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# The World – Work of Divine Goodness and Love

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### Abstract

In our study we draw the readers' attention to the fact that the Christian youth, dominated by exaggerated desire for quick financial gain, career, temporary worldly interest, manifest increasing religious indifference, and ignorance of authentic Christian teachings and traditions. We consider this to be a matter of concern for contemporary society. Therefore, we sound the alarm, urging humanity's return to their springs, at the dawn of creation, precisely to realize that we are the work of God and that the ultimate goal of our life is to be the Creator's image. If we are not aware of the wonder of God's creation, with man crowned among creatures, we risk moving away from the Creator and not completing the purpose of our existence. Only to the extent that we consciously realize that God created us for Himself and that our soul longs for the final encounter with Him, only then will we gain rest in Him. If this is not the case, religious indifference will be a great danger to the Christian Church and to humanity in general. A vigilant conscience is necessary so that, observing the beauties of creation, we conclude that the “very good” created world is the icon of the Holy Trinity and that, by virtue of this, it undoubtedly presupposes unity, edifying cooperation and love.

### Keywords

creation, icon, beauty, harmony, awareness

In such a secularized world as ours has become, where the tendency is for further secularization, and where, despite religion being taught in schools, God seems to find no place and meaning among the youth who are getting further and further away from the authentic conception of life, it is necessary to be reminded that the universe, with its beauty and harmony is nothing else but God's creation, an icon of the Holy Trinity's beauty. In this sublime icon, the human being is the crown of God's creation, a microcosm set on a pedestal in macrocosm. Divine love reached its peak when man was brought to life, in a special act of creation, as a being capable to enjoy what the world was offering, capable to share God's kindness and deliberately take part in it<sup>1</sup>.

The modern man does not seem to be willing to understand this simple reality. Modern technique and artificial intelligence take his time and even replace him in some creative activities. Man himself may become robotized. To avoid misunderstandings, we shall make the following disclaimer: we do not disregard the development of modern technology, but the latter should serve man and the whole existence created by God.

Abusing his freedom, instead of serving God, man is at the service of his own whims and worldly worries, often times petty ones. He is not aware anymore that there is true freedom only in relation with God. Christian faith and ethics are not imposed onto the man but offered to him. God grants us true freedom. Faith comes as a given that should be grown through deeds carried out with personal effort and assisted by divine grace.

This article is not meant to be innovative and exhaustive, but we would like, in a few words, to discuss fundamental aspects of life. Moses's address through which he presents God's creation of the universe is admirable. No other human being could render the full splendor and beauty of his ideas on the creation of the world. His ideas, inspired by God, go beyond the human possibility of expression and are music to our ears, they are so grand and deep that cannot be grasped by the reason of the created being. However, this should not make man lazy, especially modern man, and

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<sup>1</sup> Vasile Doru FER, *Păcat și mântuire în lumina revelației biblice vechitestamentare. O abordare exegetic-teologică. Răspuns la provocările lumii contemporane*, Editura Astra Museum, Sibiu, 2018, p. 32.

deter him from studying the subject<sup>2</sup>. On the contrary, overcome by love for God, we should go beyond the limits of our strength, and in few words, attempt to grasp the matter of creation. And the modern reader, in spite of all other stimuli eliciting his attention, should make himself available for this topic, become possessed by the desire and wisdom of knowledge, and understand that the world is God's creation that was given to us and that, through our actions we are responsible for maintaining the harmony of creation.

This topic has been approached by numerous authors, starting from the Church Fathers, through contemporaneity. Among more recent authors, we should mention Nichifor Crainic with his work *Nostalgia Paradisului* (En. *Paradise Nostalgia*), 1994; Nicolae Neaga with the study "Integritatea Creației pe baza referatului biblic" (En. "The Integrity of Creation Drawing on the Bible") 1986; Laurence Brottier with the article "Sfântul Ioan Hrisostom: o creație ordonată și oferită ca spectacol omului" ("Saint John Chrysostom: An Orderly Creation Offered as a Spectacle to Man"), 2003; Ioan Chirilă with the work *Fragmentarium Exegetic Filonian II*, 2003.

In approaching our topic, we shall resort to patristic and contemporary literature.

## I. Brief notes on the origin of the world

The origin of the world has always stirred the interest of mankind. Who are we, where are we coming from and where are we heading to, these are some of the questions that have generated turmoil in history and have aroused mankind's curiosity from ancient times to the present<sup>3</sup>. Several answers were given in the past, and nowadays.

