

Creation and Evolution

Orthodox View of Creation

The basic teaching and doctrine of the Orthodox Church on Creation is: a.) God created the world out of nothing, by exercise of His own free will, b.) He created it in time; c.) with both an adequate aim and end, d.) and orders and guides it according to His almighty Will and Wisdom (divine providence).

The order of creation we know to be is as follows: there was a progression from good to very good, from inorganic to organic, from the irrational to the rational, *"with man (anthropos-male/female) as the link uniting visible and invisible nature, the microcosm embracing both matter and spirit"*. (Mesolora and Androutsos.)

The biblical account teaches us that each new species was a separate creation of God. (*"according to its kind"* Genesis 1:12,21,24,25.) Most Orthodox theologians do not spend time to reconcile Genesis' six day creation with scientific investigation.

They claim that the right view of Holy Scripture helps clear up any misconceptions, for the bible is not a book on natural science, but presents its contents in a form and language agreeable to the ideas and understandings of those for whom it was written.

Therefore, the traditional Orthodox view of the Genesis account has never looked at it as a literal scientific account of the physical processes of the origins of the physical universe, nor a scientific treatise of the origins of life, or of the origins of human existence.

Thus, St. Basil in the 4th century, in his exegesis called the Hexameron (which means 6 days), the "Six day creation", did not limit himself to just the Genesis account, but used scientific information and philosophical terminology of his day to present a balanced account of the origins of the world, both spiritual and scientific.

The problem that can arise and always does, is in the interpretation of the Bible. Some Christian denominations since the time of Darwin have been in conflict with scientists over the

subjects of creationism and evolution. In Orthodox Christian circles you find little conflict. The reason primarily is that the Eastern Fathers did not take a fundamentalist viewpoint of the Scriptural account of creation. As Vladimir Losky, a Russian Orthodox Theologian states, *"The Church always freely makes use of philosophy and the sciences for explanatory purposes (which is called apologetics), but She never has any cause to defend these relative and changing truths as She defends the unchangeable truth of Her doctrines"* (which is called polemics). It has to be understood that the Bible is not a work on nature, nor a geology book, nor a geography text, but a religious text –fulfilling the end for which its revelation was designed and written. Furthermore, as you well know, it cannot all be interpreted literally, as its interpretation is rendered both in the literal and allegorical manner.

EVOLUTION

The theory of evolution, first and foremost is a theory. Its theory is that various plants and animal species evolved over millions of years from lower organisms, to eventually and finally

humans.

Charles Darwin being the main exponent of this theory, again, please keep in mind, it is a theory, claimed that the plants and animals evolved in a mechanical way; this was his hypothesis.

The origin of species, according to Darwin, is seen in the change of the individual species: the adaptability, heredity, and natural selection which derives from the survival of the fittest.

Even ancient philosophers had theories of evolution. Empedocles had a theory of natural selection-the one destined to survive.

Anaxagoras had a theory of evolution of the animals. Epicurus explained a purpose of animal evolution based on Empedocles.

Spencer prepared the way for Darwin by claiming the evolution of ideas and concepts. However, Darwin, is the only one in his theory to speak of the evolution of man from lower animals.

Even the ancients did not mention evolution of man, for even they believed he had a divine origin.

When this theory was spreading in the 19th century, the materialists took advantage of this theory because it backed their views. They claim that since one species derives from another,

therefore there is no need for a Creator God. This stirred some religious leaders, who became concerned for the validity of the biblical teaching of creation. This was the manner the conflict between evolution and creationism developed, which was not only limited to science, but when the materialists and the philosophical approaches entered their exclusive views, the problem became acute.

The theory of evolution does not weaken religious belief. The Orthodox Christian approach and position has always been consistent with Theistic evolution. Our view rejects evolutionary theories which are formulated in exclusively materialistic perspectives, primarily because they fail to acknowledge the nonmaterial, spiritual verities of existence. Theistic evolution sees in it justification for the view that God uses such processes, not only to bring into existence the material world, but to guide it in its material development (divine providence). The world as described by objective scientific description is, after all, God's world, and it must be understood as such, so that one truth about the origins of the world is maintained.

