good relationship with the rest of the creation. The fact that man remains in the fallen condition perilously prolongs the world enduring in the same condition. Thus man contributes to the perversion and degradation of nature. Therefore, the fall has not only distorted man existentially and morally but also his very same environment.

Thus the person who has an unclean heart relates towards other human beings in a way which serves his passions and acts wrongly towards nature, by abusing it. Christ himself reveals: "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness" (Mark 7, 21-22). Man's heart is full of passions because he does not strive for virtue, neither does he obey the Lord's commands. St Gregory Palamas stresses: "The mind which has rebelled against God either becomes beastly or diabolical; having rebelled against the laws of nature man does not put a limit to his pleasure" (St Gregory Palamas: Homilies. KB). Abba Dorotheos says that a proper conscience defines a person's relationship with others but also with the rest of the creation. Thus in his homily on conscience he says: "To have a proper conscience towards material things means that one

does not abuse anything, neither does he let it perish nor throws it away” ( Abba Dorotheos: Ascetic Works, Teaching 3).

Nowadays we have reached such a level of irrationality, such a degree of lack of conscience and such an extensive state of rebellion that the entire human race is threatened with partial or total extinction from a nuclear disaster as a result of war or nuclear accident; from the depletion of the ozone layer as a result of the increase of harmful substances in the air and from the increased desertification and the pollution of waters.

For example, it is said that the constantly increasing average temperature of the earth causes the melting of the ice in the poles. If the polar ice melts the average level of the oceans will rise by 70 meters and areas which are inhabited by a quarter of the earth's population will be submerged in water. It is estimated that every year, 24 billion tons of soil is lost from all continents. During the last few decades the volume of soil lost was equal to the farming land of the entire United States. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) estimates that desertification costs some 40 billion dollars a year. Almost all subsoil waters in Europe have been polluted by substances harmful to man, making them undrinkable. This is the direct result of the over fertilization of farmlands because of intensive farming. The ongoing successes in Genetics which may culminate in the human cloning will cause terrible moral and social consequences. The nuclear waste is increasing so much that the United States alone has massed seven hundred thousand tons of depleted uranium, which has become very costly to store and thus it is being used in the creation of bombs. However, these issues will be more extensively dealt with by the scientists who will speak at the conference tomorrow.

Throughout history, mankind has experienced ecological disasters which have been described in the Holy Scriptures. It is worth turning our attention to the causes of these disasters and not to the historical events themselves. In the God inspired passages of the Holy Scriptures, the incarnate Word-God and the Fathers of the Church refer to the various causes and their effects and not to the precise way they took place and progressed; they talk about the causation of beings and not their substance. The latter is something immaterial for the Holy Scriptures and the Patristic Tradition but not for science which treats it as its main subject. Scientific method, relying on the rational faculties of man, contributes towards the development of the material knowledge of substances. Theology, however, which relies on the experiences of the saints and especially on the perception of God exclusively through the mind- as defined by the Patristic writings-, leads man to

experience the Uncreated One.

*source: Translated by Olga Konari Kokkinou from the Greek edition: Αρχιμ. Εφραίμ Βατοπαιδινού Καθηγουμένου Ι. Μ. Μ. Βατοπαιδίου, Αθωνικός Λόγος, Ιερά Μεγίστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου, Άγιον Όρος 2010.*