<sup>2</sup> Ioan CHIRILĂ, *Fragmentarium exegetic filonian II*, Editura Limes, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, pp. 12-33.

<sup>3</sup> Vasile Doru FER, "Teorii contemporane cu privire la originea lumii și a omului", in: *In memoriam Liviu Borcea dascăl și istoric*, Editura Universității Oradea, Oradea, 2018, p. 176.

Some would say that God created the world, not out of nothing, but out of matter as eternal as Him. And then, in making the world, God would only be an *architect*. The origin of the world would thus lie both with God and the matter. That was the dualist approach, professed by Parsis, Plato, the Gnostics, etc.

Others would claim that the world emanates from God, therefore it has a divine substance and is identical with God. This is the pantheist belief held by Brahmins, and by all the pantheist philosophers, more ancient and more recent likewise: Giordano Bruno, Spinoza, Hegel, and so on.

And then others would say that the world is the result of atomic combination. Its matter is eternal, and its form the result of a long evolution (all the materialist conceptions).

God's supernatural revelation shows that the world is God's work, created not out of existing matter, co-eternal with God, but out of nothing. God himself created the matter as substance of the world. First, in an amorphous state, and then, out of this substance, He organized the world during the six days or stages of creation. He did not create the world out of internal or external necessity, but freely. Or, better said, the creation was simultaneous with time and space, and not out of eternity. The world is the work of God's love, and it is destined to be Godlike. As an activity external to God, the creation of the world and then of mankind is, primarily, the work of God the Father, through *appropriation*. But, the two other persons of the Trinity, God the Son Jesus Christ and God the Holy Spirit, also participate (Gen 1,1-2; Jn 1,3; Rom 11,36).

The beings created by God, seen and unseen, organic and inorganic, animate and inanimate, make up a unitary and harmonious whole, the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1,1), fortunately called *cosmos* (gr. *ho cosmos*), *universe* or world. The unitary character of the world is manifest through the origin of beings. God brought them all to existence out of nothing. God is infinite contrary to all the other beings belonging to the unitary world, they are time and space bound, and thus finite. The physical nature, the spirit, and all the elements of creation merge within man, and he becomes a second miniature world, a microcosm, according to the ancient Greek thinkers and to the Church Fathers. Man is a natural icon and represents the unitary character of the world.

The world, as a unitary and harmonious whole of creation is made up of two parts: the material world and the spiritual one.

Saint Maximus the Confessor claims that the rational, mental world is divided in two: the world of angels and the human world, the latter comprising all people of all times and places, from Adam to the end of times.

The world of angels, created by God, is expressed through the word *heavens*, from the Scripture (“In the beginning God created *the heavens* (Hebrew *Hašamaim*<sup>4</sup>) and the earth.” - Genesis 1,1). The angels, spiritual, immaterial beings represent the unseen world of spirits, whereas the material reality and the human being represent the visible, concrete world. Man is the link between the two worlds, he is a spiritual-bodily being.

## II. The world – the icon of divine beauty

“Creation” is a word that Christian theology considered from the very beginning to be the most appropriate to describe how the world came into being. The Christian view is that the world was created by God as a gift to people. The act of creation has its origin in the Greek word *epoiesen* – to make, which translates the Hebrew *bara* – a verb always used in the Old Testament to express God’s creative action<sup>5</sup>, God’s work in the Holy Trinity through which “He made the world and everything in it”<sup>6</sup>. The creation of the world was God’s cognizant and almighty act, through which the seen and the unseen (the angels – *hašamaim*) were brought to life out of nothing (*ex nihilo* 2 Maccabees 7, 28), not to fulfill a wish or to meet a need, but “out of love and freedom, for them to rejoice in His blessing and to participate to His kindness”<sup>7</sup>. The creation through word, which is also

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<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew word *Hašamaim* is an articulated masculine noun in the plural.

<sup>5</sup> *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură* – ediția jubiliară a Sfântului Sinod, traducere și note de Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2000 (notes with explanation to Genesis 1,1).

<sup>6</sup> Ioan BRIA, *Dicționar de teologie ortodoxă*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1994, p.40.