The series of creation of organisms as referred in Genesis is easily reconciled with the theory of evolution. In Genesis, life appeared progressively: plants, creatures in water, reptiles, land animals, and finally man. The Church Fathers, such as St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Basil, and St. Augustine, accepted some kind of evolution directed by God. Many scientists who adopted this theory of evolution from the beginning, support and confirm the belief in the Creator God. Also the prominent scientist of that day, Lamarck, who supported the theory, emphasized that the variety of animals falls on a "scale" from the simplest creatures to the most developed, which is "the general and unchangeable order which the Supreme Creator created in everything." Darwin, whom the materialists call upon to support their atheistic principles, clearly and categorically emphasized his faith in the Creator. Darwin states in his work, titled-On the Origin of Man, he states, *"the issue of whether a Creator and Ruler of the universe exists, is completely a different matter; and in this question, the great minds of the ages answer positively."* He further stated that both activities of origin, that is the species

as well as the individual is completely in the same way, part of the great reasonable series of events, which by no means our minds can accept as a result of blind chance.

Today, many who speak seriously of evolution accept it not as pure chance but give it a theological or philosophical character. According to many scientists, who are not atheists, evolution is not a result of blind chance (which is blind mechanical forces) but Creation is directed by the Creator. The plant and animal kingdoms become realities in the plan conceived by God's Will. The Russian biologist, Nikolai Vavilov, once director of the Russian Institute of Genetics, spoke of directed evolution, and later during Communism, was dismissed as an enemy of dialectic materialism which was part of the communistic principles of the day.

If evolution were taught as a theory, as something which is formulated from a hypothesis and tested and modified in such a manner, it would not be as controversial a subject. The problem arises when it is presented and taught as **fact**. The creation and evolution of man has to be looked at objectively.

Some theologians are of the opinion that the human organism evolved from more advanced animal organisms which are closer to the human species in a process that was directed by God, Who acted indirectly by using secondary sources. St. John Chrysostom (late 4th century) said, *"the clay was thin earth from which the first human body was created, it was living matter worked out to a living organism and developed to the animals, and from there leaped to the human organism, then the soul entered by God's intervention making man a direct creation of God."* In Genesis 2:7 (NKJV), it states, *"then God formed man out of dust from the ground, and breathed into his face the breath of life; and man became a living soul"*. How we evolved cannot be concretely answered. We do see an evolution within the species of man, but the manner of man's evolution from another species is in the realm of speculation, assumption, hypothesis, and theory. Among the opinions of scientists, there is no unanimous decision or conclusion. Some theorize that man is a descendant from apes; others have speculated the other way around, and that a certain human species disappeared. Others

believed we developed from other types of animals though comparative anatomy; for example, human blood is most similar to the blood of pigs, and heart valves from pigs have been used in humans. There is no pure scientific proof, nor agreement of opinion as to the nature of man. Therefore, no theory is infallible for the scientist.

We have seen evolution of civilizations, of different species, of the arts, of ideas. But we do not see a mule become a horse even though it is a mixed breed. Even when we try to mix different breeds of different species for generations, we see no extreme changes to become another species. Elementary, it did not happen then and throughout the eons of time. Until we have a concrete answer, we cannot accept mechanical, unguided, random evolution in nature. We must not be fooled into supposing that the prevailing opinion of some scientists can pronounce a verdict on the revelation of God.

In Orthodox theology, in reference to the creation of man, the words "image and likeness" are not used interchangeably as they are in other Christian faiths. For Orthodox Christians,

“image” denotes the powers and faculties with which the human being is endowed by God from the first moment of existence.

“Likeness” is the assimilation, the growth process to God through virtue and grace, which is called Theosis. For Western theology, man was created perfect in the absolute sense, therefore when he fell, he fell completely away from God. For Orthodox Theology, man was created perfect in the potential sense, (meaning with the potential for perfection through growth and change.) So even in the theology of the Church, we actually see an evolution of our spiritual nature. Since we have the free will to choose, and the grace which God gives and makes available to us, we have the potential to attain Theosis in this cooperative (synergy) relationship and actually go through a spiritual evolution in our being.

In conclusion, creation and evolution are subjects that are neither foreign to our Orthodoxy nor something new since the time of Darwin. In fact, both subjects whether identified or defined as such have been subjects discussed within the life the Church. Even when using paleontology (study of fossils-paleo in

Greek), the subject of creation is not in disagreement, as the Hebrew word for day is "yom", which means both day and a lengthy undetermined period of time. Orthodox Theology and the Church Fathers have never had a problem with creation and evolution. The problem arises when we take God's providence out of it, as even Darwin did not do that. Exactly how man evolved is a question that science has to answer with concrete proof, with hard evidence and a demonstration of processes that can be reproduced. The question that we should address is not where we came from, but where we are going. There is a lot of information on this matter. If one looks at it and more importantly studies it, one comes to the same consistent outlook that even the early church had. As science finds and makes more discoveries, it only shows God's inexhaustible glory.

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III. Creation

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