<sup>7</sup> Vasile RĂDUȚĂ, “Perspective ortodoxe asupra creației”, in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 1-2 (1988), p. 82.

reason, highlights the logos feature of the creative act. This would imprint a secret beauty and harmony to the entire creation, which is beyond the human power of expression<sup>8</sup>. The Word, according to Saint Athanasius, “always means both Reason and Word, God made the world conceiving it rationally, and He made it uttering the Word, indefatigably”<sup>9</sup> (“for at his command they were created, and he established them for ever and ever—he issued a decree that will never pass away – Psalm 148, 5). All seen and unseen beings were brought to existence on God’s will, “out of nothing”, since there is nothing besides Him. “If there was something else, this would limit God, depriving Him of His quality”<sup>10</sup>. The world did not exist as a “preexistent matter or co-eternal with God, as the Hellenistic view was”<sup>11</sup>, it is the work of God’s kindness and love, it is a manifestation of divine beauty, through the beauty of the creation the Creator can be contemplated<sup>12</sup>.

The Biblical teachings on Creation are to be found both in the Old and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, in the first chapters of the Genesis, Moses talks about the Creation directly; in their respective books, the prophets tackle it indirectly (“Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name.”– Isaiah 40,26; 45,18; Jeremiah 10,12-16; Amos 4,13), and the Book of Psalms (Psalm 33,6; 90,2; 102,25) also brings it forth. Then in the New Testament, references are made in the Gospel of John (“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” – John 1,1; Acts 17,24; Hebrews 1,2; 11,3).

The Creator is of divine nature, God is either Elohim or Yahve, hence the name “Creator of the heavens and earth” - Isaiah 42, 5). He, the One

<sup>8</sup> Dumitru MEGHEȘAN, *Logositatea creației*, Editura Astra Museum, Sibiu, 2018, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> SFÂNTUL ATANASIE CEL MARE, “Tratat despre Întruparea Cuvântului”, transl. Dumitru Stăniloae, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 15, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, p. 92.

<sup>10</sup> Saint CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, “Thesaurus”, PG 75, 275.

<sup>11</sup> Ioan G. COMAN, *Probleme de filosofie și literatură patristică*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1995, pp. 38-39.

<sup>12</sup> Christos YANNARAS, *Persoană și eros*, transl. Zenaida Luca, Editura Anastasia, București, 2000, p. 105.

and Almighty God, is the only Creator of the world, without the help of any demiurge. The entire creation is the work of God in the Holy Trinity, although there are biblical passages where the creation is attributed to the Father (“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” – Genesis 1,1; Isaiah 44,24; Psalm 33,6), in others to the Son (“Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.” – John 1, 3; 1, 16), and in others, to the Holy Spirit “... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” (Genesis 1,2; Job 26,13).

The meaning of the biblical teaching on creation is obvious. The entire creation is unity and harmony drawing on the supreme Harmony, an image of the plenary Being, a face or an icon of God’s beauty. The progressive order of creation, “from inferior to superior, from the leaf of grass to the human being, the life of plants and animals, the functioning of the luminous bodies, they all generate absolute integrity and beauty”<sup>13</sup>.

In the animal and vegetal world there is harmony and balance well established by God, “He leaves no one and no thing outside His care”<sup>14</sup>. Each natural element reflects the idea of divine beauty and harmony of the entire cosmos: “Lo, «the God of powers», (Psalm 58, 5; 79, 5, 8, 15, 20; 83, 8; 89, 9), exclaims Hermas in *The Shepherd*, whom I love, by His mighty power, and by His great wisdom «created the world», and by His glorious counsel surrounded His creation with beauty”<sup>15</sup>.

The beauty of the creation is frequently emphasized in the books of the Old Testament. The book of Genesis is brimming with phrases highlighting the beauty of the Universe (Genesis 1, 4.10.12.18.21.25). The words “it was very good” (beautiful) (Genesis 1, 31) “*idou kala lian*”<sup>16</sup>, underline the harmony and perfection of things in nature that are nothing else but “representations of eternal ideas – this is the objective character of the

<sup>13</sup> Nicolae NEAGA, “Integritatea Creației pe baza referatului biblic”, in: *Mitropolia Ardealului* 4 (1986), p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> SFÂNTUL VASILE CEL MARE, “Omiliile la Hexaemeron”, transl. Dumitru Stăniloae, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, 17, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1986, p. 176.

<sup>15</sup> HERMAS, “The Shepherd”, english translation by Kirsopp LAKE, in: *Apostolic Fathers II*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> *Septuaginta – Id est Vetus Testamentus graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, Alfred RAHLS (ed.), Stuttgart, 1935, p. 2.

beauty of nature”<sup>17</sup>. Nature, i.e. God’s being, is actually and objectively beautiful. It is the mirror in which the Creator shines beyond the world; it reflects His image and traits. Even the name of the world is beauty, it is called cosmos which means order and adornment. And if the world is good, as God said when He created it, then the world is the time and space expression of God’s infinite kindness. And if the world is beautiful, then it is the shining and cosmic expression of the other-worldly beauty that created it. Beauty is the beginning of all things, the drive that makes everything move and then coordinates the movement.

“He is eternal and unchangeable, with no birth or death, with no growth or decline. He is not beautiful on one side and ugly on the other; one cannot say that sometimes He exists, sometimes He does not; one cannot say that He is beautiful with respect to something, but not to something else; one cannot say that He is beautiful in a place, but not in another, or beautiful for some things, but not for others. On the contrary, He is beautiful in himself and by himself, beautiful in His one and eternal image. Transcendentally, beforehand, He has in him the primordial beauty of everything that is beautiful. All the beauty and everything that is beautiful has a single and pre-existing cause: the simple and other-worldly nature of all beautiful things. Drawing on this beauty, all things that exist get their own specific beauty. Beauty makes the harmony, and attractions, and communions of all things. Beauty unites them all”<sup>18</sup>,

beauty is identical with good. This idea of the good in beauty and of the beauty in good is shared by classical Christian thinking. It is in this unanimous consensus that we understand the Bible’s words on creation that say “God saw all that He made, and it was very good” (ἴδου καλα λίαυ) (Genesis 1,31). The beauty of creation also appears in the Wisdom of Solomon (“For by the greatness and beauty of the creatures proportionably

<sup>17</sup> Nichifor CRAINIC, *Nostalgia Paradisului*, Editura Moldova, Iași, 1994, p. 118.

<sup>18</sup> DIONISIE PSEUDOAREOPAGITUL, *Despre numele divine*, transl. Cicerone Iordăchescu and Teofil Simenschi, Editura Institutului European, Iași, 1993, p. 77.



the maker of them is seen” (13,5-7). The work thus created is God’s artistic masterpiece, and his work is called *καλα*, i.e. beauty (“the beauty of heaven, the glory of the stars” – Jesus Sirach 43,9).

In the New Testament, the idea of beauty and harmony is recurrent, Christianity is the religion of love which reveals all of God’s values. It also testifies to the fact that the world was brought to existence as a harmonious unity by the Holy Trinity, and that it becomes thus the most beautiful divine icon belonging to a very complex painting.

From a theological point of view, harmony represents the relation between God and creation as a work of His love. This is how the Church Fathers understood the concept of harmony and beauty expressed in their writings. Dionysius the Areopagite was describing the cosmos and everything within as a “beautiful, harmonious and orderly beauty”<sup>19</sup>. The divine beauty

“can be communicated to all things from the created world, He is the creating cause setting everything in motion. All the beauty and everything that is beautiful has a single and pre-existing cause: the simple and other-worldly nature of all beautiful things”<sup>20</sup>.

This beauty is the source of all things, He is the One generating harmony and through Him everything gets united. In relation to God, the cosmic, the human, and the organic harmony are revealed more in depth, “harmony is indestructibly related to beauty, to the good, and to the rational.”<sup>21</sup>.

Clement of Alexandria speaks about God calling Him the source of beauty, the one who through His will “has the universe in harmony”<sup>22</sup>. Through His simple will, He creates and on His simple will everything gets accomplished, “all these great works of creation and gracious gifts

<sup>19</sup> Mihail DIACONESCU, *Prelegeri de Estetica Ortodoxiei. Teologie și estetică*. vol. I, Editura Porto-Franco, Galați, 1996, p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> Nichifor CRAINIC, *Nostalgia Paradisului*, p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> Mihail DIACONESCU, *Prelegeri de Estetica Ortodoxiei...*, p. 93.

<sup>22</sup> CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, “Exhortation to the Greeks”, english translation by G.W. Butterworth, in: *Clement of Alexandria*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960, p. 245.

He has let out to thee ...”<sup>23</sup>. The beautiful shapes and forms in time and space, making up the ornament and brightness of the universe, pre-exist in God. He knows them before they exist, from their beginnings, through their evolution up to their endings. Saint Basil the Great thinks likewise. In *On the Hexaemeron* he praises God, calling Him “sublime artist who in wisdom created cosmic beauty; God’s works are made in art and wisdom, and from the beauty of things we know the Sublime above beauty”<sup>24</sup>. Through kenosis, the Sublime descends and participates to beauty, He is the cause that makes everything that exists beautiful. The beautiful is above the being and it is called beauty (κάλλος). He sends the beauty to all existing things; He is the cause of the happy and beautiful harmony existing in the world.

In *Ambigua*, Saint Maximus the Confessor also insists on the beauty of the world, which is harmony, universal order, good design, measure, persistence, and regular rotation. God’s creation, through harmony and complete beauty, shows us that the Creator achieved this harmony through the word or the divine Reason. “The divine Reason as norm and supreme source of all rational organization, of the harmonious connection of everything created, is also supreme source of all the good accomplished and followed by the creation. Only by following the good steadily, and having it impressed as virtue on one’s being, this reason surfaces, according to the model of the uncreated reason, which is also the divine hypostatic reason”<sup>25</sup>.

Saint John Chrysostom approaches the topic of the orderly creation, of beauty and cosmic harmony with subtlety and wisdom. He urges us to admire the beauty and grandeur of creation:

“Looking at the sky, you wonder at its beauty, at its overwhelming brightness, at how diverse the stars! But don’t stop here, with

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<sup>23</sup> Dumitru POPESCU, “Logosul divin și unitatea creației într-o lume secularizată”, in: Casian CRĂCIUN (ed.), *Teologie și educație la Dunărea de Jos*, Editura Episcopiei Dunării de Jos, Galați, 2003, p. 74.

<sup>24</sup> SF. VASILE CEL MARE, “Omilii la Hexaemeron”, pp. 72-73.

<sup>25</sup> SF. MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, “Ambigua”, transl. Dumitru Stăniloae, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* 80, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1983, pp. 85-86.

you mind go and visit their Creator! Then you're in awe of the sun's light, you're amazed when you see how useful you find it, and you admire the sun's beauty when its rays shine on your face! But don't stop here! If this can be more beautiful and wonderful than any human mind, think how wonderful the One who made it only through command and word can be! Think likewise about the earth. When you see it adorned with flowers, as if it had flowery clothing, when you see it covered with a rug of greenery, don't think that the earth brought them to life, helped by the sun and the moon, but think carefully. Before all these, God only said «Let the land produce vegetation ...». And it was so" (Genesis 1, 11)<sup>26</sup>.

What makes man recognize the beauty of the world to God's glory, is man's state of communion with the Holy Spirit<sup>27</sup>. Outside this state, not only that man does not see the beauty of the world, but he simply ignores it (this is how the world is) and falls prey to the sickly indifference of the daily life, missing on God's gift and His beneficence. Christ's kenosis is continuously carried out at the level of gift, through which God enters the heart of the world<sup>28</sup>. We must bear in mind that God, through His gift, always wants to be with us. He "does not limit Himself from the world, as if it were something adjacent, but He embraces it in Himself or He lives in it, exceeding it infinitely and cloaking it in His infinity, living fully in it and beyond it, in Himself, as a spring from where flows as much strength as the world can receive: awaken beings more, and some even more, like a father pours as much understanding in the child he's holding as the latter can receive."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Laurence BROTTIER, "Sfântul Ioan Hrisostom: o creație ordonată și oferită ca spectacol omului", in: *Sfinții Părinți pe înțelesul tuturor – Creația*, trad. de Miruna Tătaru Cazaban, Editura Anastasia, București, 2003, p. 59.

<sup>27</sup> Paul EVDOKIMOV, *Ortodoxia*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, p. 95.

<sup>28</sup> Florin Toader TOMOIOAGĂ, *Taina chenozei în teologia ortodoxă a secolului al XX-lea*, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 2013, p. 78.

<sup>29</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu*, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 1987, p. 240.

Admiring the grandeur and beauty of the creation, we get to contemplate the One who made them exist, and the more we focus on its grandeur and beauty, the closer we will get to its Maker.

To conclude, we shall say that creation is an act of existence that we owe to God. It is the work of the Holy Trinity, through the Logos that operates with reason, science and love. Creation is good and beautiful, it is the icon of divine beauty, because it keeps the image, the seal or the type of Logos – Wisdom. The power and omnipresence of the Logos sets the creation always in motion, dynamically and historically. Creation is, therefore, a spectacle offered by God. And like a permanent catechesis, it is a way of access to divine splendor. God's wonderful creation makes us project ourselves in the other-worldly spheres of existence, awakening in us the nostalgia for paradise.